MEDIA RELEASE

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Conservation Achievements take the spotlight with the Sarus Crane Awards

The Sarus Crane Award continues to shine a spotlight on remarkable environmental achievements across the Southern Gulf region, with this year's winners celebrated during local Australia Day ceremonies.

Since 2007, the award has honoured individuals and groups who have made a lasting impact by protecting the region's natural assets and cultural heritage. The awards were made possible through a collaboration between Local Governments and Southern Gulf NRM, highlighting a shared commitment to sustainability and conservation. The 2025 awardees were:

- **Mount Isa City Council:** Warrant Officer Class 2 Rick Leeman and Private Courtney Eldridge from Delta Company, 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment
- **Cloncurry Shire Council:** The McDonald Family
- **McKinlay Shire Council:** Norm Gabbert
- **Richmond Shire Council:** Richmond Shire Council Outside of School Hours Care
- **Flinders Shire Council:** Ken & Jane Masterson

Prudence Wharton, General Manager of Southern Gulf NRM, said, "The Sarus Crane Awards celebrate the outstanding efforts of individuals and groups who are driving positive change in land management, conservation, and environmental stewardship. These awards provide a platform to acknowledge and honour the remarkable achievements that strengthen our communities and protect our region's natural and cultural heritage."

This year's awardees have made significant contributions across various conservation efforts. Delta Company, 51st Battalion, played a crucial role in the Great Northern Clean Up on 31 August 2024, using their army truck and trailer to collect large volumes of rubbish. Norm Gabbert, a local yard maintenance provider in Julia Creek, has long helped residents with landscaping and planting native trees. The Richmond Shire Council's Outside of School Hours Care Program successfully implemented the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, teaching children to grow and prepare healthy food. Ken and Jane Masterson from Hughenden made strides in actively treating weeds for environmental and ecosystem sustainability. Additionally, the McDonald Family from Cloncurry prioritises environmental stewardship in their beef operation. Partnering with Australian Bush Heritage and the Queensland Government, they have designated parts of their grazing land as nature refuges. They also supported the Ballara Mining Heritage Trail Committee in fencing Fountain Springs to preserve it as a natural landmark.

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More information on the award and 2025 recipients is attached.
Images provided upon request.

SARUS CRANE AWARD

Background to the Sarus Crane Award

Since 2007, Southern Gulf NRM has proudly recognised individuals and groups making a significant contribution to land management, cultural heritage and the environment by means of the well regarded Sarus Crane Award. That award was announced at the Annual General Meeting of Southern Gulf NRM (then known as Southern Gulf Catchments). From 2016, Southern Gulf NRM offered partnerships with local councils in our region to offer the Sarus Crane Award as part of Australia Day Award ceremonies. The objective is to enable wider recognition of achievement across all shires in the Southern Gulf region.

Story of the Sarus Crane Award's name

The iconic Sarus Crane *(Grus antigone)*, which features in the organisation's logo, was picked as the award's name in 2007. The Sarus Crane is the tallest flying bird in the world, with some adult males reaching up to 1.8 metres tall. The only known breeding area for Australian Sarus Cranes is in the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria. This area is important not only for native flora and fauna species that call this region home but also for the numerous migratory bird species that travel vast distances along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to reach these feeding grounds. This bird signifies the distinct environmental values of the Southern Gulf region and its importance at local and international scales.

About Southern Gulf NRM

Southern Gulf NRM is the natural resource management (NRM) organisation for the Southern Gulf region of North West Queensland. The region comprises all the land whose creeks and rivers run into the south of the Gulf of Carpentaria. We work with our partners and the community to protect our region's natural resources and maintain the prosperity of industries and communities that rely on these.

2025 SARUS CRANE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mount Isa City Council – Delta Company, 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment

Delta Company, 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, provided outstanding support during the Great Northern Clean Up on August 31, 2024. Special recognition goes to Warrant Officer Class 2 Rick Leeman and Private Courtney Eldridge, who utilised their army truck and trailer to collect large volumes of rubbish and heavy items. Thanks to their efforts, alongside other dedicated volunteers, a total of 1.84 tons of rubbish was collected, making a significant contribution to the event's success.

Cloncurry Shire Council – The McDonald Family

The McDonald Family for many years has had good environmental stewardship as an important pillar of running their successful beef operation. Joining with the Australian Bush Heritage and the Qld Government, the McDonald Family has added a nature refuge overlay to a number of their grazing properties. This partnership shows that sustainable grazing is no barrier to natural biodiversity. More recently, the McDonald Family strongly supported the Ballara Mining Heritage Trail Committee with their effort to fence the Fountain Springs area to maintain it as a natural wonder of our area.

McKinlay Shire Council – Norm Gabbert

Norm Gabbert has been a cornerstone of yard maintenance in Julia Creek for many years. Renowned as the town's top "green thumb," he dedicated his time to both private and volunteer work, ensuring local lawns were well-watered, neatly mowed, and beautifully maintained. Beyond this, Norm contributed to the town's charm by growing and planting native trees for residents to enhance their yards. Although now transitioning into retirement, Norm continues to lend a helping hand to elderly and local residents, maintaining their gardens and lawns when they're unable to do so themselves. His contributions have left a lasting impact on the community.

Richmond Shire Council – Richmond Shire Outside of School Hours Care

The Richmond Shire Council's Outside of School Hours Care Program has been successfully running the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program for several years. This globally recognised, evidence-based initiative equips children with valuable skills to grow, harvest, cook, and enjoy fresh, affordable, and culturally diverse food. Through the program, participants develop lasting positive attitudes toward healthy eating, well-being, and sustainability, paving the way for healthier, more sustainable futures.

Flinders Shire Council – Ken & Jane Masterson

Ken and Jane Masterson have been dedicated to managing weeds to support environmental stability and ecosystem health. They have actively contributed to the Prickly Acacia Biocontrol Research, focusing on minimising the impacts of invasive weeds and enhancing land condition. Their efforts aim to boost agricultural productivity through integrated pest management strategies, including biocontrol initiatives.