

Situation Analysis – Desert Channels Queensland

Background

Drawing from the initial Practice Change Project workshop and various publications, the following is a situation analysis of Desert Channels Queensland. It includes the key NRM issues, organisational structure, the resource condition targets and management action targets that have been identified. The purpose of the situation analysis is to provide an overview of the Desert Channels catchment for circulation among the ten regions involved in the project. This will enable the participating regions to better understand each others situations.

The Region

Geography

The Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) region is the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin. Its 509,900 square kilometres make it the largest regional body area in Queensland. The region is made up of the Georgina Diamantina and Cooper Creek catchments^{w hich} are the main catchments for Lake Eyre. The region contains wetlands of international significance and national importance, and the biodiversity hotspot, the Desert Uplands bioregion.

The DCQ region, with seven biogeographic regions, is the most diverse in the state. It ranges from the eucalypt woodlands of the Desert Uplands along the Great Dividing Range, through the rolling plains of the Mitchell Grass Downs and the vast floodplains of the Channel Country to the Simpson/Strzelecki Dunefields. Also represented are the ranges of the Mount Isa Inlier, significant areas of the Mulga Lands and a small part of the Brigalow Belt South.

Demographics

More than 60% of the region's 14,500 inhabitants live in 25 towns which vary in size from 15 to 3,800 people. The rest are widely scattered across half a million square kilometres of extensive pastoral country, most of these in the northeast. While the region's 900 Indigenous residents are spread throughout, most live in the west and northwest, the latter being home to several Indigenous communities.

Land uses

The relevant land uses and their level of significance in DCQ catchment are listed below.

- Grazing – Major significance
- Intensive livestock - Major significance
- National Parks - Major significance
- Urban - Major significance
- Rural Residential / lifestyle blocks - Major significance
- Tourism - Major significance
- Irrigation – Minor significance
- Industrial – Minor significance
- Mining – Minor significance



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NRM issues

- Biodiversity Conservation / Endangered Species
- Chemical Contamination / Waste Management / Pollution
- Climate Risk and Drought
- Diversification
- Education / Awareness
- Grazing Pressure / Pasture Management / Safe Carrying Capacity
- Great Artesian Basin
- Indigenous Land Management
- Lack of data
- Land Degradation
- Mining and Petroleum
- Property Management Practices / Planning
- Salinity
- Security of Tenure
- Streamline Ecology
- Surface Water Management
- Tourism
- Vegetation Management
- Viability / Economics
- Weeds / Feral Animals
- Wildlife use / harvesting

The Regional NRM Organisation

History

Since the late 1980s there has been significant community activity in NRM. This began with the landcare movement and then moved to the establishment of regional groups in the Desert Uplands and Lake Eyre Basin in the mid 1990s. In 2002 new regional arrangements were foreshadowed with the creation of Desert Channels Queensland and downstream in SA, the Rangelands Integrated Natural Resource Management Group.

Organisational arrangements

Staff: The operations of DCQ are supported by 15 staff in an office in Longreach. The staff members provide administrative, coordination, project management, mapping, information management, publications and communications support across all areas of DCQ work.

Board: The DCQ Board is made up of 15 members of the region's community. They meet regularly to ensure that available funding is put to best use (in line with community priorities) for the sustainable management of the natural resources of the region. Feeding into the management board are representatives of the community-based implementation groups and other representative bodies.

Key functions

The key functions of DCQ are to:

- Improve the condition of soils and other geological aspects impacted by climate change and unsustainable grazing practices
- Address the threats of damaging weeds and feral animals



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- Manage human and climate impacts on the region's water resources and wetlands
- Ensure that the ecosystems in the region are well conserved and managed; there is no net loss of biodiversity in the region
- Support the community to manage the region's natural resources in a sustainable way

Budget (First year - 2005)

State and Australian Government funding – \$1.7 million
 DCQ Core costs - \$290,200
 Land Program - \$360,554
 Water program - \$193,798
 Biodiversity program - \$148,729
 Community program - \$432,436
 Indigenous program - \$45,069

The NRM Planning Process

History

The Desert Channels region was fortunate to have four experienced committees dedicated to community-based NRM issues. These groups work in partnership and support Desert Channels in the planning process. Each committee has a well-developed strategy, which has been developed through extensive community consultation.

NRM plan

The final plan was sent to the Commonwealth/State Joint Steering Committee (JSC) for endorsement. It remains a living document, open to change as required.

In addition to the plan, a regional investment strategy, **Powering our Actions** was developed. It details the investments required over the next 3 years to implement the actions identified in the plan and was submitted to the Commonwealth/State Joint Steering Committee in early 2005 and endorsed by it and the relevant Ministers.

Resource condition targets

Asset	Resource Condition Targets (RCTs)
Land	<p>RCT 1.1 No net increase in the area of land identified as having a long term declining ground cover trend by 2015.</p> <p>RCT 1.2 By 2015 salinity risk is assessed in priority areas (to be determined).</p>
Weeds and feral animals	<p>RCT 2.1 Impact of priority weeds and feral animals on the land, water and biodiversity assets of the region contained (no further spread) by 2010 and reduced by 2015.</p> <p>RCT 2.2 Prevent 100% of new, priority weed and feral animal outbreaks from establishing within the region (within 2 years of identification, commencing 2005).</p>
Water	<p>RCT 3.1 By 2015 maintain the quantity and quality of catchment flows necessary to maintain ecosystem processes.</p> <p>RCT 3.2 At least 80% of Wetlands of National Significance, and all high priority</p>

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	artesian springs in the region are in good condition or better by 2015.
Biodiversity	<p>RCT 4.1 By 2015 the extent of remnant native vegetation cover in the region has not dropped below the level measured in 2007.</p> <p>RCT 4.2 By 2015 adequate and representative samples of 80% of the regional ecosystems found in the region are protected on private or State land and these ecosystems are in good condition or better.</p> <p>RCT 4.3 By 2015 at least 1000 ha of regional ecosystems currently assessed as 'endangered' have improved in condition.</p> <p>RCT 4.4 By 2015 100% of known rare and threatened species in the region, subject to recovery plans, are protected by regionally implemented management plans.</p>
Community	<p>RCT 5.1 By 2015 the community is effectively informed and engaged in the management of their natural resources.</p> <p>RCT 5.2 By 2015 there is a fully integrated (social, economic and natural resource management) and implemented planning process in place for the region.</p>
Indigenous land management and heritage	<p>RCT 6.1 The capacity of the Indigenous community to contribute to the management of the region's natural resources is enhanced by 2015.</p> <p>RCT 6.2 Indigenous issues and cultural heritage are dealt with effectively in the management of the region's natural resources by 2007.</p>

Management action targets

Asset	Management Action Targets (MATs)
Land	<p>MAT 1.1 Develop scientifically sound, community accepted, and measurable soil condition/ground cover targets for the major land types of the region by 2008. This will involve the testing and refining of community accessible remote sensing techniques to assess ground cover in the region.</p> <p>MAT 1.2 Determine priority areas for salinity risk by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 1.3 Develop Best Management Practices (benchmarking and goals) for all major pasture types/ vegetation communities in the region by 2007 (includes fire management).</p> <p>MAT 1.4 Climate risk (including climate change) widely understood in the region by 2007, information delivered through Grazing Land Management (GLM) package.</p> <p>MAT 1.5 Land management capacity-building opportunities are provided to at least 350 grazing enterprises in the region by 2008 (primarily delivered by the Grazing Land Management (GLM) package).</p> <p>MAT 1.6 Make regionally appropriate information available on total grazing pressure to the region by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 1.7 Improve the condition of DCQ assets through integrated information delivery, on ground planning and action at 200 locations in the region by 2007 ('Protecting our Future').</p> <p>MAT 1.8 Have Best Management Practices for planning, construction and rehabilitation of roads, tracks, borrow pits, and small-scale mining adopted by local government, State Government and miners in the region by 2007.</p>
Weeds and feral animals	<p>MAT 2.1 Develop and implement a regional containment and adaptive management strategy for WONS weed species by 2006 (consistent with</p>

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	<p>national strategies). Reduce weed infestations consistent with this strategy by 2008.</p> <p>MAT 2.2 100% control of priority weed and feral animal outbreaks in the region is achieved within 2 years of identification.</p> <p>MAT 2.3 Develop and commence implementation of a regional strategy for weed and feral animal control by 2006. Reduce weed and feral animal infestations consistent with this strategy by 2008.</p> <p>MAT 2.4 Provide appropriate incentives for strategic and innovative management of weeds and feral animals as part of integrated on-ground action and planning 'Protecting our Future' by 2006.</p> <p>MAT 2.5 Develop (by 2005) and maintain a region-wide database and mapping capacity on weed and feral animal distribution and control (support community efforts to map pests in the region).</p> <p>MAT 2.6 Develop and implement a regional weed and feral animal management compliance strategy by 2006.</p> <p>MAT 2.7 Ensure delivery to all sections of the community and visitors (industry, tourism) of appropriate pest identification, spread prevention and control information by 2006.</p>
Water	<p>MAT 3.1 Map wetland areas of the region by 2006 (in conjunction with the community). Develop a list of priority wetlands, management guidelines and information for the community.</p> <p>MAT 3.2 Monitor point-impacts on water quality (sewage inflows, livestock pressure, groundwater discharges, and tourism use) and determine best management practice for point-impact pollution by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 3.3 Progressively set catchment-scale (and community-accepted) water quality targets based on best available information with indicative targets in 1 year, refined targets within 3 years and confirmed targets within 5 years.</p> <p>MAT 3.4 Appropriate systems in place for monitoring stream flows and water quality in the region by 2007 (may include reactivation of gauging stations).</p> <p>MAT 3.5 Climate risk (including climate change) impacts on catchment processes widely understood by land management community by 2008.</p> <p>MAT 3.6 Provide information on wetlands best management practice linked to appropriate on-ground incentives to manage and restore wetland areas in the region by 2008. (see MAT 1.7) ('Protecting our Future' – linked to other assets).</p> <p>MAT 3.7 Best practice water use guidelines adopted by major stakeholders (DCQ, GAB, Local govt., industry groups) in the region by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 3.8 By 2007 there is effective integration between the work of DCQ and the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) to improve the management of the region's natural resources.</p> <p>MAT 3.9 By 2007 there is effective cooperation between DCQ and the State water management planning processes.</p> <p>MAT 3.10 High priority artesian spring ecosystems are adequately protected and managed through adoption of best management practices and voluntary agreements by 2007 (linked to MAT 4.4).</p> <p>MAT 3.11 Identify erosion processes/areas of risk that lead to increased streamline siltation by 2007 (connected to MAT 1.1)</p> <p>MAT 3.12 Scientifically sound and community accepted standards in place for assessing catchment health in place by 2006 ('Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment') (linked to MAT 3.3).</p>

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Biodiversity	<p>MAT 4.1 Regional ecosystem mapping completed by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 4.2 Regional ecosystems are adequately conserved by 2009.</p> <p>MAT 4.3 Systematic surveys and biodiversity audits are undertaken in targeted areas by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 4.4 Ecosystems on private land are conserved through adoption of best management practices and voluntary agreements – 250,000 ha in place by 2007 (consistent with regional priorities).</p> <p>MAT 4.5 Develop education/awareness packages for the community on biodiversity values and landscapes by 2007 (recognise prior achievements).</p> <p>MAT 4.6 Develop benchmarks for managing biodiversity condition and management to be incorporated into the GLM package by 2006 (linked to MAT 1.5).</p> <p>MAT 4.7 Review existing recovery plans, and develop and implement regionally relevant management actions for at least 80% of threatened species in the region by 2009 (will utilise outcomes from MAT 4.3).</p> <p>MAT 4.8 Obtain information on the impacts of weeds and feral animals on biodiversity and make this available through the GLM package by 2007.</p>
Community	<p>MAT 5.1 Have information packages on the sustainable management of the natural resources of the region developed and distributed to the community by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 5.2 Ensure active community involvement in NRM planning and action by 2007 through support for the DCQ Board, Cooper’s Creek Catchment, Georgina Diamantina Catchment and Desert Uplands committees and other NRM groups in the region in a healthy partnership with governments (federal, state and local).</p> <p>MAT 5.3 Have NRM issues recognised in planning for tourism development and management of the region by 2006.</p> <p>MAT 5.4 Undertake a socio/economic study of the constraints on the management of the region’s natural resources by 2006.</p> <p>MAT 5.5 Sound links between DCQ and key groups (e.g. AgForce, WQLGA, RAPAD, OQTA) in place by 2006.</p> <p>MAT 5.6 Develop a regional waste management strategy by 2007.</p>
Indigenous land management and heritage	<p>MAT 6.1 Develop a database of traditional owners and historical custodians and foster and develop a DCQ Indigenous Leaders Group by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 6.2 Identify significant Indigenous areas / attributes / knowledge by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 6.3 Develop better relationships in the community with regard to Indigenous cultural heritage and incorporate Indigenous land management techniques and knowledge into mainstream land management packages by 2007.</p> <p>MAT 6.4 Have Indigenous land management and cultural heritage issues incorporated into local government planning in at least two shires in the region by 2007.</p>

Philosophy and thinking

DCQ’s philosophy is people based. They see their strengths as lying in:

- Engagement of people, ‘getting people on side’.
- Placing a high priority and importance on people – the team believe that their Executive Officer sees people as the most important part of the NRM landscape - this gives a personal touch that flows through the organisation.

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- Everything they do comes from the community – the development of the plan was community based.
- The make up of the board is valuable – they are community people, rely on staff to bring necessary technical expertise. It works well despite the background of bringing together the different groups that existed in the region.
- Open and regular internal communication.
- Open minded - looking at different ways of doing projects and then debate it a lot internally.
- Communicating in people's language – personal style, informality.
- One-on-one delivery at the project level works very well.
- Culture of the organisation is important – not a corporate background, are open to sharing ideas.
- Starting an attitudinal survey.

It was important to move out of the state DNR office so they can be seen to be non-government. There is a strong mistrust of government in this region.

People, energy and skills

The DCQ team are all based in the Longreach office – mainly because of services and to enable good communication and enthusiasm. This works well as the region has a low population and Longreach is regarded as 'local' across the region.

Expectations of involvement in project

Expectations

To work through some different examples of how the framework might be used – starting at different points in the cycle. Flesh out what's involved at each of the stages for different types of projects/activities. For example:

- for a devolved grant round
- for a project (eg groundcover change in western Queensland)

Focus on the areas of 'People and Change' / 'How to foster change' and a bit on 'Whose practices to change'.

Link with the attitudinal survey.

Focus on the program level.

Tools

DCQ are happy to share with other regions their approach with the operational planning tool.