

# Darling Downs Environment Council Annual Report

2024 - 2025



DDEC acknowledges that we meet and work on the land of the Jagera, Giabal and Jarowair tribes. We wish to pay respect to their Elders — past, present and future — and acknowledge the important role all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play in protecting, conserving and sustaining Queensland.

# President's Report 2025

Don Carlson

This year has been an exciting year of progress for DDEC's involvement in growing action and advocacy for our region's environment in the face of the many challenges it faces. Our coordinator has done a fantastic job in mobilising awareness, volunteer efforts and building connections across our community. In his report he has ably covered DDEC activities and achievements so this report will cover broader issues and thank you's.

Our strategy focus has been broadly focussed in two broad initiatives. The first of these is the big picture of Regional Planning and Biodiversity Protections. There has been considerable effort directed to improve the clarity and efficacy of environmental protections in the much-delayed new Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme. Our experience during this year has shown, yet again, that without a sound set of rules there are few if any avenues for effectively holding environmentally destructive actions to account. Similar reasoning applies to our advocacy with our State Government Ministers, Members and Departments concerning critical issues in our region.

Secondly, to make a positive impact on the environment we share, action at the individual, group and community level is the key. Several of this year's initiatives and campaigns including 'Keep Toowoomba Cool', 'Protect Trees', 'Gardening for Wildlife', and 'Greening Toowoomba' have many elements in common including improving the environment for wildlife and us with a strong with a strong local community involvement focus.

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Our heartfelt thanks to all the dedicated volunteers who contribute to their vital efforts dedicated to benefitting our living and natural environment. I'm always being inspired by finding about new (for me) individuals and groups who are giving so much to such a range of activities from koala care, population mapping and fodder forests, wildlife rescue and care to weed control, corridor plantings, community benefits from renewable energy and campaigning to save high value agricultural land from inappropriate mining activities and old growth forests for wildlife.

As far as possible, with limited resources, we seek to find ways to amplify the efforts of member groups and individual members through fostering possible collaborations where beneficial and appropriate and in some cases providing auspicing for projects.

There are so many people to thank for their efforts for DDEC this year that I can't possibly cover everyone who deserves mention so please forgive any omissions.

- ☛ Our capable and energetic Coordinator Ahri Tallon who has been integral to so much of what has been achieved this year. Megan Brady who we welcomed to our part time paid staff to enhance our efforts in the renewable energy space.
- ☛ My fellow Committee Members who have all played their critical part in the guidance, stewardship and strategic direction of DDEC.
- ☛ Our capable Committee secretaries - Jenny Withnall who had stepped in to fill the 2023 vacancy and kept us on track for over a year in particular during

Ahri's(Coordinator) extended leave and Christel Pidcock who in turn took on this role during this year.

- 👉 Our treasurer David Tutty for overseeing our finances and Peter Albion for taking up a supporting role to spread the load. Rhonda Haeusler our dedicated and patient volunteer bookkeeper for sticking with us as we got our reporting requirements sorted out.
- 👉 For putting in successful grant applications Jenny Withnall and Sandy Brown for the Gambling Community Benefit Fund which will allow us to continue with building improvements and Ahri(Coordinator) for FRRR Grant which has funded more activity in the 'renewables done right' space.
- 👉 Again Sandy and Jenny for leading our building improvement and maintenance efforts.
- 👉 Our Volunteer Coordinators - Lee Kethel who was first to take up the role and encountered many of the teething issues and Dhareetha Perera who has taken on the role as volunteer numbers are rapidly expanding.
- 👉 Volunteers Deborah Tokkar, Franciska Charters, Maree Klemm, Kushla Gale, Andrew Reeson and Michelle Berkhout for all your contributions.

- 👉 Ros Darracott for leading the Green Social Work student program with students Moon Jazmine, Miranda Brennan, Junmei Sun and Musfirah Musiran.
- 👉 Our ever expanding ranks of volunteers covering everything from research, campaigning and media to building maintenance and gardening. Thank you all!

This year some brainstorming came up with the concept of annual awards to recognise the amazing volunteer efforts of individuals and organisations who have devoted some much of their time and energy for the benefit of the environment in our region. We would love to be able to acknowledge all those who are deserving at this time, but this is impractical. Our hope is that over time this form of recognition will help to raise the profile of all the unsung volunteers dedicated to cause and that the awards become an anticipated annual event. Not surprisingly, the hardest task has making the choice of recipients for our 2025 awards.

In conclusion, I look forward to forward with optimism to building on the current energy and momentum in the year ahead.

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## Coordinators Report

Ahri Tallon

This year has been one of tremendous energy, momentum and collaboration at DDEC. Our campaigns have reached thousands across the region, our volunteer community has deepened and diversified, and our advocacy has resonated at all levels—from local councils to state planning forums. The 2024–25 year has solidified DDEC’s role as a critical voice for environmental protection and a fair energy transition on the Darling Downs.

### Governance and Organisational Development

#### Internal Policy Strengthening

We updated and implemented key policies including Donations, Time-in-Lieu, Confidentiality, and Financial Governance Roles. A new membership registration process and volunteer induction processes have improved efficiency, clarity and inclusivity.

## Strategic Planning

Governance self-assessments and planning sessions were supported by an end-of-year supporter survey and with upcoming strategic campaign review sessions planned with the oncoming committee.

## Financial Management

Financial processes were improved with clearer oversight roles, better reporting, and refinement of donor systems. We moved from an expensive platform called Nationbuilder to a more versatile and affordable system called Action Network to improve supporter engagement

## Membership

DDEC grew to 24 member groups and over 40 individual members.

## Volunteer Engagement and Staff Capacity

### Growing Volunteer Base

Nearly 30 volunteers are now active across social media, volunteer engagement, outreach, research, events, admin, fundraising, and campaign support. A new Volunteer Coordinator, Dhari, was appointed in mid-2025.

### Student Placements

Two social work students from the Eco Social Work Placement Network joined the team, supporting communications, campaign development and volunteer engagement.

### Training and Induction

A successful campaigner training day was held in late 2024, 5 volunteers travelled to a QCC run training in June 2025 and induction processes were implemented for onboarding.

### Workplace Review

The Coordinator's work agreement and position description were updated in line with the SCHADS Award Level 5 classification.

## Media and Communications

### Digital Reach

Our supporter list surpassed 1,200 contacts. We launched new Instagram, LinkedIn, Youtube and TikTok channels and continued regular newsletters and media releases.

### Traditional Media

We received consistent strong media coverage on

illegal tree clearing, regional energy transition planning, and our "Keep Toowoomba Cool" and "Protect Trees Toowoomba" campaigns. See our Facebook page for the many 7 News actions covered.

### New Website and CRM

A new website was launched in early 2025, supported by a developer and managed by the DDEC coordinator. The CRM enables targeted supporter communications and integrated actions.

## Community Engagement and Events

### Events

Community candidate forums during the state election, a Keep Toowoomba Cool forum, two Tree Protection Forums in Highfields, markets, the Crows Nest Koala Fest, World Environment Day, and multiple "Nature Drinks" events were hosted, including with Lock the Gate and local sustainability leaders.

### Member Engagement

we sent supporter surveys and organised an end-of-year member celebration.

### Gummingarru Visit

A cultural learning and team-building visit was held in February 2025, supporting deeper First Nations engagement.

## Key Campaigns

### 1. Protect Trees Toowoomba (PTT)

- ➦ Formed in late 2024 and now meeting fortnightly, PTT has organised public forums, doorknocking, signage distribution, and protest actions.
- ➦ Campaign goals include strong protections in the new Toowoomba Planning Scheme, and a Natural Assets Local Law.
- ➦ A powerful report on how tree protections could work in the Toowoomba region was written and released by the research team coordinator, Srishti Antil.
- ➦ Engagements with UDIA, Council planners and elected representatives are ongoing.
- ➦ A campaign video is in development and a new policy platform, campaign website as well as many communication materials have been produced.

### 2. Keep Toowoomba Cool (KTC)

- ➦ Monthly working group meetings, bumper sticker rollouts, and community actions like tree photo-

sharing have kept this campaign active and growing.

- 👉 A project proposal was made regarding community-led street tree planting in partnership with Toowoomba Regional Council. This Greening Toowoomba project is in development as a possible partnership project with Toowoomba Regional Council.
- 👉 Volunteers completed a community engagement strategy report to inform campaign actions.

### 3. Renewables Done Right

- 👉 DDEC attended a forum in Miles and was the lead local organisation in a partnership with QCC and the RE Alliance in organising the “Shaping Renewables on the Downs Community Renewables Forum” in March 2025 in Toowoomba. A report on this forum was completed and sent to decision makers.
- 👉 A Statement of Expectations was drafted and shared for community endorsement.
- 👉 Ongoing work includes research and community advocacy around community benefits, myth-busting education, and planning policy improvements.

### 4. Ministerial Advocacy

DDEC represented local concerns at Ministerial Environmental Roundtable (MERT) meetings, calling for the expansion of the Koala Conservation Strategy to the Toowoomba region, the increased resourcing of the bioregional planning process and the improvement of environmental offence enforcement accountability and transparency.

### 5. First Nations Engagement

The Gummingarru team-building visit was an important milestone in deepening cultural engagement and organisational understanding.

## Fundraising and Financial Sustainability

### Appeals

Two fundraising drives—EOFY and Christmas—were supported by matched giving. Through these combined campaigns we raised over \$10,000 in small and medium donations.

### Grants

A successful \$20k Gambling Community Benefit Fund

application was submitted for Eco Hut upgrades providing funding for an air conditioner, security screens and other building improvements. We also were successful in getting another \$20k for renewables done right work from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.

### Events

The upcoming Full Moon Winter Warmer event is expected to raise critical funds for the tree protection campaign and local wildlife carers while building community support and celebration.

## Facilities and Infrastructure

### Eco Hut upgrades

New security windows, air conditioning, blinds, furniture, garden planting and PA equipment were installed. The solar system and battery were finally connected after being installed last year and we are selling power to the Scouts next door. Gardening is also developing around the Eco Hut. Further improvements are planned.

### Office Systems

New IT and CRM systems are in place, with NationBuilder phased out.

## Looking Ahead

In 2025–26, DDEC will:

- 👉 Deepen campaign reach across the region with grassroots action and evidence-based advocacy.
- 👉 Deliver a deputation to Council about the Protect Trees Toowoomba campaign and mobilise community support during the planning scheme consultation process.
- 👉 Deliver the Renewables community education across the Downs and generate community-informed recommendations for a fair energy transition.
- 👉 Strengthen our operational systems with updated work policies, sustainable funding strategies, and improved team processes.
- 👉 Support a new wave of engaged volunteers and student leaders with mentorship and training.

We thank our members, donors, volunteers, and partners for their contributions. Together, we are building a movement for nature and climate justice in the Darling Downs.