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www.countrynetwork.com.au
 E: editor@countrynetwork.com.au
 Country Social Network Inc. (Reg Y2063541)
The Newsletter that reaches across Australia



Bunbury

Membership Renewal

Membership renewal for the financial year 21-22, has been waived and so all memberships due for renewal this year have had their membership extended to June 30, 2022.

In light of our organisation’s constrained ability to offer social opportunities in the past year, and our healthy financial situation, it was agreed by the committee to offer something back to the members. Of course, we still have fixed annual expenses such as insurance, our website and mailing costs. So if any member would like to make a donation to the organisation, any amount would be greatly appreciated.

Any member who has already renewed shall be contacted by the treasurer to see if they would like to extend their membership a further 12 months, or have their payment regarded as a donation.

Any member who does not wish to have their membership renewed, may resign from the organisation by contacting the secretary at secretary@countrynetwork.com.au or 0419 551 245.

Membership Numbers

We know someone is rarely ‘the only gay in the village’ but unfortunately they are too often they are the only gay in Country Network. The good news is that as we approach 400 members, the likelihood that members will have someone residing near them is improving.

You can help us improve even further. Whilst we prefer to maintain quality over quantity within our membership, we cannot escape the reality that social networks like ours rely heavily on a numbers game – especially in Australia where there can be vast distances between towns.

We don’t want any gay man to feel isolated, regardless of where they reside. So tell a friend, acquaintance, fuck buddy, whatever; tell them about Country Network and together we can build our numbers beyond 400, beyond 500, beyond 1000 until we make sure no one needs to feel alone.

Neil Warner

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EDITORIAL



Well, two months have passed and several of us have at last managed to fit in some interstate travel. In September/October 2019, Graham S sought seven guys to accompany him on a one week self-guided sailing tour of the Whitsundays for early May 2020. I was one of the applicants. However, we all know that such a trip was impossible in May 2020 and we sought and obtained a 1 year deferral. We all held our breath as isolated Covid outbreaks and the accompanying restrictions occurred in different States. However, all went well and we met in Airlie Beach on 7th May to commence the cruise. In addition to Graham and I, Bevan W, George R, Glen B, John L, Rob S and Ross W made up the crew.

The first thing upon arrival was to stock up with liquor. Graham organised us to board earlier, that is, on Friday afternoon rather than Saturday morning. In contrast to the Murray cruises so meticulously organised in the past by Neil W, we arranged for a local group to provide all provisions rather than ordering them from a local supermarket. There was a massive unpacking effort to store a week's provisions in the available fridge and freezer space. As I was no great shakes as a sailor, I ended up ordering the provisions and choosing people to prepare the various meals. With everything now ready on board, we had dinner at a nearby Italian bistro (where Glen has the best pizza of his life!).

The next morning was spent in a comprehensive briefing on handling the boat, which was a 45 foot catamaran. After lunch we set off for our first overnight stop, being required to anchor or moor by 4pm each day. As Bevan is providing a day-by-day description of our entire tour, I will just mention the highlights here.

George and Rob made heroic efforts to prepare a pork stir fry with too much wind to keep the BBQ alight, no wok and a gas oven which was never hot enough.

We went happily to bed, never suspecting what was about to happen overnight. Our Skipper Graham, who had put so much time and effort in organising the tour, slipped and fell heavily overnight and was helped to lie flat on the table where he was clearly in pain. We radioed the boat company at Airlie Beach and were advised to return immediately so that Graham could be assessed and, if necessary, taken off the boat for expert medical attention. Unfortunately, the paramedics recommended he be taken to hospital. We were bereft, not knowing how severe his injuries were and whether or not he could rejoin us later. This was not to be the case and Graham is needing to convalesce for 3 months.

Suddenly, we were without our skipper, an experienced sailor. However, fortunately, Ross W

stepped into the breach, with able assistance from Bevan and John L. All three had previous sailing experience and worked smoothly together as a team. What a relief!

The highlights of the trip for me all relate to Whitehaven Beach, a beach with gleaming white coral sand on an uninhabited island. The first sighting of it for us was after a steep climb from an adjacent cove where we had anchored. The next day we landed, walking from one end of the beach to the other, with some climbing to a peak where we managed to get mobile coverage. Another dramatic event was the sudden emergence into 25 knot winds, the maximum permitted by the company for sailing. Amazingly, nobody was seasick for the entire voyage.

As the provisioner, I coped with some shortfalls in ingredients, but generally all went well and the cooks rose to the occasion in the rather cramped galley. The most popular meals were probably the eye fillet steak and a very generous serving of king prawns, not to forget the stir fry mentioned earlier.

Bevan's first round detailed description appears later in this issue. Several of us stayed a little longer, Glen and I in Airlie Beach and George and Rob in Cairns. This was not an official CN event, and we insured ourselves. It was especially enjoyable to get out of the rut of Covid. Except for Graham's awful luck, the tour was a success and we thank Graham again for his sterling efforts. Maybe, it will set a precedent where more of our members get together informally to organise various adventures.

John Roy (Mallacoota)



Graham, hale and hearty on first day of cruise



President's Report Country Network- Charlie Helyar



Greetings from Horsham in country Victoria. Since my last report I have moved to Horsham and started my new job as Manager of Horsham Community House. The job is going well and I am adjusting to life in the country. Thanks to all the members that reached out to me about this. It shows what a great network we are.

We have just come out of a week-long lockdown in country Victoria. Our Melbourne members are still stuck in one for another week. Hopefully things will ease for them shortly and our "new normal" will resume again. I have had my first COVID vaccine injection and by the time this newsletter goes out I will have had my second one and be "fully vaccinated".

The Committee and our Western Australian team are starting to make plans for our AGM gathering in October. Hopefully we can get together in Bunbury and celebrate Country Network and the last 2 years. Stay tuned for more details. I am looking forward to it.

June is Country Network month so I encourage all members in all areas of Australia to organise an event for members and maybe even outreach to new people. The sky is the limit of what you could do. Also reach out to Hector Vera , Events Coordinator, to publicise your event. I myself have linked in with the local Pride Group in my area and am going to get involved in anything they are running. Plus I am going to look at doing something myself for my area and members of Country Network even though there are only a few of us.

June is also pride month so we can celebrate who we are and where we have been and come to.

Autumn has left us and the trees have all shed their leaves and winter is approaching. I know I am feeling it, having had some mornings of minus zero temperatures. There is the occasional nice and sunny day which I appreciate.

Membership of Country Network is steadily growing and I encourage members if you are on Facebook to be part of the Private and Public Pages for Country Network. Bernie Gregory does an amazing job with this and there is always books to read, look at, watch on both of these pages. I wish everyone a great month of June be safe, take care and keep reaching out to each other where you can.

Keep on Networking
Big Hugs, Charlie

What constitutes an official Country Network event?

It is a question that arises periodically; usually in the context as to whether or not the event is covered by our insurance. More recently, it was raised again with the committee in the context of accessibility for members with a disability. It's complex when balancing the rights of inclusion versus the rights of members who host an event in their private residence.

The decision of the committee is that any official CN event is to be open for all members to attend and the organisers must consider the accessibility of all members. This does not necessarily guarantee access as not all venues suitably cater for people with a disability. In such situations, the organisers should consider an alternative venue if possible.

To be considered an official CN event, the event must be approved by the committee prior to the event. Any unofficial events can still be sanctioned and promoted by CN.

Country Network Zoom Meetings

On the first Wednesday of each month at 2:00pm, a small number of members meet via Zoom to chat about the small things in life that makes us tick. Our host John from Bellingin, is very clever at making everyone very comfortable, ensuring it is a safe space to reveal a little of ourselves and connect with like-minded others. That aside, it's just another great way to meet new people and make new friends.

Please come and join us. Contact John and he'll give you the details and assist with those who are not familiar with Zoom. E: johnconway@hotmail.com.

Neil Warner



BEWARE

Do you suspect that someone you know is being impersonated on Facebook? It's not uncommon for scammers to set up accounts that appear to be of someone you may know. At times such accounts are set up to fool you into thinking that they want to share with you money, fortune or luck that has fallen on them.



One of the ways is through private Facebook messages and links to how you can claim this fortune. If you get a gut feeling that something is not right... contact the person (profile) by text, email, or telephone and ask if they are chatting with you about these things. You could also report it to the Page Admin and also directly to Facebook.

It happened to me and I was able to confirm that it happened with a couple of my other friends. In my case today, I attempted to contact my friend by phone, email, and text messages but he hasn't responded yet. One of the things this suspected profile friend talked to me about is of how he was chosen and given

\$100,000.00 through some Australian monetary scheme. He had also sent such messages to a couple other of my friends plus one about bitcoins. So I unfriended him and blocked him as precaution when I had seen that he was trying to link me to a person in Kenya.

Gents if it sounds too good to be true... it probably is. Be careful out there not everyone who appears to be your friend actually is who they say they are.

Hector Vera

Communication

Our organisation still suffers from a significant number of CN emails ending up in junk folders and being overlooked. It is a problem of which we are yet to find a practical solution.

All email programs have the facility to mark emails as 'safe' so they will appear in your 'inbox' in future. However, we acknowledge this task may be unfamiliar to some of our members and therefore may not be as straightforward as it sounds.

One solution is to rely on one of the main reasons for CN's existence; contact between fellow members. Whenever you're talking with a fellow member, ask the question if they received a certain email. If not, let's get to the bottom as to why not. E: secretary@countrynetwork.com.au and let Neil know.

Without communication, there's little reason to maintain a membership. We need every member's help to improve our communication so that no member is left out of the loop and isolated.

Hosting arrangements

Did you know we have a list of protocols? Go to our website and you'll find the document which includes hosting arrangements in detail. Common sense and courtesy is at the core of our protocols, but we spelt it out just in case there's any confusion.

If you've 'ticked' the box to host, that doesn't mean you're obliged. Ultimately, it's your house and you have the say as to who comes to your house.

Hosting, or being a guest, can be an anxious time; meeting strangers when there's no immediate escape can raise concerns. However, many of the great friendships within CN were formed from these arrangements. The cliché "all lovers were strangers once" may be somewhat trite, but nonetheless, it is apt, and although we're not suggesting you'll find your 'lover' (it has happened) it might be the start of a good friendship.

So if you're travelling, be a little brave and consider an overnight stay with a fellow member or just pop-in for a cuppa and a chat. You just may brighten up someone's day.

Neil Warner



NO LAW YET TO BAN RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS FROM EXPELLING LGBT STUDENTS



Three years after Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his government would enact a law to ban religious schools from expelling LGBTQI+ students, there is no move yet to keep that promise. Last week Victorian Greens Senator Janet Rice confronted the Attorney General's department at Senate Estimates on the Sex Discrimination Act and its implications for schools. Rice, in her questions drew particular attention to section 21 of the Act, which states that under Australian

law it is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status. Section 38, provides an exemption for religious schools. "In 2018 when we were in discussion about discrimination at religious schools, our prime minister issued a statement that said, 'our government does not support expulsion of students from religious non state schools on the basis of their sexuality', and I want to know if this is still government policy?" Senator Rice asked.

Religious Discrimination Bill Is Being Developed

Andrew Walter for Attorney Generals Department responded that the matter was referred to the Australian Law Reform Commission and that its inquiry has been put on hold while the Government's Religious Discrimination Bill is developed and considered.

With two years having passed since PM Morrison's promise, the bill is still marked as pending and has not yet been introduced. Despite this delay, it is still both damaging and of concern that the proposed Religious Discrimination Bill allows increased discrimination in the name of religion against LGBTQI people, women, people with disability and others.

When Senator Rice was told that putting a timeline on the introduction of the new religious freedom legislation, or revisiting the anti-discrimination legislation was impossible, she pointed to the fact that students, who were in Year 7 in 2018 when the Prime Minister made the commitment to end discrimination against LGBTQI students in faith-based schools, would be in Year 11 before any action may indeed be taken.

Shortly after the committee hearing, Senator Rice took to twitter to double down on her attack on the inaction of the Morrison Government, tweeting_ "No student should be able to be expelled for who they are but our laws allow just that. Religious schools can discriminate against & expel students because of their sexuality or gender identity. The Govt said they opposed that in 2018 but still haven't changed the law"

'Government Failure To Act Is Concerning'

With Michaela Cash assuming the role of Attorney General, what is perhaps most concerning is Queensland Senator Amanda Stoker being appointed as Assistant to the Attorney General. Stoker in the past has written that "To obtain the protection, or indeed the promotion of the state, one must identify some attribute through which a special victimhood arises. These can be outside an individual's control (such as sex, race or disability) or matters of personal choice (such as gender identity or sexuality)." Stoker has also been vocal in her opposition towards banning conversion practices.

The Morrison Government's failure to bring to an end discrimination against LGBTQ* students in faith-based schools has been slammed by rights groups. Just.equal spokesperson, Rodney Croome, said via a statement that "Scott Morrison's commitment could not have been clearer and the Government's dodging and weaving could not be more obvious." "Preventing school children from being discriminated against because of who they are is a simple commitment that doesn't need in-depth inquiries, fancy amendments or cross referencing to other legislation. It just needs the will to prevent harm to LGBTQ young people, a will the Government clearly lacks," said Croome.

Jesse Lewis © Star Observer May 2021



Whitsunday Escape

In August 2019 Graham S sent out a message asking for expressions of interest for a Whitsunday Bare Boat charter for a week in 2020.



What is a Bareboat Charter? You rent a boat only and are allowed to sail or motor it with you and a few of your friends.

He was looking for 7 other nautical souls, to hire a catamaran that was able to handle 8 to 10 people, 8 is enough as I am not sure where you could fit 10 and cooking for 10 would be almost impossible.

What does it cost? You pay a fee around \$6,000 to hire the boat so around \$850 each plus meal provisioning. Of course, you do need to pay an insurance bond of around \$3,000. You are given a 4 hours introduction to the boat and then left to sail the boat yourself around the Whitsundays; you can pretty much go anywhere within a 50-mile radius of Airlie Beach.

May 2020 was decided as the date as this was between the heat of summer and the cooler winter months where pricing tends to be higher. The crew were decided, time off work was taken, well for me anyway, and flights were booked and we were all set to go on the 8 May 2020.

Then COVID hit, as at the end of January parts of China and Wuhan province was shut down, Australia was quick enough to restrict those coming from China and then from 23 March 2020 the prime minister shut the Australian borders to travellers and only allowed Australians to return. It looked like this would drag on, as during April all states of Australia were shut down and everyone was asked to stay home to save lives. Airlines started cancelling flights, therefore we had to delay our boat trip. Do we delay just for a few months or put it off for a whole year? Eventually the decision was made to delay the trip for a year which in retrospect was a good idea. Whitsunday Escape were able to hold over our booking for 12 months which was relief.



Ten months later, with 2 months to go, Ross who had booked, needed to pull out for medical reasons so John L took his place. Two weeks out, food provisioning that was planned by John R was ordered and the final payment for food was made. We hoped the borders wouldn't shut, as Queensland, Victoria and parts of WA were placed into short lockdowns during the first few months of 2021. Eventually the big day arrived, some of the crew had an early morning flight from Melbourne and others from Canberra and Brisbane.

My initial impression of the boat was how small the saloon was; the kitchen was of ok size but it meant the cooking area was small. Food provisions arrived and were put away and everyone started to get used to the boat. The boat had 4 bedrooms so we all shared a cabin, each with their own bathroom and toilet. The brochure description said that each bathroom included shower, which in reality was a basin tap with extension. Our first night was to be in the marina and dinner out at a local restaurant.



Early Saturday morning our boat instructor arrived and gave us a run down of the boat. Jordan from Whitsunday Escape was a pretty relaxed character and he thought we would handle the boat with ease as some of us could sail. We left the marina and sails were set for our first practice sail. The anchor was tested. Around 1pm our instructor said good bye and jumped on his own tender to head back to the marina. He was back about 30 minutes later to retrieve his phone and wallet.

We made our way across to Whitsunday Island for our first mooring for the night, 2 crew took out their paddle boards for a look at the shore line. A dinner roster had been made with teams of 2 so it meant that there was some structure in regards to what jobs needed to be done with





cooking and cleaning each meal time. Our first night's meal was on the boat when we realized that the cooking would be rather difficult for 8 people on the small stove and oven. Content from our wonderful first night's meal we sat down to watch a movie, Get Real; over the next 6 nights we had brought along a few different gay themed movies to choose from. We went to bed looking to explore more of the Whit-sundays as the weather was looking particularly nice, a good south Easterly and not too much rain.

About 2:30am most of the boat woke up when there was a series of 4 big bangs. Had we hit something or more ominously had someone fallen and injured themselves?.

To be continued **Bevan W**

VALE BOB NOLAN

It was with sadness that I heard of the death of Bob Nolan, one of our most longstanding members. I remember him most for organising the Mount Warning adventure several years ago. I also remember him fondly for looking out for me when I was a new member, finding my way. He always had a kind and encouraging word. I am sure many of you had similar experiences.

John Roy

