



Noel Strohfeld, left, recently appointed chairman of the Queensland Murray Darling Committee, with past and present chairmen of North East Downs Landcare, Graham Cooke, 2011 to present, Owena Reimers, 2006 to 2011, Glenys Bowtell, 2001 to 2006, David Vonhoff, 1996 to 1998, and Bob Rowlings, 1994 to 1996. Not pictured are John Barber, chairman 2000 to 2001, and Michael Fyffe, chairman 2000 to 2001.

## North East Downs Landcare celebrates 21 years

North East Downs Landcare has celebrated 21 years of service, helping to co-ordinate projects across the Northern Darling Downs.

Celebrations were held in Oaky to mark the event and to recall previous eras when government assistance was more forthcoming for projects that improved water

quality, soil quality and assisted the control of feral animals and weeds.

Chairman of North East Downs Landcare Graham Cooke said the organisation remained functional although at a lesser level.

He said it continued as a co-ordinating organisation for the smaller local Landcare

groups of which there were now a dozen, after peaking at 16.

Mr Cooke said there were many changes occurring on the Darling Downs, including farm aggregations.

The challenge of Landcare was to remain relevant in the 21st century.

Mega trends that had to be

faced included climate change and digital technology, he said.

"But even with the latest technology, will a drone be able to pick up a hoe or an axe or a crowbar when they were required?"

Mr Cooke said that at the local level, landholders had to confront feral pests and weeds

which were a rarity 10 to 20 years ago.

He said that those who took a leap of faith 21 years ago when North East Downs Landcare was established should be saluted, and even before that there were some local Landcare groups in existence. -MILES NOLLER



Guest speakers at the 21st anniversary celebrations of North East Downs Landcare were Bob Rowlings, the organisation's first chairman, and Peter Crawford who was co-ordinator from 1997 to 2011. He is now a consultant with the Burnett Mary catchments regional group. They were presented with timber executive toys, crafted by Max Kuhl of Highland Plains.

## Landcare leader calls for govt action on weeds and pests

Lack of commitment by State and Local Governments to organisations such as Landcare is being noticed by groups of landholders trying to free the country of weeds and feral animals. Crows Nest district grazier Bob Rowlings criticised the actions of these governments during a function to mark the 21st anniversary of North East Downs Landcare. Mr Rowlings said some were fighting weed invasions from roads, where weed seeds were spread by council slashers.

He thought a class action might be required to wake up the authorities to what was occurring.

Mr Rowlings, a former government soil conservationist who runs cattle north of Crows Nest, was the founding chairman of this regional Landcare group. He said it was sad to see the demise of the departments DPI and DNR. They were very useful organisations and their representatives often attended Landcare meetings and were able to advise on

issues affecting many districts, he said.

"Landcare has been expected to take over their roles," Mr Rowlings said. "But we have enough to do rather than tell others how to farm."

Mr Rowlings said the Emu Creek Catchment group had 75 members, but half were absentee landlords. He said many had issues concerning weeds, pests and soil erosion, but it was difficult to contact them and then difficult to get action on the issues.

Mr Rowlings said that in the past, Local Government representatives such as Noel Strohfeld and Col Ambrose from Rosalie Shire regularly attended Landcare meetings and understood the issues. Mr Rowlings is a representative on Toowoomba Regional Council's pest management group. He said it was disappointing no one from the council attended last week's function.

He said there was a problem with council activities spreading weeds.

Marker pegs had been placed around a weed infestation but a council slasher operator simply removed those pegs and slashed right through the weeds, spreading the seeds.

Mr Rowlings, chairman of North East Downs Landcare from 1994 to 1996, has continued in official roles in a number of Landcare groups, including his local Emu Creek Catchment group and with the SEQ Catchments organisation which includes upper Brisbane River areas.

## Still time to visit Bush Christmas

It is not too late to put the fun back into Christmas shopping this year with a visit to the annual Bush Christmas Exhibition.

Now in its 19th year, Bush Christmas combines an all-encompassing display of the works of some of Australia's most talented rural and remote artisans, with the opportunity to purchase a gift for just about everyone.

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Bush Christmas supports the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association and Aussie Helpers, both stalwarts of the Australian outback, thankful for any contribution during these tough times.

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**VENUE:** Masonic Centre, 58 Neil St, Toowoomba (next to Empire Theatres)

**COST:** Free Admission

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