



February 2015

Weed work spreads

The prickly acacia eradication work that DCQ has been doing across the region is spreading into the neighbouring Southern Gulf Catchments (SGC) region thanks to McKinlay Shire Council. At the November meeting of the North West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (NWQROC), the McKinlay Shire proposed that the councils of the NWQROC combine with DCQ and SGC to put forward a collaborative proposal to Government, aimed at eradicating the core infestations of prickly acacia.

As a first step, community support for the initiative was gauged at public meetings in Hughenden, Nelia and McKinlay in late January. A combined 116 people attended the three meetings, and voted 113 to 3 in favour of supporting the DCQ and SGC programs to eradicate prickly acacia. The three organisations will now work together to develop a collaborative weed plan to eradicate core infestations of prickly acacia in the NWQROC area.

DCQ's template for successful prickly acacia eradication is based on new regulatory support instruments, very detailed mapping and costings, a commitment by landholders, chemical subsidies and professional weed control labor support.

Lose two; gain two

December saw the final board meeting for retiring board members Errol Enriken and Casey Stringfellow, while the March meeting will be the first for new board members Ann Ballinger and Mike Pratt. Errol has served on the DCQ board for six years, while Casey was with us for three. Each brought different things to the table: Errol with his vast knowledge and experience of the region, its people and its issues; Casey with entrepreneurship, board experience and connections in the corporate world. Both brought their unique brand of philosophy and enthusiasm. Above all, they were both passionate about Desert Channels Group and its work.

Ann Ballinger's life, from childhood through work, to marriage and business, has always been closely linked to grazing properties. When her husband died 15 years ago, Ann took on the running of their Muttaborra district property, Stockholm, quickly gaining the business and property management skills required. She is on numerous community committees and

a keen advocate for mental health in the bush. Ann is passionate about the inland and its people, and sees education and best practice management as keys to an economically and environmentally sustainable landscape.

Mike Pratt was raised on a Stanthorpe sheep property, and he and his wife run sheep and cattle on their three property aggregation of Waroona, Bellfield and Ban Ban in the Stonehenge district. Mike is Deputy Mayor of the Barcoo Shire, Deputy Chair Central West Wild Dog Control Fence Steering Committee, along with other community and industry groups. He is particularly keen on controlling Prickly Acacia, Parkinsonia, wild dogs and feral pigs.

Ann and Mike join Chair, Bruce Scott, and continuing Board members, Leonie Nunn, Doug Humann and Gerry Fogarty in guiding Desert Channels Group over the next three years.

Put up or shut up!

While a colourful character once said 'Don't bloody complain about it if you're not prepared to help make the situation better.', we wouldn't go that far. But we do encourage everyone with an interest in the sustainable management of the natural resources of the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin to provide feedback on the draft version of our updated natural resource management plan at www.dcq.org.au/plans. It is accompanied by a handy, 11 question feedback form to make it easy for you to lodge your comments, along with an informative Community Information Paper that provides additional background and interesting facts. This, our third five-year plan, will guide our priorities for the next five years ... have a read; send us your thoughts.

Are we really achieving anything?

Despite the lofty ideals and best intentions with which we often embark on a course of action, it may be throwing good money after bad to continue down the chosen path if it is not delivering the desired outcomes. The only way we can be sure is through a continuous program of monitoring and evaluation - the more formal and rigorous the process, the more accurate, defensible and useful the findings. We use our monitoring and evaluation program to drive continuous improvement in the way we kill weeds (where, when and how) and, more broadly, how we deliver projects more effectively. Monitoring kill rates, pasture regeneration and fauna recovery in exclosures like this one gives us the empirical evidence to support additional funding applications for further weed control work across the region, as well as encouraging more landholder participation through being able to show them tangible returns on investment.

It's not what you know ...

All the knowledge in the world won't help you get the job done if you don't have the resources to get the rubber on the road ... that's where partnerships come into their own. If we relied on direct funding for our weed work, we would be nowhere near as far down the road as we currently are: partnerships with landholders, local government and others, have

delivered extraordinary results and tremendous momentum. And it's not just in killing weeds that partnerships value-add to our work. As outlined in the previous story, monitoring is an important part of ensuring you are doing good work and continue to improve, and our partnership with RAPAD Employment Services Queensland saw a group of unemployed people learning fencing skills while erecting exclosures at two sites to enable us to monitor the results of our Prickly Acacia eradication work. Often, it's who you know that helps get job done!

Waddi ya know?

Our program to raise awareness of the unique Waddi tree and its conservation needs has kicked off with the installation of an information sign at the Boulia grove, and the printing of information brochures for visitors and locals. The brochures, which give an overview of the tree's characteristics, natural and cultural significance, distribution and threats, have been placed in visitor information centres in the west of the region. Both the sign and the brochure were designed and produced by DC Solutions, whose profits are donated to Desert Channels Foundation to undertake conservation work in the region.

Caveat Emptor

'Let the buyer beware' is always pertinent, never more so than at present when landholders lucky enough to get under some good rain are buying in cattle to rebuild herds decimated by drought. Cattle coming off Prickly Acacia infested country should be quarantined for at least a week, to allow them to pass any seeds they may be carrying. Ideally, this should happen at the vendor end, rather than the buyer end ... that way, all those pesky little seeds can stay with their mates, rather than colonising fresh country. As the experts tell us, the most cost-effective way to manage Prickly Acacia is preventing spread. They also tell us that this Class 2 declared pest plant can reduce on-farm production by up to 75%. 'Buyer beware' indeed!

DCS Update

Our commercial team has hit the ground running in 2015 with film production, sign and brochure design and production, weed control, environmental surveys, project management, communication services and, of course, catering and event management. The exciting news is that Alun Hoggett, our filmmaker, is conducting a filmmaking and social media workshop in the lead up to the 18th Australian Rangelands Society biennial conference from 12th to 16th April 2015 in Alice Springs. He will also deliver a presentation, 'Australian Outback: Heart of a Continent', in the communications segment of the conference. This segment will be supported by a 10 minute trailer outlining the concept of giving Australians a deep appreciation of the land that supports them, its custodians, and the challenges they face in caring for the living, changing, pulsing country at the heart of the Australian continent. The documentary will acknowledge the past, show the challenges of the present and reach into possible futures of this vast natural landscape.

Field day date claimers

- Water Quality and Gardens at Kenya - April (date to be announced)
- Weeds and Weed Outliers at Ayrshire Hills, Winton - 28th May