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Protecting and promoting the environment in our region.
Unite. Advocate. Innovate.

Toowoomba Regional Council's draft Planning Scheme, with its new tree and habitat protections, is expected to go to Planning Minister Jarrod Bleijie this month.

Years of local work went into those protections. We have already seen what can happen at this stage: in Gympie, protections that were proposed locally were wound back by the State after the local work was done.

That isn't happening in isolation. Over the past three months the Minister and the State Government have been removing the checks that let communities speak up for nature:

- **The Critical Minerals Act** (passed 26 August) lets the Minister declare any project a "state strategic project." That shuts out judicial review and third-party appeals.
- **The mining objections bill** (introduced 15 September) would limit objections to people living within 125 km of a mine. Objections would no longer go automatically to the Land Court, and environmental concerns would be pushed into a weaker submission process. **Submissions close at 10am, Monday 12 October.**
- **Ministerial overrides of local planning** have already happened in Gympie and Toowoomba's scheme is next in line.

The common thread is simple. Each change cuts down the number of people who can question a decision before it's made and decisions being made without the community getting a say at all. When the right to object is taken away, it isn't just a process that changes. The people who live with the consequences get pushed out of the room.

So this month we're asking you to do three things:

1. [**Come to the Tall Trees Celebration Picnic on Saturday 10 October, 3–5pm at Peacehaven Park, Highfields.**](#) We've invited Minister Bleijie and our local State MPs to stand under the trees with us and say publicly whether they will back our council's right to decide. Whether they come or not, a big turnout says it for us.
2. [**Sign and share e-petition 4716-26, which asks Parliament to restore appeal rights and require the Minister to give public reasons for his decisions \(more below\).**](#)
3. **Make a submission on the mining objections bill** before 12 October.

Out west, the same question is coming to the Western Downs. A \$32 billion AI data centre

has been proposed near Kogan. It would be the largest in the country and draw about a quarter of Queensland's electricity, use massive amounts of water, potentially drive more fracking and have a huge impact on a community already buckling by the strain of cumulative development. All for a technology none of us have had a say on whether we want it and the massive impacts that we are not prepared for on our lives, jobs and safety. [A petition against it is already past 20,000 and is the biggest on the parliamentary website.](#)

Whether people in Dalby, Kogan and Chinchilla get a real say in how it goes ahead depends on exactly the rights now being stripped back.

Word on the street is that manufacturers are getting orders for Data centre parts before it has even been lodged and the Western Downs planners are being told to push the timelines for everything on their desks way back.

You'll find a summary with more info further down. A action group was formed last night with local community members leading the way.

Power in a region like ours isn't something a community simply has or doesn't have. We build it, slowly, out of relationships, evidence, organisation and our ability to act together. This October is a chance to use it.

With thanks,

Ahri Tallon

Coordinator,

Darling Downs Environment Council



DDEC Events

Tall Trees Celebration Picnic

Date: Saturday, 10th October

Time: 3:00pm - 5:00pm

Location: Peacehaven Park, 56 Kuhls Rd, Highfields QLD 4352

After years of community advocacy, Toowoomba Regional Council's draft Planning Scheme — including important new tree and habitat protections — is expected to be referred to Queensland Planning Minister Jarrod Bleijie in October.

This is an important point in the process. State Government intervention has previously resulted in locally proposed tree and biodiversity protections being wound back in Gympie and Protect Trees Toowoomba does not want to see the same happen here.

But protecting trees isn't only about planning provisions. People are more likely to stand up for the places they know, value and feel connected to.

That's why Protect Trees Toowoomba is holding a Tall Trees Celebration Picnic at Peacehaven Park — a chance to come together beneath some of the trees that make Highfields and the wider Toowoomba Region so special.

Planning Minister Jarrod Bleijie and our local State MPs — Trevor Watts, David Janetzki, Pat Weir and Deb Frecklington — are being formally invited to join the community, experience the majesty of Highfields tall trees and hear directly why local tree protections matter. We are asking them to confirm to the community whether they are going to stand up for our local governments role in deciding how we get a balance between housing and nature by ensuring the planning Minister does not intervene.

Scot McPhie, Birdlife Australia's Birds on Farms Project Coordinator Lockyer-Toowoomba will be speaking along with our growing group of musicians and guests.

Whether our elected representatives attend or not, a strong community turnout will send an important message.

- 🌳 Bring a picnic rug
- 🍵 Pack some afternoon tea
- 👨👩👧👦 Bring the family
- 💚 Come and celebrate the trees we want future generations to enjoy

[RSVP Here](#)

Tree Planting on Country- Gummingurru



Date: Saturday 17 October

Time: 8:00 am start

Location: Gummingurru, 148 Old Homebush Road, Gowrie Junction, 4352

A reminder that the Gummingurru tree planting will now begin at **8:00 am**.

Join us on Jarowair Country at Gummingurru — an ancient ceremonial place and gathering point on the old pathways to the Bunya Mountains — to plant 150 native trees and help care for this living cultural landscape.

The morning will begin with a Welcome and Smoking Ceremony before we get our hands in the soil together.

[There are only a few spots left.](#) **If you have registered but can no longer attend, please let us know as soon as possible** so we can offer your place to someone else who would like to join us.

Gowrie Creek Clean Up

Date: Saturday 31st October

Time: 2:00pm- 4:30pm

Location: 18 Brook Street, North Toowoomba

Our next Gowrie Creek clean-up will be held on Saturday, 31 October, and we'd love to see you there.

Come along and help us continue removing rubbish from Gowrie Creek and surrounding areas while supporting a healthier environment for local wildlife and the wider community. Safety equipment will be provided, so all you need to bring is yourself, suitable clothing and closed-in shoes.

Every extra pair of hands makes a difference, and new volunteers are always welcome.

RSVP

DDEC Updates

Giving our Possums a Place to Call Home

Following the success of our bird box workshops, we are looking at hosting a Possum Box Workshop on the **13th December**.

Possums often get a bad rap, particularly in suburban areas where they may be seen as pests when they move into roofs. But these nocturnal darlings play an important role in our ecosystems. They help pollinate plants, disperse seeds and are an important part of the food web as they eat many insects. We've had conversations with community members who

would love to support possums in their own backyards.

With the workshop falling in the Christmas school holidays we're hoping it can be a fun, hands-on activity for families and children and perhaps even a thoughtful Christmas gift for a backyard possum! We'll be focusing particularly on providing habitat for our Brushtail Possums but will also give a nod to the ring tails who often live in dreys but may need a box if the environment is not ideal.

We've been excited to hear a number of pale head Rosellas move into the boxes made at our previous workshops, which has been wonderful to see. If you've attended one of our workshops and have had a bird or other wildlife move into your box, we'd love to hear from you and find out how it's going!

Tiff and Sandy



Gowrie Creek Clean Up

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us for our latest Gowrie Creek clean-up on Saturday 26th September and gave their time to help remove rubbish from the creek and surrounding areas. This one visited a amazing site on the edge of town with a waterhole and waterfall. We did not know the name so please let us know if the falls have a name that you know of. We are calling it Gowrie Falls in the time being.

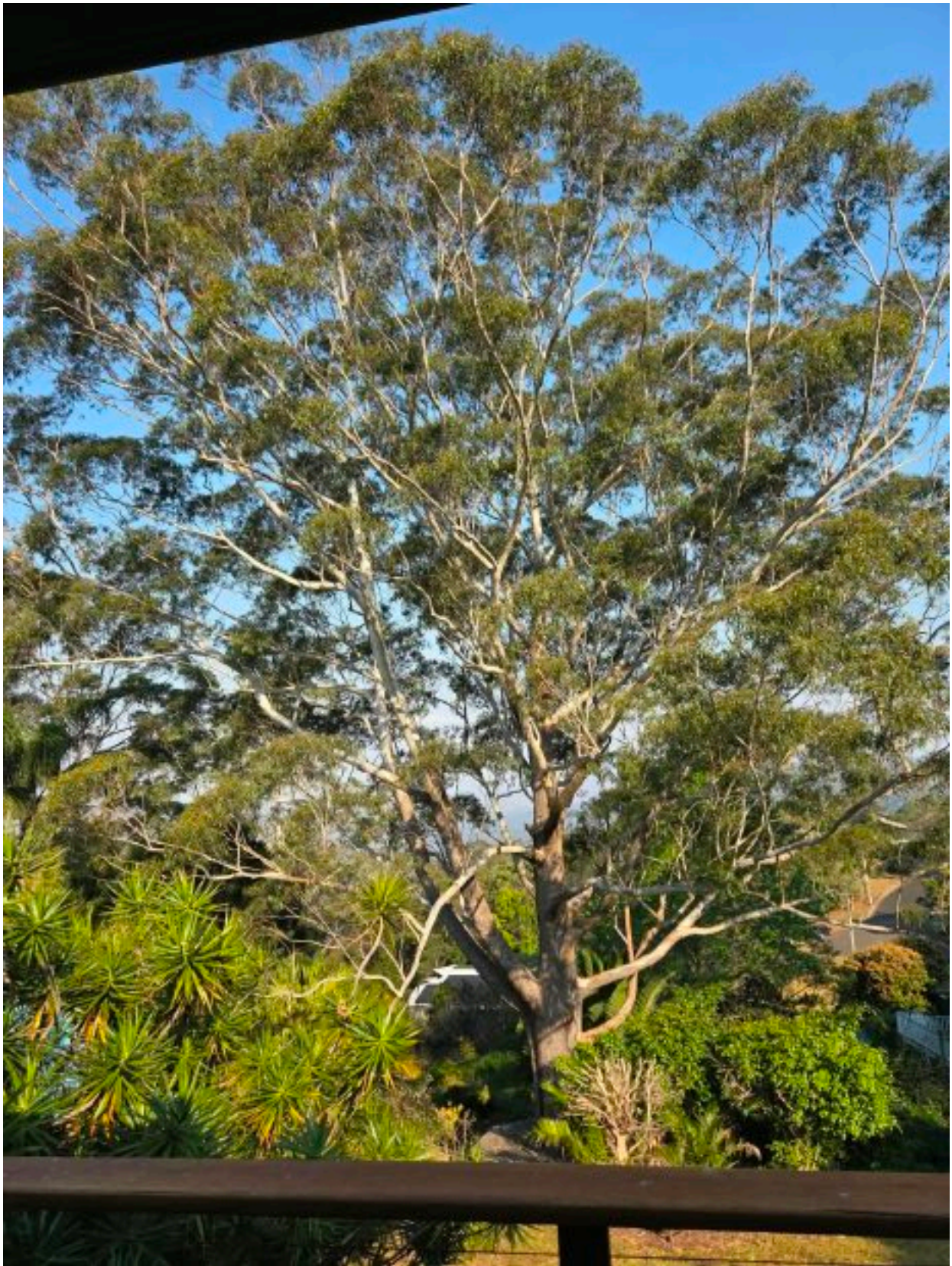
Every clean-up helps reduce risks to wildlife, keep rubbish out of our waterways and build greater care for Gowrie Creek as an important part of our local environment.

Thank you again to all of our volunteers for getting stuck in and helping care for the creek.





Tree of the Month



This tree stands in my neighbour's yard in Blue Mountain Heights.

I'm grateful that it is still standing, as many people would have it cut down to improve their views down the valley.

Although it has no hollows yet, it is already full of life, day and night. I'm thankful to have such a beautiful tree in my neighbourhood.

- Christel Pidcock

Do you have a favourite tree? Share your photo and story with DDEC for a chance to be featured in our next Tree of the Month.

Volunteer of the Month - Michael Scott





Michael Scott has made a massive effort recently in community engagement, tree planting rescue efforts and signage work as well as many other projects. Thanks so much for your amazing work! Deb is also always amazing as well!

The Western Downs Data Centre: Is the Decision Already Being Made?

Singapore-based Zerra DC has lodged a development application with Western Downs Regional Council for the Western Downs Digital Park. The site covers 725 hectares at Kogan, about 37 km from Dalby. AI company Anthropic has signed on as the anchor tenant.

What's proposed:

- **Scale:** about \$32 billion, and up to 2.16 gigawatts of power at peak, roughly a quarter of Queensland's electricity use.
- **Energy:** the site sits beside the Braemar gas power stations. The developer says it will match its power use with new renewables, but the State Government's "energy-agnostic" approach leaves finite gas which would drive more fracking for a non-essential technology.
- **Water and land:** the developer says it will use about as much water as an office building. Locals still have real questions about groundwater, prime farmland, traffic, fire risk and housing workers.
- **AI safety:** Australia still has no binding AI safety law and international standards do not exist. Increasingly AI researchers are calling for a moratorium to stop the USA and China AI arms race spiraling out of control with machines that make decisions about human life.

Officially, nothing has been decided. The application is still before council and the public notification period hasn't been announced. But the Premier has called the project "a major win" with a "streamlined approvals process." People across the region are reporting that it may be given planning priority by the State, and that orders are already going to manufacturers before it has been properly assessed. We can't confirm those reports yet, and we'll be asking the developer, Council and State Government to answer them publicly. If you know more, please get in touch.

This is why the loss of objection and appeal rights matters. Under the new Critical Minerals Act, the Minister can declare a project "state strategic" and shut out judicial review and third-party appeals. If a project this big can be prioritised from Brisbane and ordered before anyone has assessed it, local planning becomes a box to tick. The people who will live beside it for decades find out after the real decisions are made.

More than 20,000 people have already signed petitions calling for the project to be stopped and there is a growing international movement calling for a moratorium on data centres and AI to allow society to create the awareness, consent and social licence for safety, community and environmental safeguards.

Queensland Environmental Roundtable

The next Queensland Environmental Roundtable (QERT) will be held on Thursday 26 November, from 9:30am–4:00pm Queensland Council of Unions, Level 2, 16 Peel St, South Brisbane, QLD 4101.

QERT brings Queensland's environmental movement together to build stronger relationships, discuss key environmental issues and share useful tools and insights.

DDEC members and supporters interested in attending can register now. Participants are also invited to suggest topics, discussions or workshops to help shape the agenda.

Do you have ideas for discussions and workshops you would like to run? [Fill out the form](#)

RSVP HERE

Tree Planting Maintenance and Watering Volunteers Availability Register

Pending some of the grants we have applied for coming through DDEC is exploring the purchase of a watering trailer to support tree planting and revegetation projects across the Toowoomba area.

Our ability to plant and establish more trees depends not only on planting them, but on being able to provide reliable watering while they become established.

We are currently seeking expressions of interest from people who may be willing to occasionally help with tree watering — either by towing a watering trailer and or assisting with watering as a passenger/volunteer.

Completing this form does not commit you to volunteering. It will simply help us understand the level of community interest, availability and capacity before developing the program.

Complete the Expression of Interest

Planning Scheme Expert Advisory Committee

Planning Scheme Expert Advisory Committee - Members Wanted

The Planning Scheme is not far away with it likely to be on the Planning Ministers desk in October, then back with council over the summer and publically consulted upon likely in February or March next year.

To ensure DDEC covers the full spectrum of issues in what is likely to be a 900 page plus document we are seeking expressions of interest in our planning scheme submission working group to help inform what feedback we give to the draft planing scheme to best consider the needs of nature, community and sustainability as our region changes.

Gas Expansion Threatens Habitat in Kumbarilla State Forest





Recent fieldwork for a native plant guide to the Condamine Catchment has revealed the growing impact of coal seam gas development in Kumbarilla State Forest, southwest of Dalby.

Photos show areas of previously connected forest being cleared for gas well pads and access roads, some up to 12 metres wide. Similar development is occurring in other regional state forests, including Dalby, Weranga, Braemar and Condamine.

These forests provide important habitat, including for threatened plant species. The clearing of native vegetation and construction of extensive road networks fragment this habitat, raising serious concerns about biodiversity loss and the long-term future of our state forests.

The photos highlight the scale of development taking place in public forests and the importance of greater community awareness of its environmental impacts.





The Surat Gas Project South reveals plans for 51 well pads, most of which are located within Kumbarilla State Forest, southwest of Dalby.

The proposed development includes the Tetris 1 and Boundary Road Part 1 gasfields, separated by the dog fence. Recent site visits have documented extensive vegetation clearing, while comparisons with Google Earth imagery suggest that many of the access roads are new, with no existing tracks visible in the affected area up to 2023.

The scale of this development raises concerns about further habitat fragmentation and the loss of native vegetation in our state forests.

Manage Your DDEC Email Preferences

Do you get overwhelmed by emails?

DDEC has upgraded its email subscription settings so you can now choose to only receive newsletters- [to do so click here.](#)

If you are in one of our many google groups there is always a link at the bottom for you to click through to and adjust your emails to digest emails if you choose (summary every few days or each week). [Another option is also exploring how to set up priority inbox that helps a lot managing emails.](#)

How DDEC's Work Fits Together

DDEC has developed a draft program logic document showing how our projects and operations connect with our vision, mission, and strategy.

We welcome feedback and questions from our members as we continue to develop it.

[View the Draft](#)

Community Updates

H5 Bird Flu Preparedness Update



The Queensland Government is continuing preparations for a potential H5 Bird Flu (highly pathogenic avian influenza - HPAI) incursion.

The Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI) has developed regional HPAI Preparedness, Response & Recovery Plans to help guide preparedness and response activities.

The Southern Central plan, which includes Toowoomba Regional Council, outlines regional options for preparedness, response and recovery and supports coordinated action between government, councils, Traditional Owners, environmental organisations and other partners.

[View The Southern Central Plan](#)

The AI Doc - Now Streaming

The AI Doc: Or How I Became an Apocaloptimist is now available on Netflix, Amazon Prime,

YouTube and other major streaming platforms.

The documentary follows filmmaker Daniel Roher as he speaks with AI experts about how artificial intelligence works, its potential benefits and risks, and what its rapid development could mean for jobs, surveillance, relationships, children and society.

It offers an accessible way to explore some of the big questions surrounding AI and its growing role in our future.

[Learn More](#)

National Lobbying Reform Campaign Update

The Australian Democracy Network (ADN) has launched its Lobbying Reform Principles, now endorsed by 76 organisations, calling for the introduction of a national lobbying act.

The principles propose greater transparency around lobbying, stronger rules for movement between government and lobbying roles, timely disclosure of lobbying activity, independent oversight and stronger enforcement.

The campaign argues these reforms would help ensure Australians can better understand who is seeking to influence government decision-making.

[Read The Lobbying Reform Principles](#)

The Aussie Bird Count is back!

From 19–25 October, Australians everywhere are invited to spend just 20 minutes counting the birds around them, whether that's in your backyard, on your balcony, at school or in your local park. No experience needed, just a love for birds and a desire to connect with nature.

Last year, 64,000 people counted more than 5 million birds across Australia. This year, we want to make the Count even bigger, and we'd love you to join us! 🐦

All you need is 20 minutes, a little curiosity and the free Aussie Bird Count app, which guides you through the whole process.

Your sightings help contribute to important citizen science, while giving you a chance to slow down, connect with nature and discover the birds living right around you.





[Find out more & Register](#)

Surrounded on AI: What Impact Will AI Have on Inequality



In his latest blog, Andrew Yang reflects on his appearance in the YouTube debate series *Surrounded*, where he debated 20 AI optimists about the future of artificial intelligence and its impact on society.

Yang raises concerns about AI's potential to increase economic inequality, replace millions of jobs and concentrate wealth among a small number of companies and individuals. He also discusses universal basic income as a possible response to widespread job displacement and questions whether technological progress will prioritise productivity and profit over human wellbeing.

The blog explores what these changes could mean for workers, young people and communities, highlighting Yang's argument that the economic benefits of AI should be shared more widely.

[Read The Blog](#)

Podcast Recommendation



Looking for something thought-provoking to listen to?

Screw This...Let's Try Something Else explores communities that are finding new and practical ways to approach challenges around food, energy, housing, and decision-making.

[Listen on Spotify](#)

Community Events

Journeys Through Art, Science and Visuals





An Evening with Geoff Thompson

Date: Friday 2 October

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: St Anthony's Community Centre, 4 Memory St, Toowoomba

Join the Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club as it celebrates its 75th anniversary with a special presentation by Geoff Thompson, a scientific illustrator, artist and photographer who worked with the Queensland Museum.

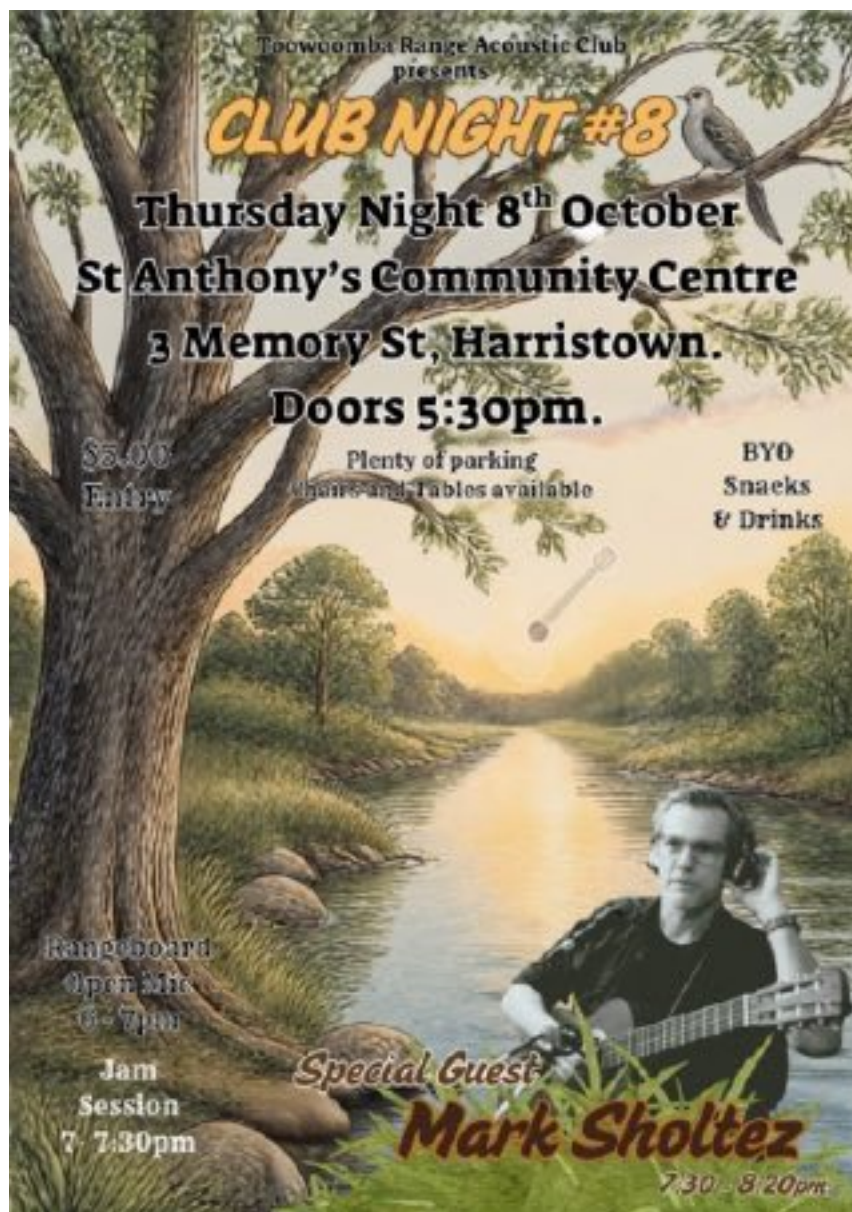
Geoff will share stories from his career, from traditional scientific illustration and remote field expeditions to detailed digital photography revealing the hidden world of insects.

The evening offers a fascinating look at the intersection of art, science and the natural world.

Everyone is welcome, and entry is free!

Interested in attending? RSVP at toowoombafieldnaturalists@gmail.com

TRAC Club Night - Mark Sholtez



Date: Thursday, 8 October

Time: Doors open at 5:30 pm

Location: St Anthony's Community Centre, 3 Memory St, Harristown

The Toowoomba Range Acoustic Club (TRAC) welcomes special guest Mark Sholtez, an ARIA-nominated and APRA award-winning singer-songwriter whose music blends pop, jazz and folk.

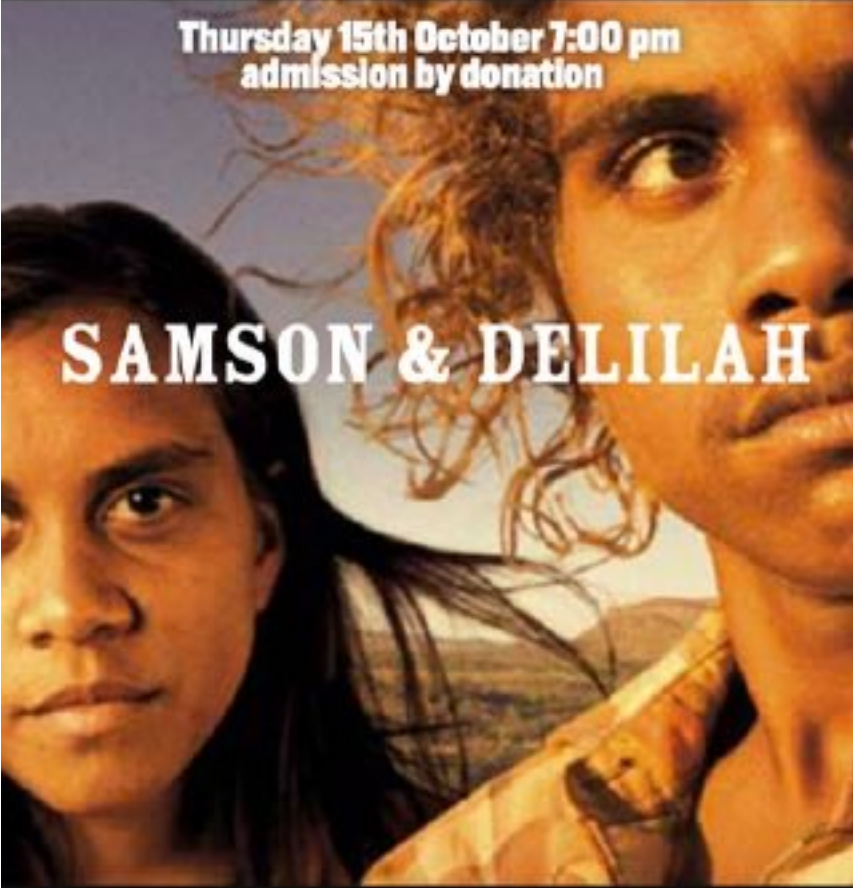
The evening also includes an open mic from 6–7pm, a jam session from 7–7:30pm, followed by Mark Sholtez from 7:30–8:20pm.

\$5 entry | BYO snacks & drinks

Movies that Matter: Samson & Delilah

— MOVIES THAT MATTER —
A partnership between
St James Anglican Parish and Amnesty International Toowoomba Group

Thursday 15th October 7:00 pm
admission by donation



SAMSON & DELILAH

Released February 20, 2009 — approximately 100 minutes duration

Samson and Delilah is a 2009 Australian tragedy film written and directed by Warwick Thornton and starring Rewan McKamara and Marissa Gibson, both young first-time actors. The film depicts two Indigenous Australian 14-year-olds living in a remote Aboriginal community who steal a car and escape their difficult lives by going to Alice Springs. It won many awards, including the Camera d'Or at Cannes for best first feature.

"Lost, unwanted and alone they discover that life isn't always fair, but love never judges."
— ScreenAustralia

"Alternately beautiful and heartrending, Samson and Delilah is terrifically acted and shot, and presents a complex portrait of what it means to be Australian."
— Rotten Tomatoes


Parish of St James
St James's Anglican Parish Hall Cnr Mort and Russell Streets.


DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Join us for the film and discussion, after which a light supper will be served.

Date: Thursday, 15 October

Time: 7:00 pm

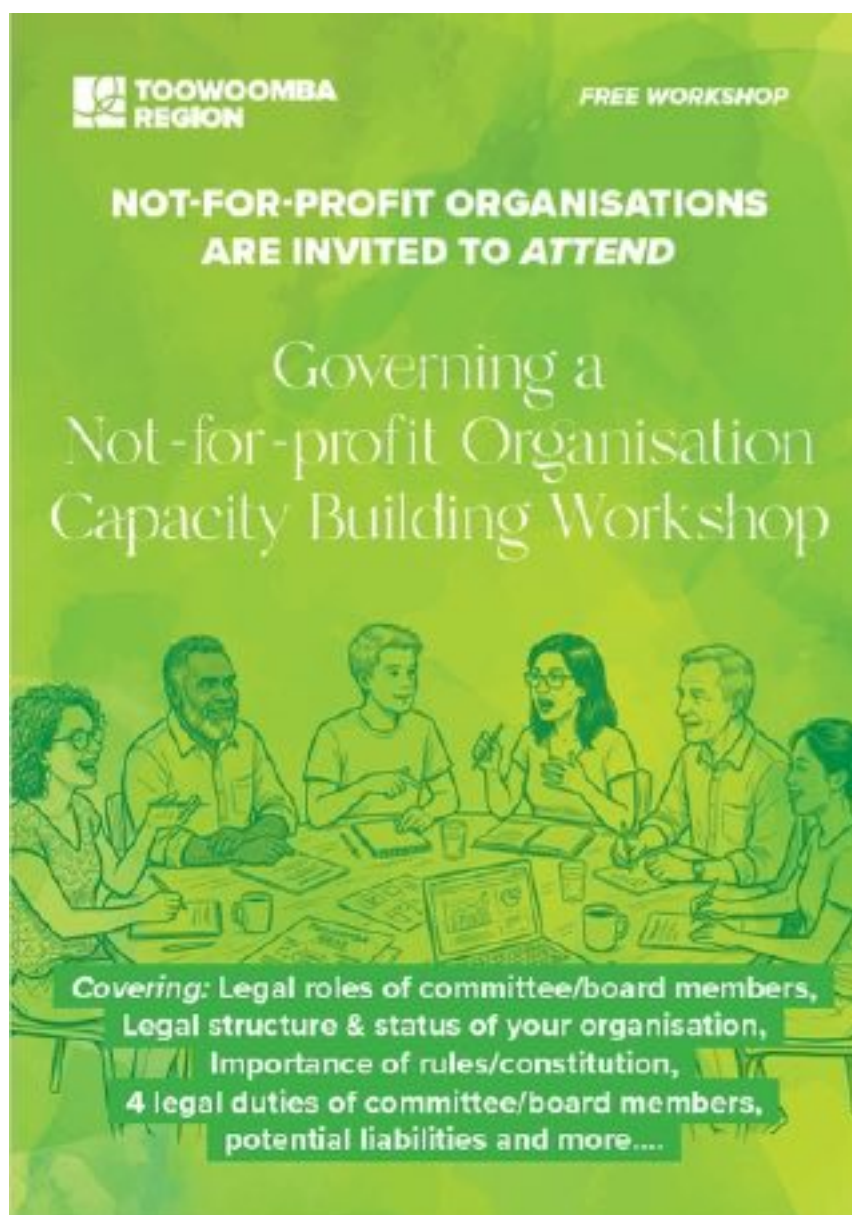
Location: St James's Anglican Parish Hall, corner of Mort and Russell Streets, Toowoomba

Join St James Anglican Parish and Amnesty International Toowoomba Group for a screening of Samson and Delilah, the award-winning Australian film directed by Warwick Thornton.

The film follows two young Aboriginal teenagers as they leave their remote community and travel to Alice Springs, exploring themes of love, hardship and resilience.

The screening will be followed by a community discussion and light supper.

Governing a Not-For-Profit Organisation - Capacity Building Workshop



Date: Tuesday, 20 October

Time: 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Location: Multiple locations across the Toowoomba Region

Location: Multiple locations across the Toowoomba Region

Toowoomba Regional Council is offering a capacity-building workshop on governing a not-for-profit organisation. Community groups and not-for-profit organisations can attend at one of seven locations, including Toowoomba, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Hodgson Vale, Highfields, Goombungee and Oakey.

Light refreshments and snacks will be provided. Places are limited at each location.

RSVP by Friday 16 October

Bookings are essential. Contact Toowoomba Regional Council Customer Service on 131 872 to reserve your place.

[View Workshop Locations](#)

Regional Planning in SEQ: Failed, Flawed or the Future We All Need?



Date: Saturday, 31 October

Time: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Location: Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Southbank

The South East Queensland Community Alliance (SEQCA) is hosting a half-day community conference exploring the past, present and future of regional planning in South East Queensland.

Speakers and a panel will explore issues including environmental offsets, major project impacts, housing supply, regional planning and the future of mobility in our cities.

Tickets: \$12 online | \$15 at the door | Free for full-time students

*Money for the South East Queensland Community Alliance will be donated to Queensland

morning tea provided. Profits will be donated to Orange Sky.

[Find Out More & Register](#)

Lift the Load - Toowoomba Together



Date: Sunday 11 October

Time: 3:30 - 5:30 pm

Location: Queen's Park, Toowoomba

Toowoomba Together is taking part in Lift the Load this October to raise funds to support Top Blokes and help bring more conversations about healthy relationships and mental health to young people in schools and the wider community.

Community members are invited to join the Toowoomba Together team for the walk, followed by a sausage sizzle at Queen's Park.

[Join The Toowoomba Team](#)

CCMA 34th Annual Lunch 2026

Date: Thursday, 15 October

Time: 12:30 pm

Location: Highfields Tavern, O'Briens Road, Highfields

Free event | Lunch provided

The Condamine Catchment Management Association (CCMA) invites the community to its 34th Annual Lunch, featuring the topic:

“Is the environmental market in carbon credits for you?”

Guest speaker Andrew Drysdale will draw on 35 years of experience in rural and regional sectors and community-based natural resource management.

RSVP by 1 October 2026

Contact: Glenys Bowtell

☎ 0428 751 070

✉ glenysbowtell@bigpond.com

2nd Coal Seam Gas & Public Health Conference



Date: Tuesday 3 November & Wednesday 4 November

Location: Wattle Room, Chinchilla Cultural Centre, 80–86 Heeney Street, Chinchilla

Organised by North West Protection Advocacy and supported by Lock the Gate Alliance, this two-day event will bring together researchers, health professionals and local residents to explore the public health concerns of living in and around coal seam gas fields.

Tuesday will feature a guided tour of the Western Downs gasfields, offering firsthand insights into the experiences of local communities.

Wednesday will focus on expert presentations and community discussions covering the impacts of coal seam gas development, health and wellbeing, psychosocial hazards, citizen science and navigating the complaints process.

Conference attendance is free for Western Downs residents. Other ticket prices and gasfield tour costs are available in the full program.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

[View The Full Program](#)

EV Picnic & Get-Together

Date: Saturday 7 November

Location: UQ Warwick Solar Farm, near Warwick

The Darling Downs South West Australian Electric Vehicle Association (AEVA) is hosting a self-catered EV picnic and get-together.

EV owners and interested DDEC members are invited to come along, connect with other EV enthusiasts and enjoy a relaxed gathering at the solar farm.

For further information, contact Cecil Barnard at zen.electrified@gmail.com

Return to the Village



Date: 20 - 26 April 2027

Location: Woodfordia, Queensland | Jinibara Country

Return to the Village is bringing the permaculture community together at Woodfordia in April 2027. Right now tickets are only \$550 for 7 days of convergence and festival with 4 days of three vego meals a day provided.

The event celebrates the strength of grassroots community and connection, with people coming together to share ideas, knowledge and practical approaches inspired by the permaculture movement.

Permaculture Australia is encouraging communities to help spread the word and build awareness in the lead-up to the event.

[More Information](#)



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