

Year in Review

Infamous Bruce on the nose

A RECORD number of accidents, a lack of overtaking lanes, rough and narrow surfaces, potholes – the Bruce Hwy has continued to make headlines in 2012.

It's no wonder the infamous highway has yet again been named one of the worst stretches of road in Queensland by RACQ.

Five sections of the notorious road were ranked among the top 15 most dangerous national highway links – and two of the five are within the Gladstone region.

The Bruce Hwy was also identified as the deadliest highway in the country by The Australian Road Assessment Program report. It was official, the Bruce was in crisis but 2012 also saw a turning point for the highway.

In April a Crisis Management Action Group was appointed. The group's membership includes the heads of the RACQ, Queensland Police traffic support branch and

Queensland Trucking Association as well as Leader of the Nationals and Federal Member for Wide Bay Warren Truss. In July the State Government announced plans to start flood repair work on more than 35km of the Bruce. Highway works will be done at 18 sites from Childers to Miriam Vale, Apple Tree Creek, Booyal, Wallaville and Gin Gin.

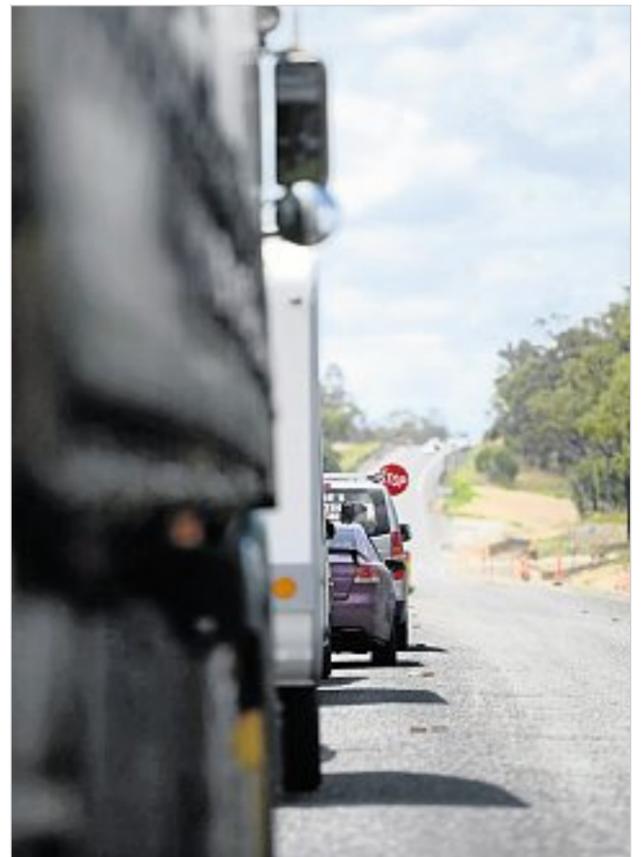
In October The State Government's Bruce Highway Crisis Action Plan was unveiled. It included a 10-year blueprint for fixing the problematic Bruce Hwy.

The plan includes projects already committed over the next 10 years under base funding arrangements, plus additional projects that are needed to repair, improve and flood-proof the Bruce.

The Crisis Management Group will now be responsible for using the blueprint to lobby the Federal Government for extra funding.



DANGER STRETCH: Four-car pile-up south of Tannum Sands turn-off on the Bruce Hwy. PHOTO: BRENDA STRONG GLA151012ACCI



Fest marked 50 years

BEGINNING as a one-day event 50 years ago, the Gladstone Harbour Festival has grown into a weeklong celebration highlighting the region's unique beauty and lifestyle.

Being one of the largest self-funded free community festivals in Australia, the jam-packed event is renowned for its fantastic free family entertainment, rides for the kids, delicious food, novelty events and much more.

And 2012 was a big year for the Harbour Festival as the much-loved Gladstone tradition celebrated its 50th anniversary.

The community came out in full force to mark the major milestone, starting with the

Rio Tinto Alcan Street Parade.

Parents and children lined the streets as dozens of brightly decorated floats coasted through town.

Later that night the sun set across the harbour at QGC's Opening Night Celebration featuring Frankie J Holden and Wilbur Wilde.

The 50th birthday celebrations included all your favourite festival fun as well as some fun new festivities including The Tour de Festival Thunderbox Classic.

GPC's Family Fun Night featuring Fifi & the Flower-tots, Fireman Sam and Yo Gabba Gabba was a huge hit and the NRG Great Raft Race was hilarious as usual.



SPLISH SPLASH: NRG's Great Raft Race was held at the Gladstone Yacht Club. PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER CHAN

Child care problems addressed

AT THIS time last year, child care was a big issue.

A rapidly growing Gladstone was suffering a drastic child care shortage.

Rising costs, a population boom and a lack of trained staff were all factors.

"No vacancy" signs were displayed at most child care centres throughout the region for several months as most had extensive waiting list.

A rise in childcare fees didn't help. But Rio Tinto came to the rescue in early 2012.

About March, Rio Tinto

Alcan Community Fund joined with the Gladstone child care sector to launch a \$1.2 million initiative aimed at alleviating the problem.

The Here for Childcare package of six partnerships will be implemented over the next three years with a focus on the attraction, professional development and retention of child care personnel.

The partnership also included a \$5000 grant for 30 people who want to open their own family day care facility – potentially providing care for 120 children.

Disability campaign is ongoing

WHEN Kathy Harrip first visited The Observer office earlier this year, she was at her absolute wit's end.

The mother of three had recently lost her husband.

And she desperately missed her son Cody, 20.

He is severely autistic. And when her partner died, Cody lost the plot.

Kathy was also an emotional wreck, but she had to look after her 12-year-old twin girls. She needed help.

We used her plight to launch a campaign to improve disability services in our town. The initial plan was

to build a new respite hostel in Gladstone.

But after speaking to several parents and carers in our community, we decided to take a slightly different tack.

We started speaking to families living with disability in our region to gauge their unique needs. The result: exactly that. Each family's needs are unique.

The Observer's role is to raise awareness of both the struggles and joys of raising a child with a disability. And we tried to do that in 2012.

We're hoping to continue to do that in the new year.

Airport corporatised

ONE of Queensland's busiest regional airports was in the spotlight in 2012.

Speculation surrounded the status of the council-owned business, which was leaning towards corporatisation in the New Year.

In June Gladstone Regional Council passed a motion to corporatise Gladstone Regional Airport.

This coincided with the resignation of former general manager Glenn Robinson.

On July 1 the Gladstone Airport Corporation was established, with chair Phillip Cash leading a board of five non-executive members.

In August flight punctuality of Gladstone Airport came into question after a Federal Government report found

certain airlines were underperforming when it came to meeting targets.

QantasLink's flights between Gladstone and Brisbane were on average 60% punctual, compared to Virgin Australia's 90%.

Newly appointed CEO Mr Cash said punctuality problems stemmed from capital city airports. In bid to improve punctuality, QantasLink announced direct flights between Sydney and Gladstone, which will start in March. The Gladstone Aero Club was also in constant contact with Gladstone Regional Council to build new hangars at the Clinton site. Despite being brought up with council, a decision is yet to be finalised.



BIG YEAR: Aerial view of Gladstone Airport.

PHOTO: BRENDA STRONG