

Rotary Club of Longreach Inc.

Who we are

We are a community-focussed club who provide drought assistance, social connectivity and contribute to building community resilience across the Queensland Outback.

The Rotary Club of Longreach was officially chartered in January 1961. We are the westernmost club out of 49 Clubs in Rotary District 9570 (Central Queensland) which covers nearly 700,000 km² (Figure 1). Emerald, 400km to the east, hosts the nearest Clubs in our District. Only three Queensland towns west of the Great Dividing Range have a Rotary Club. Given such large distances between clubs, Longreach Rotary holds drought activities and provides support from Corfield to Windorah and Aramac to Tambo, an area of about 130,000 km² within central-western Queensland. The most distant of these locations are a 3-4 hour drive away.

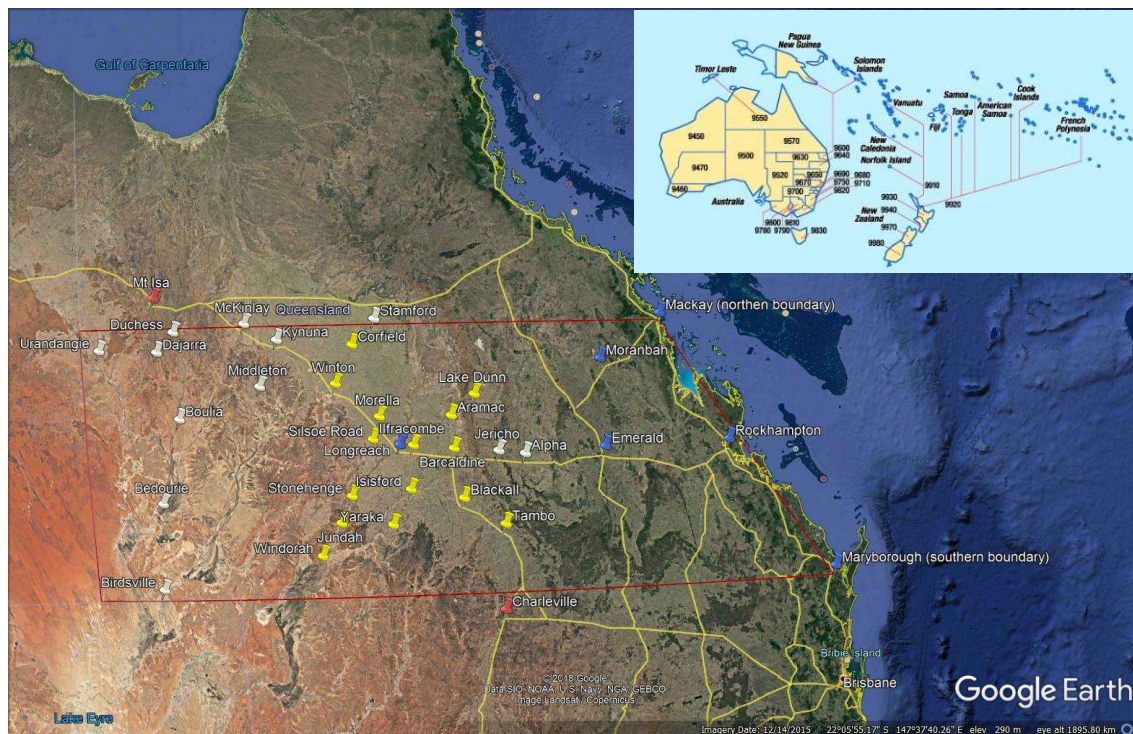


Figure 1. Rotary District 9570 (red outline) extends from Mackay and Maryborough in the east, to the NT border in the west. Some key Rotary Club locations are shown in blue. Longreach is the westernmost club and provides support, hosts events and visits the surrounding locations shown in yellow. The communities shown in white are (to date) out of Longreach Rotary's capacity to help. Longreach is one of three locations west of the Divide with a Rotary Club (Charleville and Mt Isa are the others, shown in red).

We currently have 18 members, having peaked at about 25 and with a historic low of around 12. Most of our members are still actively employed (90%) and we have a balance of men and women (60:40), old and young (median age approx. 55), and include an ethnic mix (15%).

We meet every Thursday evening at 6:30pm starting with Fellowship for a 7pm meeting (with a casual format) at the Jumbuck Motel, Sir Hudson Fysh Drive, Longreach.

Guests and visiting Rotarians are encouraged to come to meetings and join in with our events. Visiting Rotarians are asked to share their Club's experiences, approaches and activities so we can learn more about the work that Rotary does around Australia and the world. Guest speakers are

Longreach Rotary Club information sheet

Prepared by Past Presidents Damian Arthur and David Phelps



always welcome. We have quite a number of members with awards, and quite a few as a Club as well - but we prefer action over acknowledgement.

Our three core actions are to provide drought assistance, social connectivity and to build community resilience for a strong future.

Our Drought Support Activities: Longreach Rotary Supported by Rotary Australia.

Our immediate focus is to help communities get through the current drought conditions, with an emphasis on:

- Town and country (inclusiveness)
- Social connectivity (mental health and stress relief)
- Physical and mental wellbeing
- Supporting local business
- Building leadership and capacity for the future.

Our key drought related activities are:

- Confidential cash drops where drought is made even worse through personal circumstances (e.g. illness, bereavement)
- Movie/BBQ Trailer events in the paddock to bring local families together for a night
- Free movies through the Longreach Star Cinema, to bring local families together, provide safe socialisation for local youth and provide relief to our hard-working volunteers
- Delivering Christmas hams to the smaller townships in the district
- Cooking and community Christmas tree and school concert BBQs to allow everyone in smaller communities to come together and reconnect
- Providing free Q Fever vaccination clinics, as this debilitating disease which affects rural workers is expensive to prevent and not subsidised through health programs
- Supporting youth to attend sporting and other camps (e.g. Scouts and Guides)
- Supporting local events for community cohesion (e.g. shows and events)
- Supporting Beds for Bush Kids and other school based programs
- Trucking drinking water to households who are close to running out
- Trialling welding upskilling days to bring 'the blokes' together, as a way to encourage peer support around the stresses of drought
- Contributing to the on-going efforts of the Western Queensland Drought Appeal.

While people generally associate drought with the rural sector, the drought has now engulfed our entire community. Our towns and businesses are suffering from decreased cash flow and business turnover (in the order of 40-60% annual reductions) and the knock on effects of decreased employment which causes people to pack up and leave (see the 'Beyond the DUST' report commissioned by the Western Queensland Drought Appeal for more information at www.wqda.org.au).

Our focus is on helping people help themselves. We don't encourage the victim mentality that can sometimes creep into support work. For instance with hay distributions in 2016 we identified the Morella district west of Longreach as needing support. We identified a stockpile site at a shearing shed and let the community organise the rest. We supported the distribution by hiring an additional machine to load farm trucks and the community turned the event into a morning tea.

We try to think outside the square when looking at ways to give individuals and communities a boost. For instance for Christmas 2015 we distributed 290 hams to small towns in our region when

folk got together for the annual Town Christmas Tree. For 2016 we delivered over 400 hams to all residents of the smaller towns of Yaraka, Windorah, Jundah, Stonehenge, Isisford, Ilfracombe, Muttaborra, and Aramac. The hams have all been purchased through the local Longreach butcher, and this allowed them to keep on an apprentice. This exemplifies our approach – we helped bring town and country together by sharing the support at a local function, helped local business and helped build capacity in our region by supporting an apprentice to continue their training.

Beds for Bush Kids is an initiative of the P&C of the local School of Distance Education which is better known as School of the Air. Students travel to Longreach for a week for what is termed a mini-school, which is face to face time with their teachers. The P&C raises funds to cover the cost of food and accommodation for each student to attend mini-school. We have helped support this when there are shortfalls in fundraising.

Q Fever We entered into a partnership with our local Health Service, the Uniting Church and Lions to fund the cost of Q Fever vaccination clinics. The drought has resulted in a significant spike in Q Fever cases. The issue with Q Fever is that you just can't roll up and get a shot, because if you have had the fever and didn't know and were vaccinated then the result could be fatal so you have to be screened first. The Health Service subsidises the cost of the clinics and Rotary, Lions and the Uniting Church share the vaccine cost of \$110 per shot for those who need it but can't afford to pay.

Local Shows We have six shows across the region and we made a donation to each to help cover the cost of running the show. For small communities like Muttaborra and Isisford the show is one of the few major events held each year. Shows rely on sponsorship which is limited as businesses have endured significant reductions in turnover.

Youth/Sport We have helped our local Girl Guides and Scouts send members to Jamboree. With cash flow being so tight across the community youth and sporting clubs are struggling to raise funds. Our drought sub-committee has developed a set of funding guidelines as we have had requests from sporting clubs and individuals to help with costs associated with travel to regional or state level events. We don't want our children missing out on opportunities because their family can't afford to send them but we do need to assist within our means. So far we have supported Junior Rugby League, Netball, Soccer, School of Dance and individual athletes.

Cash Drops When we identify a family or individual doing it tougher than most we arrange a cash drop of \$500. A brief note goes with the money as well as bottles of honey. The honey lasts longer than the money and every time people use some honey they remember that someone cares.

Movie/BBQ Trailer The Rotary Club of Belvoir Wodonga has kindly loaned us a trailer built for their drought support work from 2006-2010. Rotarian Barry Membrey and his wife Ann generously towed the trailer up to Longreach; about 1,900km. The trailer called 'A Night at the Movie' contains everything needed to provide a BBQ and a movie for 60 people. Its purpose is to present an opportunity for people to put aside the daily grind of the drought and join their neighbours for a meal, a movie and most importantly conversation. Our first activity was on a property near Ilfracombe. Since then we have headed 70km west of Longreach down the Silsoe Road to a property where the farming families gathered for a BBQ and the movie 'The Castle'. About 45 people plus children attended, which is almost 100% attendance. We have since taken the trailer as far south as Tambo and as far north as Corfield. We are in the final stages of building our own trailer.

Hay and water direct support The Hay Project has mostly run its course now, but was a major response in the first three years of the drought when our graziers still had sheep and cattle. All up we distributed over 4,500 4'x4' bales which each weighing about 250kg. We provided about 20 bales per property. This project is managed by PP Ron Poulsen from the Pioneer Valley Rotary Club and

represents a partnership between PVRC, Longreach Rotary and Moranbah Rotary Club. Farmers in the Pioneer Valley donate a paddock of native grass and Ron and his team organised for it to be cut and baled and transported to Longreach. A Longreach transport operator carts the hay to Longreach and we organise for it to be distributed.

The hay project is registered with the Rotary Australia Benevolent Society (RABS) as 'Longreach Region Drought Relief project number 46 2013-14. It has DGR status and we are reimbursed our freight expenditure through the Queensland Government's Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. We use these funds to provide direct relief to families and individuals as required by RABS guidelines. *Beds for Bush Kids* and *Q Fever vaccination clinics* are two projects funded out RABS. The Queensland Government freight rebate is normally capped at \$30,000 per charity per financial year, but they showed their support by raising this to \$150,000 to help us run more projects.

We continue to deliver potable water to farm households that have not had enough rain to fill their water tanks.

Time for Tea In 2015-16 the Club supported a Friends of Rotary initiative to send special tea to people on the land facing (at that stage) their second to third year of drought. Tea companies from across Australia donated product which was sent onto 500 properties, letting them connect with family and friends over a cup of tea – a time honoured rural tradition.

Whilst Longreach Rotary is at the coalface we can only achieve as much as we do for our communities through the generous support of Rotary Clubs from across Australia. We have also been supported through grants and sponsorship from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Resilience, Jupiter's Casino Fund, the Queensland Government and many more.

Our other non-drought Support Activities

Whilst it has been drought and more drought, it is not all about drought. We continue to support our local community with:

- Improving hospital services (e.g. donating hospital beds required for eye surgery and contributing to maternity ward upgrades)
- Emergency support for victims of domestic violence
- Sponsoring youth to attend TASTE, NYSF, RYLA, RAIC and RYPEN
- Hosting Rotary end-polio movies
- We have previously hosted and co-hosted the Rotary Youth Exchange Program.

Our local community fundraising comes mainly from fundraising BBQs, shovelling, bagging and selling sheep manure and collecting, cutting, bagging and selling fire wood.

How can other Clubs help?

The first step is to ask us what our communities need before you get too far into your project, and to support a whole-of-community approach. Donations to either Longreach Rotary or the Western Queensland Drought Appeal are always appreciated, to distribute cash to families and to maintain our projects. We also encourage Rotarians to come and visit – lend a hand at a function, cut some firewood, shovel sheep manure and spend some time (and money) enjoying the Outback! Extra help could be as simple as helping us improve our on-line presence, offering to run a fundraiser in your community, or just spreading the word. We appreciate your support, and many of our community groups have projects—or administrative tasks—on hold as we all focus on the drought. Many of our sporting, youth, church, fishing and other organisations could also use a hand to coordinate and run events, through to the 'mundane' paperwork needed to run effectively.