Desert Channels Queensland

Strategic Communications Plan

This strategy provides a framework to enable a clear, coordinated approach to DCQ's communication efforts.

It helps DCQ achieve its core objectives by celebrating progress, acknowledging investors and informing stakeholders of the delivery of DCQ's programs and projects which, in turn, leads to increased support, awareness, partnerships and participation.

This strategy identifies and details the following key components:

- Goals
- Objectives
- Audiences
- Messages
- Tools
- Resources and timescales
- Evaluation and amendment

It also includes crisis communications which identifies issues, risks and mitigating actions.

Goals

- are the purposes toward which DCQ's communications efforts are directed
- are broad, general intentions
- are longer term and may not be tangible or measurable

Goal 1
To consistently tell the most compelling stories.

Goal 2
To have all team members become compelling storytellers.

Objectives

- are the keys to the success of this communications strategy, the outcomes that signify DCQ has achieved its goals
- should ensure that this communications strategy is organisationally driven rather than communications driven
- should serve and, therefore, be aligned with organisational objectives
- should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound.

Objective 1
Increase article placements and requests, media release uptake, interviews, website hits and Facebook likes by 50% per year.

Objective 2
Increase the number of exploited storytelling opportunities by 10% per year.

Aligning communications and organisational objectives reinforces the importance and relevance of communications and makes a convincing case for the proper resourcing of communications activity within DCQ.

Audiences
Resources will be concentrated on communicating with those audiences identified as critical to achieving organisational objectives - the target audience may vary according to the objective. Table 1 details DCQ's current audiences or communications stakeholder groups.

Table 1: Audiences

Internal: ● Team members ● Board members ● DCQ members	*Industries:* ● Grazing ● Tourism ● Small business (local) ● Resources
	Education and research: ● Universities ● Researchers and scientists
Community: ● Land managers ● Landcare groups ● Conservation groups ● GDCAG members ● Aboriginal groups ● Town communities ● Upfront Outback subscribers ● NRM bodies (Queensland and Australia)	*Government:* ● AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (agriculture) ● AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (environment) ● Elected representatives (Federal, State and local) ● AG and QG staff and senior managers (agriculture) ● AG and QG staff and senior managers (environment)

AG = Australian Government; QG = Queensland Government

Messages
Strategic targeting and consistency are key to DCQ's messages. Listed below are DCQ's key messages and a comprehensive case for each. The case for each key message is then summarised into key points with three of these being prioritised for each audience in the accompanying table.

These key messages are to be constantly repeated throughout DCQ's communications activities by way of human interest stories, interesting narrative and arresting imagery. Communications is all about storytelling.

Key Messages
1. Community pays a high price for weeds
2. Weeds spread faster than rabbits
3. Weeds are worse than dogs; as bad as drought
4. Rough justice for weeds in Western Queensland

The Case for each Key Message
Community pays a high price for weeds:
- Landholders bear the brunt of the costs through reduced production, reduced land values, ongoing control costs and the mental health impacts such as being overwhelmed, dispirited, coping with declining incomes, foreclosures and family breakdowns.
- $100,000 plus, per year, per property is the estimated direct economic impact at high density levels (Australian Government's Strategic Plan for Prickly Acacia 2012-2017).
- The resulting loss of jobs in the rural sector flows on to towns and, when amplified, leads to business closures and loss of services.

Weeds spread faster than rabbits:
- Prickly Acacia will start seeding two to three years after germination (more quickly in high rainfall years), and a medium sized tree with good moisture access can produce 175,000 seeds per year - given that Prickly Acacia trees in Western Queensland grow in dry, open paddocks as well as with their feet in watercourses, bore drains and dams, a conservative average yield of 50,000 seeds per tree is assumed.
- This rate of seed production leads to a seed bank in the soil of between 5 seeds per square metre in low density infestations, and 724 in high density infestations.
- spreading at 2.6 kilometres per day
- A Prickly Acacia seed pod can float for 12 days, a potential dispersal of many kilometres.
- Seeds take up to 8 days to pass through cattle, which, with livestock transport, gives a potential dispersal of thousands of kilometres.
- Seed spread prevention is a key to managing the weed - people must recognise their social responsibility.

Weeds are worse than dogs; as bad as drought:
- According to the Australian Department of Environment, weeds cost Australian agriculture $4,000 million per year, with a similar, if not greater, cost to the environment.
- At high densities, an annual cost of more than $100,000 per property, which would be roughly equivalent to losing 1,000 sheep to wild dog predation.
- The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre's WildDogScan website states feral domestic dogs, dingoes and hybrids combined, inflict $66.3 million of damage to Australian agriculture per year; however, the real cost is thought to be much higher.
- In years when drought is severe and widespread, its impact on Australian agriculture is estimated to be around $4,000 million.
- Properties where Prickly Acacia has taken over, are in perpetual semi-drought conditions due to permanent lack of grass - 20% canopy cover = 50% less pasture.

Rough justice for weeds in Western Queensland:

- DCQ has zero tolerance for weeds, especially Prickly Acacia and, while it can't influence the whole State, it sets an example, and its area of responsibility covers one-third of Queensland.
- Queensland's reputation for environmental vandalism is tipped on its head by the primary environmental benefits of this program - restoration of native ground cover, riparian vegetation, and ground-dwelling fauna habitat (particularly the Julia Creek Dunnart); reduction in erosion; and improvement in water quality).

Key Points for each Key Message

Community pays a high price for weeds:

1. reduced production
2. reduced land values
3. ongoing control costs
4. job losses through the whole community
5. mental health - overwhelmed, loss of productive land, forclosures, family breakdowns
6. weeds cost the Australian environment more than $4,000 million per year[1]

Table 2: Key points for each audience

Key Points	1	2	3	4	5	6
Audience						
Team members	✓	✓	✓			
Board members	✓	✓	✓			
DCQ members				✓	✓	✓
Land managers	✓	✓	✓			
Landcare groups	✓		✓			✓
Conservation groups	✓				✓	✓
GDCAG members				✓	✓	✓
Aboriginal groups				✓	✓	✓
Town communities				✓	✓	✓
Upfront Outback subscribers	✓				✓	✓
NRM bodies (State and National)	✓		✓			✓
AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (agriculture)	✓	✓	✓			

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[1] Australian Department of Environment

	1	2	3	4	5	6
AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (environment)				✓	✓	✓
Elected representatives (National, State and local)	✓	✓	✓			
AG and QG staff and senior managers (agriculture)	✓	✓	✓			
AG and QG staff and senior managers (environment)				✓	✓	✓
Agriculture	✓	✓	✓			
Tourism	✓			✓		✓
Small business (local)	✓	✓		✓		
Resources	✓	✓	✓			
Universities				✓	✓	✓
Researchers and scientists				✓	✓	✓

Weeds spread faster than rabbits:
1. 50,000 seeds per Prickly Acacia tree per year[2]
2. soil seed bank of 5 to 724 seeds per square metre[3]
3. spreading at 2.6 kilometres per day

No table required

Weeds are worse than dogs; as bad as drought:
1. weeds cost Australian agriculture $4,000 million per year[4]
2. dogs cost Australian agriculture $66 million[5]
3. drought costs Australian agriculture $4,000 million in drought years[6]

No table required

Rough justice for weeds in Western Queensland:
1. zero tolerance for weeds
2. overturns Queensland's reputation for environmental vandalism
3. role-model for remaining two-thirds of the State

No table required

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[2] According the the Australian Department of Environment, a medium sized tree with good moisture access can produce 175,000 seeds per year
[3] Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
[4] Australian Department of Environment
[5] Feralscan.org.au
[6] extrapolated from a number of sources including Australian Government, ABS and Treasury

Tools

DCQ's communication tools need to reflect the level of time and human and financial resources available. The following is a list of tools commonly used by DCQ to communicate its messages:

- Print media - news stories, articles
- Radio - news stories, interviews
- YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals
- Advertising
- Upfront Outback - news stories, promotional, general interest
- Website - promotional, project updates
- Facebook - informal breaking news, general interest, promotional
- Annual report - project updates and achievements
- Publications - industry, case studies, brochures, displays, promotional materials
- Presentations - Powerpoint & other resources
- Networks - communications, GIS, pest management, Business Managers, CEOs
- Sponsorships - school visits, sponsorships, promotional visits
- Group emails
- Direct mail
- Events - field days, workshops, forums, shows, conferences, symposiums, school visits
- Networking - personal contact
- Meetings

For the most cost-effective communications, only those tools identified as the most appropriate for each of the identified DCQ audiences should be used. Some tools will be audience specific, while others will be more broadly effective.

Table 3: Tools for each audience

Audience	Tools
Team members	YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Facebook Group emails Meetings
Board members	YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Facebook Group emails Meetings
DCQ members	Facebook Direct mail Annual report
Land managers	Print media Radio YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Facebook Advertising Events - field days, workshops, forums Networking Meetings
Landcare groups	Group emails

Audience	Tools
	Meetings
Conservation groups	Networking - personal contact Meetings
GDCAG members	Group emails Meetings
Aboriginal groups	Print media Networks
Town communities	Print media Radio Facebook
Upfront Outback subscribers	Upfront Outback
NRM bodies (State and National)	YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Publications - industry Networks - communications, GIS, Business Managers, CEOs Group emails Events - workshops, forums, conferences, symposiums Networking
AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (agriculture)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies Annual report Publications - case studies Direct mail Networking
AG and QG Ministers and ministerial advisors (environment)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies Annual report Publications - case studies Direct mail Networking
Elected representatives (National, State and local)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies Annual report Publications - case studies Direct mail Networking
AG and QG staff and senior managers (agriculture)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies Annual report Publications - case studies

Audience	Tools
	Direct mail Networking
AG and QG staff and senior managers (environment)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies Annual report Publications - case studies Direct mail Networking
Agriculture	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Publications - industry Direct mail Networking
Tourism	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, promotionals Publications - industry Direct mail Networking
Small business (local)	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews Publications - industry Direct mail Networking
Resources	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - news stories, case studies, promotionals Publications - industry Direct mail Networking
Universities	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - case studies Publications - industry Direct mail Networking
Researchers and scientists	Print media - news stories, articles Radio - news stories, interviews YouTube - case studies Website Direct mail Networking

Resources and timelines

Timelines dictate the required resources which, in turn, informs the necessary budget; the budget ultimately determines what communications activities can reasonably be undertaken. Regardless, using resources and timelines to set legitimate levels of expectations will help frame the case for additional resources.

Resources

Through DC Solutions (DCS), DCQ has access to an experienced communications person; for the purpose of this communications plan, .5 of a full time equivalent (FTE) requirement is assumed.

DCQ has considerable communications infrastructure in place:
- Newsletter (Upfront Outback) - established, electronic, bi-monthly, 1299 subscribers as at 30-06-15
- YouTube Channel (Desert Channels Digital) - established, 186 videos, 46,500 views since inception, 11,600 views in year to 30-06-15
- Website (dcq.org.au) - established, redeveloped June 2015
- Facebook page (Desert Channels Group) - 1,048 likes at 30-06-15
- Media contact spreadsheet (Media Contacts) - current as at 30-06-15
- Media placement spreadsheet (Media Records) - current as at 30-06-15
- Media release template
- Display trailer - dust-proof, audio-visual unit, velcro-compatible panels
- Miscellaneous banners, posters, brochures
- Printer - large format (up to 1000 mm wide and 5000 mm long)
- Laminator - large format
- Graphic design capacity

In addition, the DCQ region is served by a number of distinct, overlapping media outlets - Table 4 outlines most.

Table 4: Media outlets

Name	Type	Frequency	Coverage
ABC Western Queensland	Radio	Daily	Most of region
4LG	Radio	Daily	NE quarter
Longreach Leader	Newspaper	Weekly	Near local
Queensland Country Life	Newspaper	Weekly	All of region
North-West Country	Newspaper	Monthly	NW quarter
Northern Miner	Newspaper	Tuesday & Friday	Far NE
North Queensland Register	Newspaper	Weekly	Far northern
Central Queensland	Newspaper	Weekly	Far east

Name	Type	Frequency	Coverage
News			
Western Times	Newspaper	Weekly	South
Barcoo Independent	Newspaper	Fortnightly	Blackall surrounds
Winton Herald	Newsletter	Weekly	Winton Shire
Quilpie Cryer	Newsletter	Fortnightly	Quilpie Shire
Flinders Flyer	Newsletter	Weekly	Flinders Shire
Grasslands Whisperer	Newsletter		Tambo surrounds
Regional Roundup	Newsletter		Blackall, Tambo
Desert Yarns	Newsletter	Monthly	Diamantina Shire
Barcoo Community Newsletter	Newsletter	Monthly	Barcoo Shire
Channel Country Chatter	Newsletter	Monthly	Boulia Shire
Barcaldine Bulletin	Newsletter	Monthly	Barcaldine Regional Council area

Timelines

The timelines outlined in Table 5 can be reasonably expected to achieve both Objective 1 and Objective 2, and while Objective 1 relies heavily on external capacity, (DC Solutions), Objective 2 is more reliant on internal DCQ capacity. Both rely on adequate resourcing.

Table 5 - Tools and timing

Tool	Timing
Print media	fortnightly
Radio	monthly
YouTube	bi-monthly
Advertising	as required
Upfront Outback	bi-monthly
Website	weekly
Facebook	daily
Annual report	yearly
Publications - industry	quarterly

Tool	Timing
Publications - case studies	quarterly
Publications - brochures, displays, promotional materials	as required
Presentations	monthly
Networks	ongoing
Sponsorships	opportunistic
Group emails	as required
Direct mail	as required
Events - field days	quarterly
Events - workshops, forums	quarterly
Events - shows	in season
Events - conferences, symposiums	half yearly
Events - school visits	opportunistic
Networking	ongoing
Meetings	ongoing

Monitoring, evaluation and improvement

Measuring progress against a baseline, evaluating the results, and amending the strategy to improve the outcomes is a vital part of any plan. How this is done will vary according to the prevailing objectives.

Tangible objectives are easily measured with empirical data collected (published stories, email open rates, website click-throughs, facebook likes, number of presentations), both before and after the planned activities. However, less tangible objectives like 'increasing awareness' present more challenges. In this case, a survey or focus group should be used before activities commence, to set the baseline, then again afterwards to evaluate progress.

Regardless, consideration should be given to performing a communications audit to assess the effectiveness of the strategy with both internal and external audiences. This involves surveying the key audiences through a set of open questions, then using the results to assess effectiveness and amend the strategy where necessary.

While the key audiences are identified earlier in this document, the open questions are as follows:

- What publications do you read, and why?
- What publications do you see, and why?
- What publications do you hear, and why?
- What works, and why?
- What doesn't work, and why?
- What do you want to see more of, and why?
- What information do you need that you don't currently get?
- What is your preferred method for communications from DCQ?
- How often do you want DCQ to communicate with you?