

# THE COUNTRY NETWORKER

REACHING ACROSS AUSTRALIA

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

TOGETHER

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

GARDENERS CREEK MELBOURNE



# Welcome



Hello fellow Networkers,

A Message from Colin Armstrong - Acting Secretary/ Membership Coordinator and John Holden our Editor of 'The Networker'. Welcome to the September/October edition of the Networker. Lots of news and changes this month. As you are aware Jeffrey S has resigned as President. We would like to thank Jeffrey for 14 years of service to Country Network and four of those years as President - your contribution and energy is impressive and will be long remembered. Our Secretary Paul resigned also and we thank him for his services to Country Network as well.

Our AGM is just around the corner and this is the time we elect our Executive and committee members for the 25/26 year. I would encourage you to nominate to the Committee. Representation from South Australia and Regional NSW would be great - so please consider it. We are an Australia wide group and I would like representation from all states where possible. Closing date for Nominations will be September 17th. All positions become vacant so we will look for President, Secretary, Vice President, Treasurer and 5 General Committee Members. Membership Coordinator and Editor of this publication are added to any committee role including the Executive.

Speaking of the Annual General Meeting, recently you would have received an email about its change. It will now occur on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October at 5.00pm via ZOOM - I (Colin) will send you all an invite towards the end of September - if you have any feedback in regard to the cancellation of Mulwala please send that to [secretary@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:secretary@countrynetwork.com.au) Thank you

# FROM THE EDITORS DESK

BY JOHN HOLDEN

I joined in the first Tech Talk Plus Zoom session for the year and I really enjoyed it. It's "Plus" because the chat doesn't have to be only about tech, it can be anything the group wants.

It takes place on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at the following times:

7.30pm - Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland

7.00pm - Northern Territory and South Australia

5.30pm - Western Australia

Remember to make allowances for Daylight Saving.

Living in Melbourne, I look forward to spring, and in the area I live in, the forerunners of spring are flowering magnolia trees. How good is that.

I read in The Guardian that 90% of men don't read books. I sure hope that's not true.

American friends are worried that gay marriage might be cancelled.

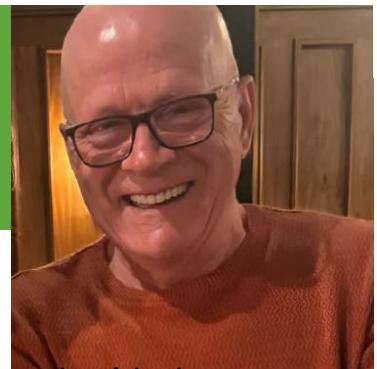
Australian friends who are Jewish and totally against Netanyahu, are worried about the rise of antisemitism.

I'm worried that humans seem unable to stop themselves from waging war. But my cat thinks I'm wonderful.

Signed  
John Holden

[john@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:john@countrynetwork.com.au)

## FROM THE MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR



Hi, well it has been a busy few months at the Membership Desk with the new financial year starting and ensuring all the memberships are up to date on our system, our Treasurer David, does a great job there and we all appreciate his work. We currently have 294 members across Australia and it appears to be growing each week.

If there is anything else you think we should do for you, our members please let me know at [colin@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:colin@countrynetwork.com.au)

I would like to welcome our new members

- Murray James
- Samual Ash
- Minh TraoHo
- Noel Perrett
- Phillip Mountbatten
- Doug Rolfe
- Adam Bold
- Henri L'Etoile
- Adam Knight

Welcome to all and I hope you enjoy your Membership at Country Network.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Dont forget that we have a Members page on Facebook and everyone is welcome to share stories, posts and thoughts there as long as it is in line with Meta's Community Standards.

If not a member of the page join today and enjoy what is placed there. We are also on Instagram and Facebook public.

By supporting our social platforms you are supporting Country Network.

Regards

Bernie G and Colin A

Social Media Platform Admins



Queensland Health has confirmed a second Australian case of the Clade I strain of Mpox, this time in Brisbane.

Detected in a patient from the Metro South Hospital and Health Service region, the case is believed to have been acquired overseas. This is now only the second confirmed case in Australia.

### **Mpox strain detected in Brisbane**

Health Minister Tim Nicholls addressed public concerns, noting the limited risk of wider exposure.

"Contact tracing has been occurring, and the community can be assured that exposure to [others] has been very limited and the public should not be concerned," he said.

Clade I Mpox has been far less common in Australia than Clade II, which has made up the majority of recent cases. Since the beginning of 2024, Queensland alone has recorded 135 confirmed Clade II Mpox cases, with most acquired locally.

Clade I, however, has been circulating more widely in parts of central and eastern Africa, with more than 30,000 cases reported. It reached Australia earlier this year via an overseas traveller in New South Wales.

Mpox was officially declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in August 2024 when they declared it a public health emergency of international concern, its highest level of alarm.

Mpox, formerly referred to as monkeypox, presents initially with flu-like symptoms with fever, headache, fatigue, muscle aches and swollen lymph nodes followed by the appearance of a painful rash or lesions, often in the anogenital region. The virus is primarily transmitted through close or intimate contact and not easily transmissible outside of this.

The LGBTQIA+ community, particularly sexually active gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM), along with their partners remains at elevated risk. However, vaccinations are available and continue to be encouraged.

The vaccine is government funded and available across Australia through sexual health clinics and selected GPs.

It is recommended not only as post-exposure prophylaxis but also as a primary preventive measure for those planning international travel to areas with ongoing outbreaks.

In October last year ACON in NSW urged LGBTQIA+ residents to get the vaccine as case numbers in the state continued to surge.

Current advice stresses that “anyone who believes they may have mpox should contact a health facility, and inform staff before attending.”

Testing involves PCR swabs from lesions or anorectal or throat samples. Other conditions like herpes, syphilis and varicella should also be ruled out.

To minimise risk, individuals with suspected symptoms should isolate, cover any lesions and avoid contact until test results are confirmed.

With a second Clade I Mpoxy case now confirmed, the LGBTQIA+ community is urged to stay informed, access vaccinations, and seek early testing if symptoms arise.

The above article was written by Michael James, July 19<sup>th</sup> 2025 and published in the Star Observer.

If you want to catch up with all the LGBTIQ+ news why not get the Star Observer, Australia's oldest gay newspaper, and have it sent to your email inbox.

On the internet go to Star Observer website: <https://www.starobserver.com.au/> and look for the SUBSCRIBE button.



# Health News from emen8

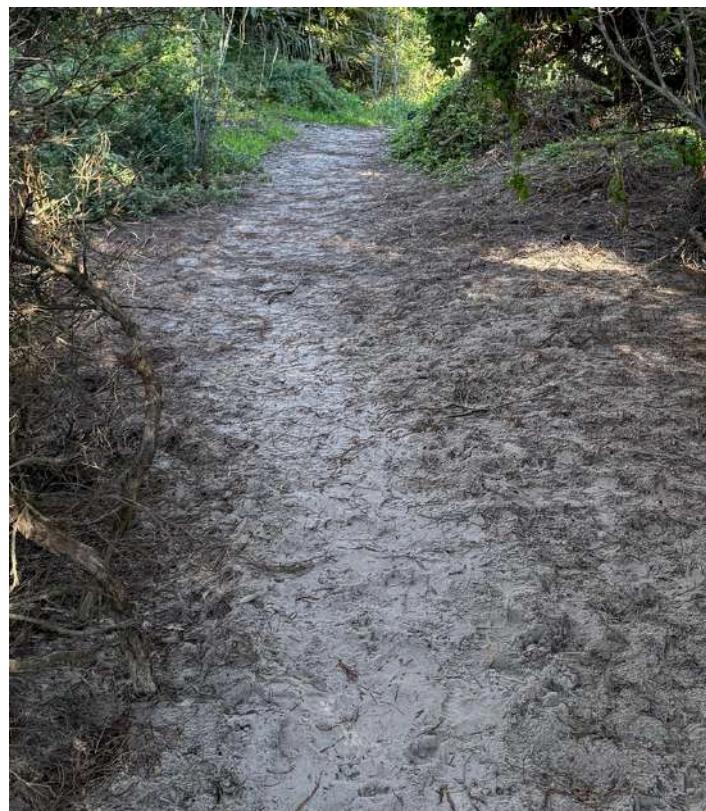
emen8.com.au

## **Staying safe when meeting people on dating apps**

<https://emen8.com.au/sex-and-dating/sex/smart-hookups-staying-safe-when-meeting-people-on-dating-apps/>

## **Get your nuts out – the easy way to check your balls for testicular cancer**

<https://emen8.com.au/health/sexual-health/get-your-nuts-out-the-easy-way-to-check-your-balls-for-testicular-cancer/>





# member services

## What are the Men's Community Couch Conversations?

This is YOUR online space to learn, listen, share and be heard. Topics are guided by participants but may include loneliness, sexual health difficulties, stress, anxiety or depression.

### What happens during these sessions?

These facilitated online group gatherings provide a safe place for men in similar circumstances to form connections, make friends and talk openly about their issues.

### What's the benefit of attending?

Men's Community Couch Conversations provide:

- a safe space free of judgement where gay men's privacy and vulnerability are treated with the utmost respect and understanding.
- connection with others who have similar issues or interests.
- a voice that promotes social interaction.
- an opportunity to help others as 10% of fees from every session are donated back to organisations assisting Men's Mental Health.

### Who runs it?

Shaun, our facilitator, is a registered Counsellor with the Australian Counselling Association. He has dealt with many complicated issues, and as a gay man coming out later in life, he understands many difficulties men need to discuss on the couch.

### How much is it and what does the price include?

Each session is only \$19.95 per person.

1.5 hours of group connection (limit of 15 participants) with a nationally qualified counsellor. Price includes a complimentary copy of 'The Couch Commentary' which includes tips and hints on the topic that was discussed during the session. Each participant receives a 10% discount on their first 1-on-1 online Counselling session at Bent Couch Counselling.

Link: [https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/bcc\\_mens\\_community\\_couch/](https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/bcc_mens_community_couch/)



Anyone who identifies as a man is welcome at Bent Couch Counselling, where they will find a supportive and therapeutic setting. In addition to online group support sessions geared specifically towards men, I also provide individual online counselling sessions for those who require it. I'm compassionate, deal with insight and empathy and I can assist other men in dealing with these and similar challenges. By dealing with my own personal experiences to seek inner healing, it has allowed me to find purpose in helping others.

**Shaun Williams**  
Counsellor & Facilitator  
0499 487 492

**Bent Couch Counselling. "Let's Connect"**  
www.bentcouch.com | admin@bentcouch.com

## Boook Review

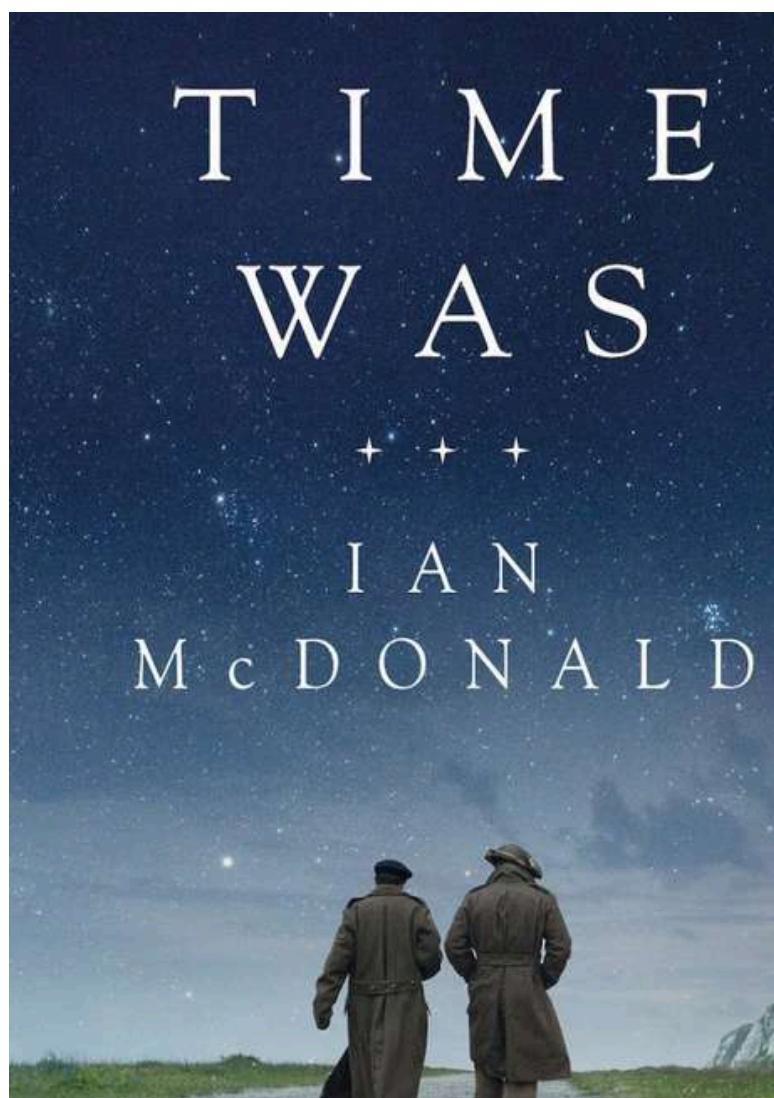
**This book has been described as “A love story stitched across time and war.”**

In the heart of World War 2, Tom and Ben become lovers. Brought together by a secret project designed to hide British targets from German radar, the two found a love that could not be revealed. When the project went wrong, Tom and Ben vanished into nothingness, presumed dead. Their bodies were never found. Now the two are lost in time, hunting each other across decades, leaving clues in books of poetry and desperately trying to make their timelines overlap.

### **About the Author**

Ian Mc Donald was born in 1960 in Manchester, England He now lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland

He has won the Lotus Award, the British Science Fiction Association Award, and the John W Campbell Memorial Award.



## Letters to Vernon

The local postmaster sought advice from higher-ups on whether Vernon should be allowed to keep his mailbox, worried that it would be used for homosexual acts. Vernon replied that would be very difficult to perform a homosexual act in a mailbox.

A police detective also warned the local paper off running Marshall's classified ad advertising the PO box. Marshall arranged an interview with the officer to push his case, and won. The newspaper ran his ads again and the fledgling organisation took flight.

It was five years before the first Sydney Mardi Gras. Dianne Minns, the co-chair of First Mardi Inc and one of the original 78ers, said Marshall was "very lucky he was able to take out an ad".

"I think it was very brave of Vernon to do that newsletter, and very lucky that he got to use the PO box – there were other gay and lesbian organisations at the time who didn't have that luxury," Minns says.

Vernon distributed one copy of his newsletter in March 1973. No further editions have been found. It's not clear whether he began writing under another pen name, or stopped writing entirely. He died in 1984, a few months before homosexuality was decriminalised in [New South Wales](#).

The Tamworth librarian Jody Ekert learned Marshall's story when she was working on the regional city's first Pride Fair Day and a local journalist handed her an article from the [December 1972 Camp Ink newsletter](#), which interviewed Marshall about his PO box.

A few years later, locked down with Covid in a cabin on a cruise ship earlier this year, ~~Jody~~ Ekert began thinking about Marshall again.

"I was like 'I'm so isolated, is it possible to get more isolated?'," she says.

Then she thought of Marshall. "That dude that you read the article about? That's gotta be one of the most isolated people: in the 70s, in Tamworth, trying to get something going," she says.

When Ekert came home, she decided to [start the Hey Vernon project](#) to carry on Marshall's mission and provide a point of connection for people struggling with their identity, especially in rural and regional Australia. She revived the PO box.

Ekert, herself a member of the LGBTQ+ community, says the anonymity of the mail box is appealing.

# Letters to Vernon Marshall, a groundbreaking gay rights advocate in rural Australia



■ The local Tamworth postmaster in 1972 sought advice from higher-ups on whether Vernon Marshall should be allowed to keep his mailbox. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Published in [The Guardian](#), Sun 12 Nov 2023

By Tom Plevey

The Tamworth accountant set up a PO Box for his LGBTQ+ liberation movement in 1972. Fifty years later, the mailbox has been revived

In Tamworth in 1972, the 62-year-old accountant Vernon Marshall took out ads in the local paper to advertise a support group he'd started.

Marshall was gay. He had lived through Nazi Germany and immigrated to Australia, landing in Tamworth in the 1950s. He rented a post office box to give supporters and attenders a place to write to, in lieu of giving his home address.

That group was called the Camp-Gay Liberation Movement Tamworth and the newsletter was provocatively called Coming-Out. Though short-lived, it was one of the earliest LGBTQ+ organisations in regional Australia.





# happenings

## AREA COORDINATORS.

Find out about all upcoming events in the following locations:

- Country Network Private Facebook Group
- Country Network website

Don't forget if you would like to organise an event: contact our events coordinator, [events@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:events@countrynetwork.com.au)

Listed below are the Area Coordinators for Australia. The Area Coordinators are an important first point of contact with the CN membership and as such are valued by Country Network.

Their main function is to welcome new members to the area which they look after and tell them those things that the official welcome from CN cannot do.

As you can see we do need our members to step up and look after those areas that are at present without an area coordinator. We do have members of the Committee looking after an area, but it is far better to have someone living in an area that knows what is happening.

Another part of the job would be to organise a gathering of members in your area. You do not have to continue with the organizing but hand it over to one of the members. We have a new event happening in Wagga Wagga and also Melbourne. Great to see, but we need more members to step up and organize a happening. CN thrives on these events and many strong friendships are formed.

### **Australian Capital Territory & Queanbeyan.**

David Benger  
☎ 0413 088 717

### **New South Wales.** **NSW Sydney Metro** [Lindsay Sheppard](#) ☎ 0429 225 222

### **NSW South Coast, Inland North, Central Coast & Hunter Valley, Northern Tablelands**

Lindsay Sheppard  
☎ 0429 225 222

### **NSW Inland South** Mark "Spud" Russell ☎ 0411 664 375

### **NSW North Coast** Lindsay Sheppard ☎ 0429 225 222

### **Victoria.**

**Vic Albury/Wodonga**  
Rob Charles  
☎ 0407 461 363

**Vic Western**  
Chris Peters  
☎ 0450 323 463

### **Vic Geelong & Surf Coast, Vic Ballarat, Vic Bendigo, Mildura & Ballarat.**

Colin Armstrong  
☎ 0481 302 327

### **Vic Melbourne Metro and Metro East.**

Neil Warner.  
☎ 0419 551 245

**Vic Gippsland**  
David Adams.  
☎ 0473 951 763

### **Queensland:**

**QLD Inland, Northern, Central Coast, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Brisbane Metro,**  
Craig Bowen  
☎ 0449 570 566

### **South Australia.**

**SA Rural & Adelaide Metro**  
Michael Stokes  
☎ 0400 478 768

### **SA Limestone Coast**

**VACANT**  
☎

### **Tasmania.**

**Tas North & South**  
Colin Armstrong  
☎ 0481 302 327

**Western Australia.**  
**WA South West & Great Southern, Rural North**  
**VACANT**  
☎

**WA Perth Metro**  
Cliff Moores  
☎ 0422 799 729



# WE WANT YOU TO BE FAMOUS!

Are you secretly harbouring the desire for fame and fortune?

Do you want to see your name up there in lights? Don't we all!!

Well, Country Network can help you... kinda ...sorta ....maybe!

Okay, what we can do is include your stories printed in our very own full-colour, magazine-style newsletter when you write and send in an article. Who knew fame was so easy??

All you have to do is bash out a couple of paragraphs on something that interests you (and keep it clean, boys). Tell us about:

- Your favourite place to eat (so we know where to eat next time we're in your neighbourhood)
- A great place to holiday/go camping (here or overseas)
- Any great garden tips? (I think we'll be writing about what to do with excess fruit by the end of Summer the way my fruit trees are going)
- Any great recipes. Maybe ones that get rave reviews at your dinner parties, or childhood favs.
- Any interesting local gay history. (remember the 'keep it clean' rule)
- Your hobbies/past times (the nerdier the better as far as we're concerned)

Anyway, you get the idea. We would love to hear about what you get up to!

And don't worry if you don't think you are a good writer. We have an army of people (well, one or two really, maybe three on a good day) who can edit your writing and make you sound like the most interesting writer in the world.

Who knows, you may be a step away from a Pulitzer!! (OK, that might be a stretch). *We will also accept anonymous articles if you are not so keen on being famous!*

Email your masterpiece to [networker@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:networker@countrynetwork.com.au)

Thank you so much for reading the this edition and we would love your Contributions and your thoughts please on what you would like included in this publication.

Please email your feedback to [editor@countrynetwork.com.au](mailto:editor@countrynetwork.com.au) - we would like to keep improving the content for you and have the content that you would like to see.

Until next time - John H

