

q support: FOR GAY MEN IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

COUNTRY NETWORK

Country Network was initially founded to promote and foster contact and friendship among gay men living in rural and regional Australia who often deal with limited social opportunities. It is a social group, incorporated in NSW and managed by volunteer members who are guided by a constitution and protocols and has members all over Australia in every state and territory that reside in city as well as country areas.

The Network understands the importance of privacy, discretion and confidentiality as many of our members live in communities that are still quite homophobic. Country Network promotes and encourages networking with other social groups who hold similar ideals and encourages all members of the community to support their local groups. Men that have a high regard for values such as courtesy, respect and tolerance and are willing to support the aims and objectives of Country Network are welcomed to join us.

Country Network is not a dating club, it is a social club! However, obviously, when a group of like-minded men get together, if the chemistry is right, relationships have, and no doubt, will continue to develop.

HISTORY

In 1977 our Founder David, who lived in Dubbo New South Wales, saw that there was a need to reach out to lonely and isolated gay/bi men in regional areas, to enable social interaction and friendship. At that time, male homosexuality was still a crime in all Australian States and Territories, except South Australia, which decriminalised it in 1975 and the ACT in 1976. These men had very limited opportunities to safely meet up with other like-minded men, as there was a very real risk of being ostracised by their community, losing their job, and indeed being arrested and charged, should their sexuality be discovered.

David placed an advertisement in the "Campaign Newspaper" in autumn 1977. A short time after the advertisement was placed, a few men came knocking at his door and others contacted him by mail. Within a few months there was a list of interested men and a short newsletter was circulated.

The first event was organised by David and the interested men were invited to a party for Christmas 1977 on a property out of Cudal, which is west of Orange NSW. On the morning after the party, some of the men got together on the back veranda and discussed organising a network. From this informal beginning, practical suggestions were put forward about using a post office box, changing fees to cover postage and preparing an official application form to join the network. The membership increased significantly around NSW and ACT mainly by word of mouth following this first event.

The next event took place on the Australia Day weekend 1978 on a property near Mendooran, NSW. About thirty participants attended and the hosts put together a great event. This success was followed by another event over Easter 1978. These two weekend events brought a lot of new members together, including a couple from Queensland and a couple from Liverpool NSW, who soon started groups in their local areas.

With increasing membership more formality was required. Thus, the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) and formal dinner was held at Katoomba NSW in September 1978. This meeting elected the executive committee, confirmed the constitution and named the group as the "Country Network".

The popularity of the Network indicated that it had morphed from a NSW rural social group to a national organisation, as even from the early years there were significant numbers of interstate members. Concerns were discussed about the difficulties of looking after a membership scattered all over Australia and so area co-ordinators were chosen from each state and territory to coordinate intra-state/territory social get-togethers during the year, separate from the AGM.

The 1979 and 1980 AGMs were also held in the Blue Mountains at Wentworth Falls.

In 1981, Club 19 in Canberra invited the Network to hold its meeting there. In 1982 the then treasurer lived in Woodford in the Blue Mountains. He recommended holding a mid-year meeting which was endorsed and held at his home. Due to its success the mid-year meetings were then incorporated into the Network calendar.

Up until 1990 the national AGM's and mid-year meetings were all held in NSW or the ACT.

In order to give as many interstate members as possible the chance to attend the AGM's and mid-year meetings, it was decided to hold them in a different state/territory every year, with capital cities or major centres being the venue for the AGMs, and regional areas for mid-year meetings.

FUTURE VISION

It has been said that, "The future is an unknown, but a somewhat predictable unknown. To look to the future we must first look back upon the past. That is where the seeds of the future were planted".

Looking back we can see that the Network met a significant need during a turbulent era for LGBTIQ rights in relation to decriminalisation and anti-discrimination laws. We greatly appreciate the hard work contributed by past members, as well as the ongoing efforts of current members that have made the Network such a successful and fun social organisation.

The need still exists to provide a social network for Gay/Bi men residing anywhere in Australia, that seek social interaction with other like-minded men, as is evidenced by the fact that we are still growing and of course, the more members we have, the more social opportunities can be offered to more men, regardless of where they reside.

If you would like more information or to join Country Network, please visit: www.countrynetwork.com.au. or write to The Registrar, Country Network, P.O. Box 105 Pakenham, VIC 3810.

