

**ANNUAL REPORT
23/24**



desert channels group





The 510,000 square kilometre Desert Channels Region comprises the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin – nearly one-third of the State.



Desert Channels Group Annual Report 2023-2024

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Contents

Chair's report	06
CEO's report	08
Stories & projects	10
Our team	30
Financials	38
Acknowledgement	42





Reports

Chair's report

I am happy to report that DCQ is close to operating with a full contingent of staff and contractors and there is a new 'buzz'.

The Desert Channels Queensland Group has had a mix of successes and challenges over the past 12 months. The successes included attracting levels of funding that we have not experienced for many years. This resulted in our DCQ team being very busy delivering natural resource related projects across the region. This annual report will highlight these projects.

The challenges included delivering these projects whilst experiencing a major loss of key staff. Most organisations experience a turnover of staff, and this was our year for that. As a result, 'the DCQ way' sprang into action. A way was found to deliver these projects, meeting our usual high standard through dedicated staff working longer hours, working more efficiently. The challenges of attracting staff to rural and remote areas is not new but I do believe it is getting harder. I am happy to report that DCQ is close to operating with a full contingent of staff and contractors and there is a new 'buzz' in the organisation.

Queensland's NRM organisations have been working hard to lift their profile and attract increased funding commitments from governments for the NRM sector. The Nurturing Nature: Cultivating Culture state election prospectus was developed to help achieve this. The document describes natural resource management related projects developed by the regions for the regions. This document has been taken to all of Queensland's political parties and has been well received. We will have to wait to see how successful our campaign has been but we have successfully lifted the profile of our sector and promoted the need to have funding priorities determined by the regions for the regions and not by well meaning but largely uninformed departmental staff sitting in Brisbane and Canberra.

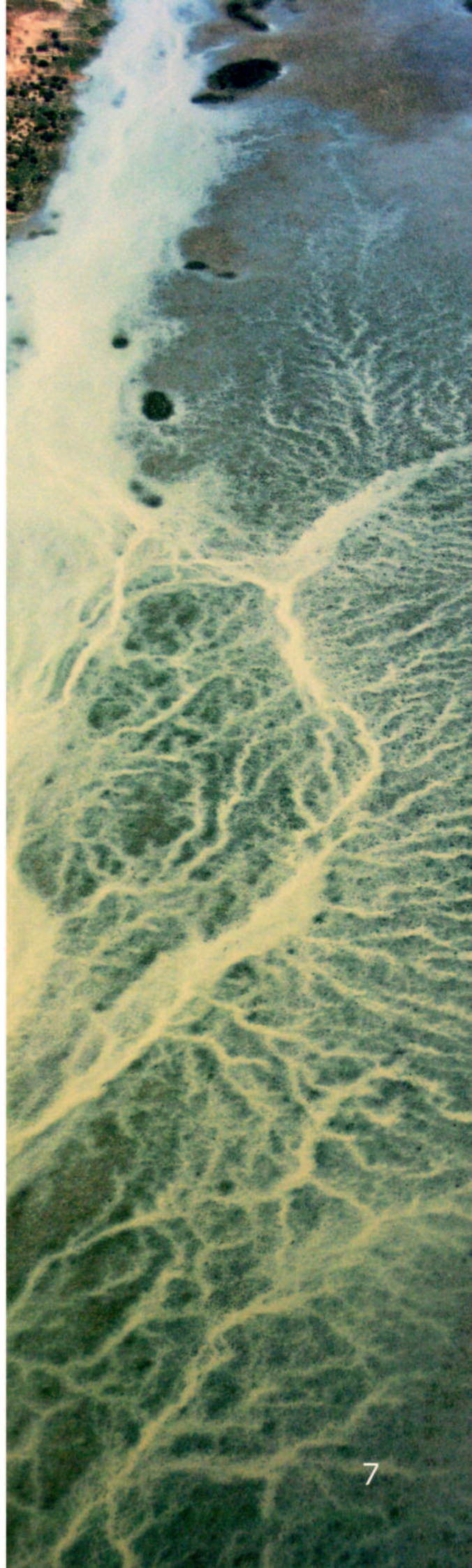
We welcome Rachael Webster onto the DCQ Board. Rachael is a grazier from west of Longreach and brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and perspectives gained from

her work in and away from the region. I urge anyone who might have any interest in becoming a director of DCQ to reach out to Leanne or myself to discuss what is involved in becoming a board member and the commitment required.

As with all my previous Annual Reports, I would like to close by acknowledging and thanking our CEO Leanne Kohler and her dedicated team for another year full of service and achievements. I also thank the Board of Desert Channels for their commitment, support and leadership.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Drysdale



CEO's report

Your collaboration has been the bedrock of our success, and I am excited about what we can accomplish together in the coming year.

As we reflect on the past year at DCQ, I want to start by acknowledging both the achievements we have celebrated and the challenges we have faced. This year presented unique obstacles, particularly in terms of project rollout and future funding. However, we have persevered, and I remain optimistic about what lies ahead.

The 2023/2024 financial year marked the conclusion of several major projects, a milestone of which we are incredibly proud. We completed these projects on time, successfully submitting our final reports and ensuring the continued delivery of meaningful outcomes for the region. Notably, our Prickly Acacia Program, which has been running for five years, stands as a significant achievement. This project, undertaken in collaboration with landholders, as well as local government and the Department of Transport and Main Roads, has been highly effective in addressing one of the region's most pressing environmental concerns. The results speak for themselves, and the broad participation and partnerships that drove this program

have been nothing short of remarkable. The completion of this initiative is certainly a highlight and represents the pinnacle of our success this year.

While the successful conclusion of past projects is worth celebrating, this year has not been without its challenges. The rollout of new projects, funded by both state and federal governments, has progressed slower than anticipated. Some projects have experienced significant delays, creating uncertainty around future funding streams. While we always believed we would navigate through this period, the uncertainty has had its toll, and unfortunately, we saw higher-than-usual staff turnover at DCQ, losing some of our highly valued team members. This has been a difficult transition, and like many regional bodies, we have faced the challenge of maintaining continuity amid this turnover.

However, with every challenge comes an opportunity. One of the bright spots this year has been the recruitment of new, enthusiastic

talent into our organisation. Their passion and energy are exciting to experience as they grow into their roles, bringing fresh perspectives and driving DCQ forward. These new team members represent the future of DCQ, and I am confident they will build on the strong foundation we have established.

Looking ahead, the future of DCQ is promising. We have successfully secured a number of new projects, and we are eager to continue some of the significant work that has already begun. Projects such as Greening the Outback and the GAB initiative remain key to our efforts. These initiatives are not only about restoring the natural environment but also about gathering essential data and developing insights that will have long-lasting impacts. The continuation of these projects will ensure we make a sustained difference to the landscape and biodiversity of the outback.

This year has also been one of reflection and planning for the future. Working closely with our Board, we have charted a course forward that positions DCQ to thrive in the years to come. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to our dedicated staff, both current and past. Your hard work, resilience, and commitment have been instrumental in achieving our goals this year. To those who

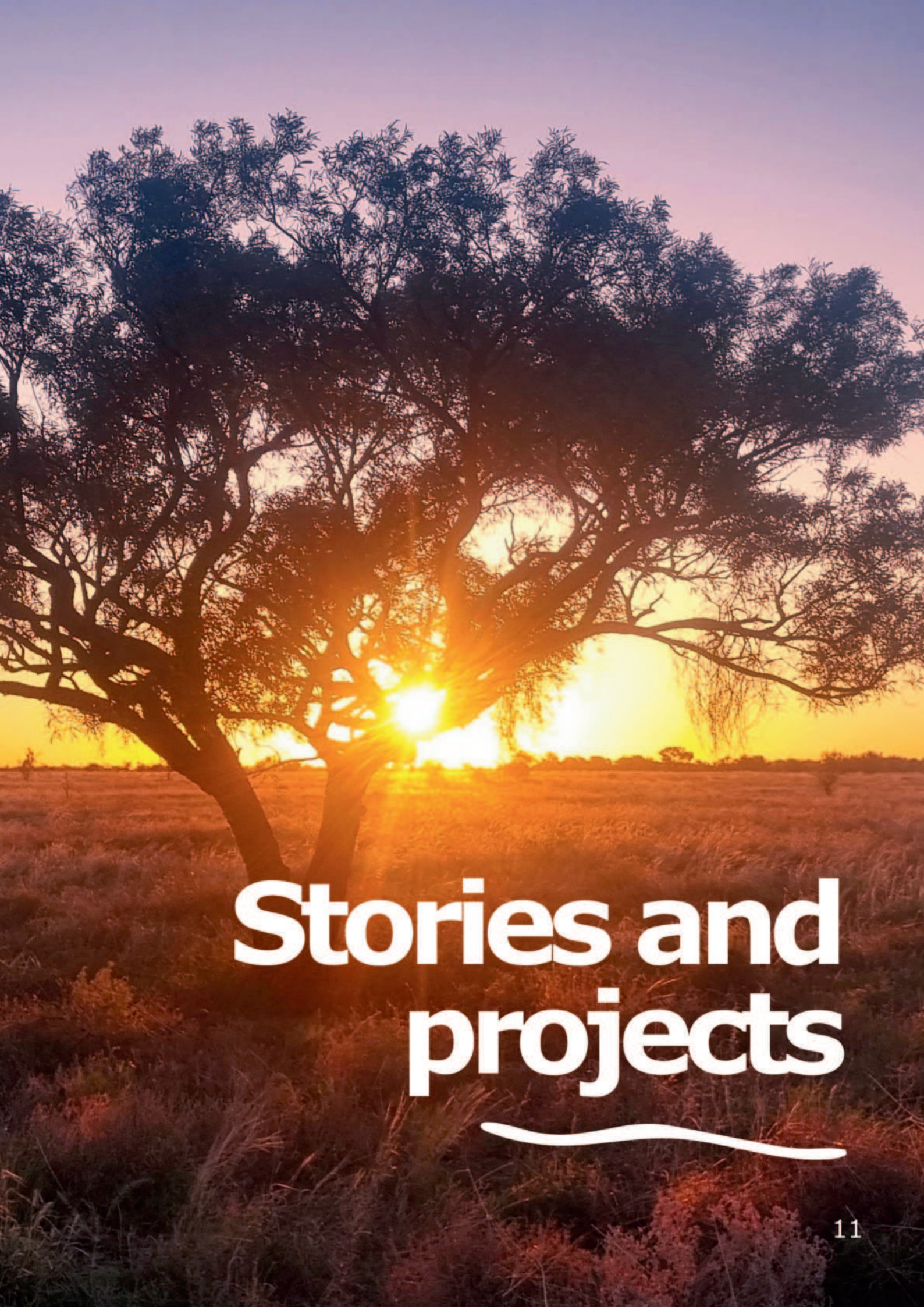
have moved on, I wish you all the best in your future endeavours, and to our current team, I look forward to continuing this journey together.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to the landholders, partners, and communities of this region. Your collaboration has been the bedrock of our success, and I am excited about what we can accomplish together in the coming year. The future at DCQ is bright, and I remain hopeful and energised by the possibilities that lie ahead.

Leanne Kohler







Stories and projects

Restoring the outback

Desert Channels Queensland has long been a driving force in preserving and rejuvenating the unique ecosystems of Queensland's outback.

Greening the Outback

In 2023-2024, Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) collaborated with seven landholders to restore bare and scalded areas of land. The project involved small-scale earthworks and targeted seeding to regenerate native grass cover on these challenging sites. Using methods such as ripping, grading, and creating "brickwork"-style offset gutters, landholders and DCQ staff enhanced water retention and infiltration, crucial for triggering grass germination in these inhospitable regions.

Originating in the Northern Territory in the 1990s, the "brickwork" method was adapted for use in western Queensland, where it has proven highly effective. The term "brickwork" refers to the staggered, overlapping cuts

made by a grader as it moves across the land. This technique, employed particularly on clay pans and other scalded areas, is designed to improve water infiltration into the soil, a crucial factor in regions prone to runoff and erosion.

A transformed ecosystem

A notable success story is found in the Longreach district, where landholder Warwick Champion from Longway saw remarkable results. Following rehabilitation efforts using the brickwork technique, previously barren land began to flourish with grasses and shrubs.

Champion was particularly struck by the emergence of lesser-known native grasses, which played an important role in enriching the soil and supporting the local ecosystem. This transformation demonstrates the tangible benefits of brickwork ploughing, not only in reviving the appearance of the land but also in restoring its ecological function.



A new way forward

As Queensland faces ongoing challenges from land degradation and variable climate, soil regeneration techniques like these will play a crucial role in preserving the state's pastoral country.

Brickwork ploughing offers a promising solution for landholders seeking to maintain productive landscapes for future generations because it enhances water retention and fosters biodiversity, ensuring the long-term fertility of pastures and country.

Now, by improving water retention, the project has fostered renewed native grasses, allowing previously unproductive land to return to use.

We are thankful for funding support from the Department of Resources' Natural Resources Recovery Program. In total, the project successfully restored 1,664 hectares of bare soil across numerous patches of outback.



Deprickling acacias

Prickly Acacia, one of Australia's most invasive weeds, has long posed environmental, economic, and ecological challenges in the Desert Channels region.

DCQ's most recent project to target the weed, the Prickly Acacia Weed Management Program, began in January 2020. This new program was supported by the Australian Government to address infestations worsened by monsoonal floods in 2019, particularly in the catchment's northern regions.

Over the project's four-year span, DCQ achieved key milestones by focusing on flood-affected catchments, fostering partnerships and utilising cutting-edge technologies. The results have set a benchmark for invasive weed management, not just in the Desert Channels region but across Australia. DCQ's direct interventions treated 221,847 hectares of Prickly Acacia infested land, which highlight DCQ's success in meeting and exceeding its project targets, even despite challenges posed by weather, logistics, and the scale of the infestation. DCQ continues to be a leader in deprickling acacia, and developing new technology to drive our success.

Human-machine innovation

Since spearheading control efforts more than a decade ago, Desert Channels Queensland has employed some new technologies such as drone-based orthomosaic mapping, which allowed the precise identification of 12 new prickly acacia infestation hotspots. This was complemented by advanced machine-learning algorithms to refine weed control planning and improve operational efficiency.

The program also trialed new herbicides, including the water-based product Method, under an Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit. This chemical has shown promise in enhancing the effectiveness of control measures, particularly in dense infestations within waterways.

Technology was also used for contract management and treatment verification. Landholders and contractors were equipped with digital tools to record treatment areas, track progress, and ensure compliance with environmental standards. These innovations not only improved the program's efficiency but also demonstrated DCQ's commitment to sustainable, science-backed practices.



Not one – but many

A key strength of DCQ's programs has been, and continues to be, the many possibilities for stakeholder collaboration. By partnering with local councils, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and organisations such as SGNRM and RAPAD, DCQ ensured a coordinated approach to weed management. These partnerships allowed seamless engagement with landholders, ensuring they received the support needed to tackle infestations effectively.

Landholder contributions played a vital role in amplifying the program's reach. Many provided resources such as accommodation, diesel, and herbicides, which enabled greater coverage of treatment areas. DCQ is particularly encouraged by the number of landholders who undertook additional Prickly Acacia control beyond the program's scope, with more than 80 per cent (348 landowners) now engaged in their own control activities, which reflects the program's influence in fostering weed management into the future.

DCQ's focus on education also empowered landholders with the knowledge and tools required for sustained weed management. Property-specific plans for ongoing weed management, which are developed alongside landholders, are expected to serve as long-term guides for control efforts.

Tackling new outbreaks

The scale and complexity of the project were not without challenges. Unseasonal rainfall and minor flooding disrupted planned activities, necessitating adjustments to the program schedule. DCQ's flexibility in reallocating resources and prioritising critical areas ensured the overall success of the program.

The program's adaptability was further demonstrated in its response to new outbreaks identified during aerial surveys. Infestations along creek lines southwest of Winton and Muttaborra, resulting from floodwaters, were addressed promptly to prevent further spread.

Meanwhile, the complementary rangeland biodiversity recovery project has documented improved native pasture and biodiversity conditions at Winton sites. These findings underscore the ecological benefits of reducing Prickly Acacia infestations, which include restoring habitat for native species and improving soil health.

Thinking future

The Prickly Acacia Weed Management Program represents more than just a successful project — it serves as a model for addressing invasive species in challenging environments. DCQ's emphasis on innovation, collaboration, and adaptability has not only delivered tangible results but also established a legacy of sustainable land management practices.

As DCQ seeks further funding opportunities, the organisation is well-positioned to build on its achievements. The lessons learned and partnerships forged during this program will undoubtedly inform future efforts, ensuring the continued health and resilience of the Desert Channels region.

By transforming challenges into opportunities and leveraging the strengths of its team and partners, DCQ has set a new standard in invasive weed management — one that balances ecological integrity with practical, on-ground solutions.



Watertight

Desert Channels Queensland has been funded by the Queensland Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing, and Water (RDMW), to spearhead a project to enhance landholder understanding of their obligations under the Great Artesian Basin and Other Regional Aquifers (GABORA) Plan.

As part of the ongoing bore capping and piping program, the project was to highlight the importance of watertight systems, the maintenance of existing infrastructure and the financial assistance programs available to help landholders achieve watertight status.

The project emphasised on-ground behaviour change as a key step toward fulfilling the

GABORA Plan's objectives. With the ambitious goal of reaching 285 bore owners managing 513 non-watertight bores, DCQ, in collaboration with Southern Gulf NRM and Southern Queensland Landscapes, successfully made direct contact with 245 individuals. This effort underscored the importance of personalised outreach in fostering engagement and supporting landholders in navigating their responsibilities.

Leveraging tech, local know-how

DCQ's innovative approach relied on a blend of technology and local expertise. Using resources like Queensland Globe and GEO ResGlobe for bore data analysis, DCQ combined these with insights from local NRM

groups to identify and connect with target landholders.

One outcome of the project was the update of the department's bore owner contact database, improving its accuracy for future correspondence. This improvement is important as the GABORA Plan continues to evolve, including the recent extension of the watertight deadline to 2032. Meanwhile, the development of a custom app streamlined data collection and record management, ensuring information was securely shared across the three partner organisations.

Sustainable outcomes

DCQ's work extended beyond immediate project deliverables, setting the foundation for ongoing engagement. One-on-one contact with landholders who have non watertight bores or bore drains remains a priority. These interactions, coupled with regular updates on funding opportunities for capping and piping schemes, aim to ensure landholders are well-prepared to meet the revised 2032 deadline.

Landholders who faced funding challenges or had opted out of earlier programs were given repeated opportunities to participate, reflecting DCQ's commitment to inclusive support. The project's success lies not only in its direct outcomes but also in fostering a culture of collaboration, where landholders are empowered to contribute to the sustainability of the Great Artesian Basin.

By bridging policy objectives with practical, on-ground solutions, DCQ has reinforced its role as a vital partner for landholders in the Desert Channels region. Through education, tailored outreach, and long-term engagement, DCQ is helping to secure the health of the Great Artesian Basin for future generations.



Regional capacity

Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) has secured a new five-year project funded by the Australian Government through the Natural Heritage Trust under the National Landcare Program.

This project enables DCQ to expand our regional networks and continue to uphold high standards in governance, natural resource management (NRM) planning, community engagement, and collaboration with Traditional Owners in the region. As a regional delivery partner for the Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Desert Channels Queensland is well-positioned to strengthen these networks with stakeholders across the region and in Brisbane. This connectivity supports effective communication and enhances opportunities to secure future funding for initiatives.

In this period, DCQ conducted activities including the Gatton AgTech showcase, pest taskforce meetings and National Feral Pig Plan roundtables, hosted Longreach City Council's Junior Fishing Workshop, built partnerships with Indigenous Service Australia, and conducted flora and fauna surveys with Winton partners to assess native habitat growth.





Grazing futures

The Grazing Futures project provided Desert Channels Queensland with an opportunity to enhance natural resource management through the Drought Resilience Property Plan initiative.

During 2023/24, DCQ worked closely with landholders, offering critical support in mapping land types, identifying on-farm infrastructure, utilising satellite imagery, and delineating grazing circles. These efforts enabled landholders to make informed decisions regarding future management and property improvement projects.

Additionally, DCQ participated in several field days and workshops, fostering knowledge-sharing and collaboration. These events focused on equipping landholders with the tools and expertise needed to strengthen property management practices, ensuring sustainable land use and improved drought resilience.





Sustainable agriculture

Throughout 23/24, DCQ has continued to maintain our Regional Landcare Facilitator, Doug Allpass. This role has been funded by the National Landcare Program for many years, however the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests did not provide funding until Jan 2024. Despite this delay in funding, DCQ achieved substantial landholder and local Landcare Group support across the region.

There have been several name changes for this role as the Australian Government programs were changed over recent years. Now called the Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator (SAF), the role has not substantially changed. DCQ has supported local Landcare Groups to undertake activities such as community education events and facilitated landholders involvement in on-ground sustainable agriculture projects.

DCQ has supported local Landcare Groups to undertake activities such as community education events and facilitated landholders involvement in on-the-ground sustainable agriculture projects.

Over the past couple of years, DCQ along with the rangelands NRM groups across Australia have advocated increased Landcare Facilitator funding, particularly given the size of the rangelands region.

The Federal Minister at the time, Murray Watt, has increased funding our Landcare Officer funding for staff members to 1.5 full time equivalents, increasing the Group's capacity to engage more landholders and to support the Landcare Groups across our region. Throughout 2023 / 24 this valuable work was carried out by Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator Doug Allpass and Project Officer Belinda Cuthill.



Managing disasters

In 2023/24, Desert Channels Queensland developed a new plan focused on improving the preparation and recovery of the region's natural assets from disasters, supported by the Australian Government.

The Natural Disaster Preparedness & Response Plan – Biodiversity and Agricultural Natural Assets compiles information on regional biodiversity and agricultural resources, such as soils, while examining the natural disasters that affect the area. The plan identifies strategies to enhance preparation, response, and recovery for species, ecosystems, and agricultural assets.

It aims to secure resources by collaborating with local, state, and federal agencies and defines DCQ's role in disaster management.





Waddy tree

DCQ is undertaking a project focusing on improving habitat condition and expanding the population range of the Waddy Tree (*Acacia peuce*) in the region. DCQ will collaborate with landholders, public land managers and Traditional Owners to address threats such as pests, weeds, vehicle impacts, and grazing.

By June 2024, DCQ assessed one Waddy Tree site, evaluating population health and threats to guide future management. This project is funded by the National Landcare Program through the Natural Heritage Trust.



The emerging springs

During 2023-2024, DCQ partnered with six landholders to manage 15 re-emerging Great Artesian Basin (GAB) springs. These springs, natural groundwater discharge points, have begun to revitalise due to increased aquifer pressure, a direct outcome of bore capping and piping initiatives aimed at minimising water loss from evaporation and seepage.

These measures not only conserve water but also enable landholders to better manage and distribute water resources, ensuring sustainable land use. The resurgence of these springs marks a critical step in restoring ecological balance, offering unique opportunities to enhance biodiversity and improve land management practices.

The GAB springs are ecologically significant, supporting a range of endemic species, some found nowhere else. Research has highlighted their role as biodiversity hotspots, hosting

unique flora and fauna adapted to these specific wetland environments. DCQ's collaboration with landholders reflects a growing recognition of the need to safeguard these fragile ecosystems. Efforts included key threats such as invasive weeds and pests, which pose substantial risks to native habitats. DCQ's management program achieved over 5,400 hectares of weed control and extended pest management efforts across 70,000 hectares, mitigating the impact of invasive species on the springs' ecosystems.

Spring revival

To protect these vital water sources further, 15 livestock exclusion structures were installed, preventing overgrazing and trampling by cattle, which can degrade spring environments and reduce water quality. This approach allows native vegetation to recover, fostering habitat restoration and increasing



the resilience of biodiversity in the region. The springs' revival also has broader implications, potentially aiding in the survival of drought-sensitive species and providing refuge during periods of extreme climatic conditions.

Ongoing research emphasises the springs' role in regional hydrology and as indicators of the health of the GAB system. Studies suggest that re-emerging springs could help buffer ecosystems from climate variability, making their management a high priority for both conservation and agricultural productivity. DCQ's initiatives align with these findings, combining practical landholder support with conservation objectives.

This integrated approach not only enhances the ecological value of the springs but also strengthens landholders' capacity for sustainable water management. By fostering partnerships with local stakeholders, DCQ is promoting long-term stewardship of these critical resources, ensuring the springs continue to support both biodiversity and agricultural enterprises in the face of environmental challenges.





A landscape photograph of a savanna. In the foreground, there is a dense field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass. A few dead, dark, and leafless trees are scattered throughout the scene, with one prominent one in the center-left. The background shows a flat horizon line under a sky filled with heavy, grey, and white clouds. The overall mood is somber and desolate.

Our team



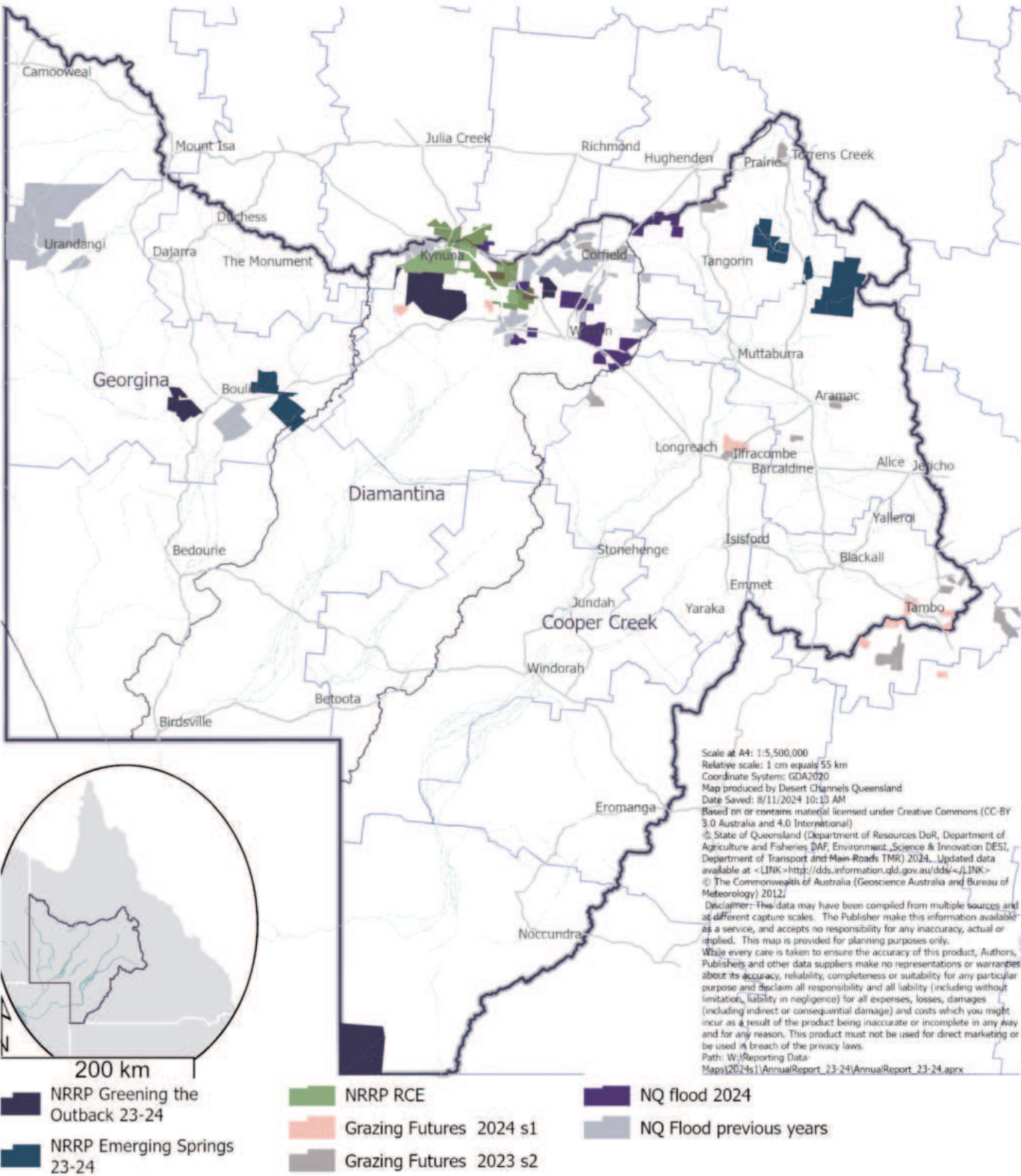
Where we worked

This map shows the properties that DCQ has directly supported in on-ground action. The range of projects include weed and pest control, fencing, water management and property infrastructure mapping. All of these projects have been in partnership with landholders throughout 23/24.

DCQ has provided on-farm assistance with labour through our Field Team providing the on ground physical workforce to get jobs done, often with landholders providing the materials or herbicide and occasionally on farm accommodation.

DCQ also provides grant cash where landholders and local government have the time and capacity to do the works. DCQ will continue to put a high priority on attracting resources into the region to be able to partner with landholders on these direct on-the-ground projects.

A map of on-ground achievements, 2023 / 24



The staff



Leanne Kohler
*Chief Executive
Officer*



Geoff Penton
Operations Manager



Doug Allpass
*Sustainable
Agriculture Facilitator*



Roxane Blackley
*Research and
Development Manager*



Bethany Murphy
*Contracts and
Project Support*



Belinda Cuthill
*Monitoring and
Projects Officer*



Phillip Jackson
Field Technician



Roshan Karki
*GIS and Information
Management Officer*



Janet Woodfield
*Admin and
Reception*



Jana Sykorova
*Monitoring and
Evaluation Officer*



Peter Spence
*Senior Project
Coordinator*



Jason Smith
Field Supervisor



Jeff Poole
*Executive Support
Officer*

Working on our skills

The Desert Channels Queensland team values staying current with skills to meet strategic goals and project needs. In 2023/24, staff completed Work Health and Safety training for operating 4x4 vehicles, side-by-side buggies, and 4x4 bikes, ensuring safety and compliance in the field.

Additionally, DCQ engaged Cultural Services Australia to deliver a cultural awareness course, which was attended by both staff and Directors. This training enhances our team's understanding and respect for Traditional Owners and their rich heritage, aligning with DCQ's commitment to inclusive and effective collaboration within the region.

These efforts reflect DCQ's dedication to professional development and responsible operations.



The board



Andrew Drysdale, Chair

I have been fortunate and honoured to be the Chair of the DCQ Board for the last five years. DCQ has, is and will continue to deliver much needed natural resource management services for the region and I hope to continue contributing to this delivery as a member of the DCQ team.



Mike Pratt, Vice Chair

It's been a challenging year for DCQ with numerous staff changes, securing ongoing project funding in a very competitive environment and raising awareness of emerging invasive species to encourage those at the coalface to take action. DCQ has clearly demonstrated what can be achieved in controlling and/or eradicating weeds, especially Prickly Acacia. Hence we strongly urge all landholders to accept their General Biosecurity Obligation and adopt a plan to control or ideally eradicate their manageable invasive species.



John Ogg, Director

In the new chapter of DCQ, we're evolving while maintaining what has made DCQ unique: our teams working closely with landholders on various activities. DCQ also serves as a channel to the government on behalf of landholders regarding environmental matters.



Rod Williams, Treasurer

2023–2024 has proven very challenging for DCQ with new government investment programs and priorities, massive delays in funding roll out, and significant staff changes. It has also demonstrated the ongoing capabilities and resilience of staff to rise above these challenges and meet all delivery expectations, all while continuing on ground activities.



George Gorringe, Director

DCQ continues to demonstrate leadership and advocacy in natural resources management and convey professional and quality advice to invest in the condition of our region.

A special thankyou

As we look back on 2023 / 24, we reflect on the contributions of those who have moved on from DCQ. Each of them brought their unique personality, dedication, and energy, enriching our organisation and shaping its culture. Though no longer with us, they remain a valued part of DCQ's story.

Simon Wiggins, our Operations Manager, and Joanne Nauman, Business Manager, both made significant impacts during their tenure. Nina Groves, Contracts and Projects Officer, and Tegan Glozier, Finance and Administration Officer, ensured the smooth operation of essential functions. Natalie Pearce, Senior Projects Officer, played a key role in delivering vital outcomes across the region.

In the field, Jaxon Richards, Kirk Morton, Stirling Green, and the ever-committed Tony faced the challenges of the outback with grit and determination. Their hard work in often harsh conditions exemplified the resilience and teamwork that define DCQ.

To all these former colleagues: thank you for your dedication. You may have moved on, but your contributions have left an enduring legacy. You will not be forgotten.



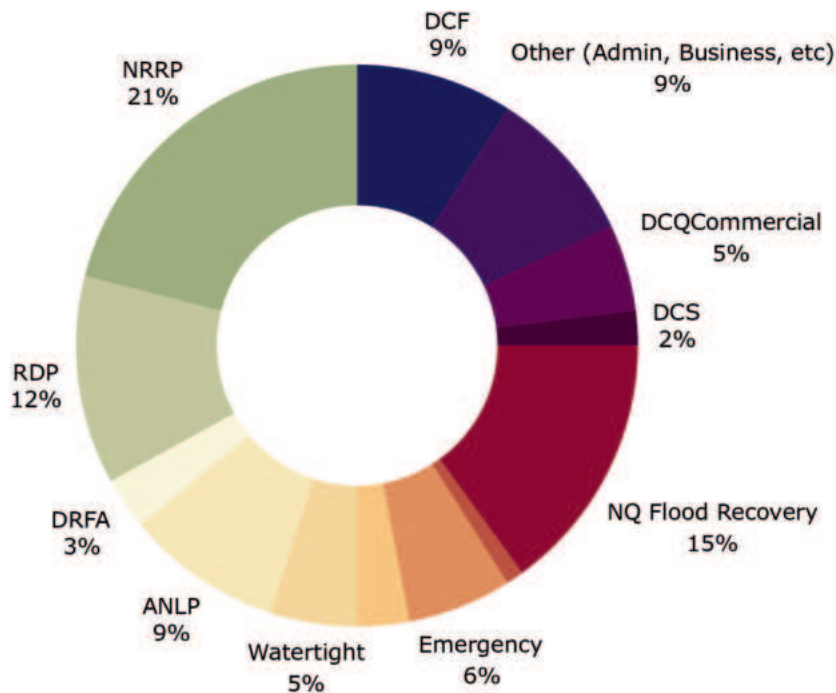




Financials

Financial snapshot

Income & Funding at a Glance 2023 / 2024



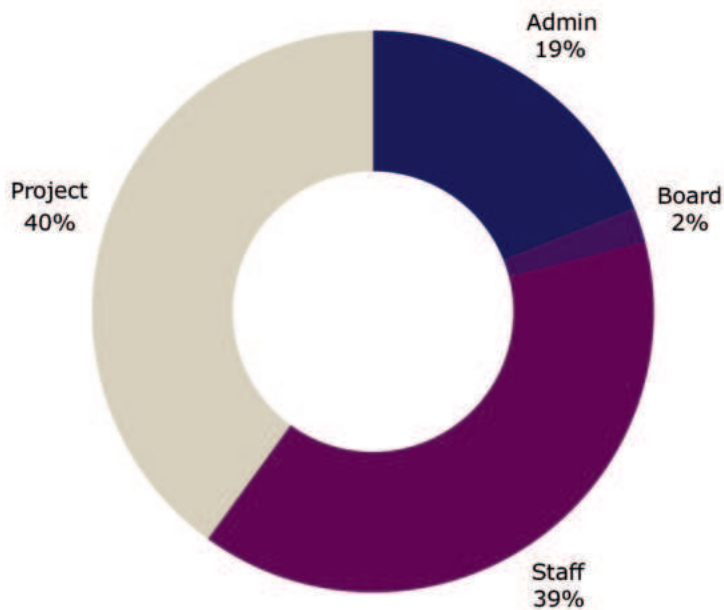
Total: \$3.89 million

Note: This graph includes grant revenue and other income such as interest, saleable items, membership fees, sponsorships and donations. The income snapshot does not include adjustments for Unexpended Grant Funds or Unbilled Revenue carried over from previous financial years.

Highlights

- Income and Funding for the 2023 / 2024 year saw a decrease of income of \$414,892.00 on the previous year.
- There has not been as much funding available for projects from either the State or Federal Government this past twelve months.
- Desert Channels continues to deliver a wide variety of State and Federal funded projects and joint ventures including Weed Control, Flood Recovery and Grazing BMP.
- The Commercial arm, DC Solutions, continued its support to the Foundation during the year with a donation of \$280,000.00.

Expenses at a Glance 2023 / 2024



Expenses: \$3.63 million

Note: The graph represents the expenses per the Profit & Loss Statement, less depreciation, plus capital expenses.

Highlights

- Desert Channels has directly disbursed \$1.44 million in on-ground project costs for the financial year for various projects.
- Desert Channels Foundation has spent the year continuing to develop a campaign to help facilitate the raising of funds for DCF.

Acknowledgements

The Desert Channels Group would like to thank our funders, partners and the people of the region for their ongoing support.

All images are from the DCQ Image Library.



Australian Government



Queensland
Government



desert
channels
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