



Conference Report



'Setting the Agenda for Rural Women: Research Directions' Conference

Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW July 15th – 17th 2002

The 'Setting the Agenda' conference attracted over one hundred delegates from Australia and New Zealand as well as invited guest speaker Dr Sally Shortall from Queens University, Belfast. The event was co-hosted by the Centre for Rural Social Research, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia and Australian Women in Agriculture Ltd.

A successful post-graduate forum was held prior to the conference. A mix of plenary speakers and workshop/paper sessions ensured a stimulating program and lively debate throughout the conference about the future direction of rural women's research, policy and programs.

The highlights from the plenary speakers were:

- understanding of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in Northern Ireland and the social impacts that this had on agricultural communities and especially the women within these communities - Dr Sally Shortall;
- the concept of 'mainstreaming' for rural women's activities and funding and the need to be vigilant about the correct use and application of this term – Assoc. Prof. Margaret Alston;

- 'the girls have had their go' and the inaccuracy of this statement in the light of data on funding spent on women's issues in the three Rs (regional, remote and rural) – Fiona Haslem – McKenzie;
- use of mind-mapping as a systems method to allow women to work within the parameters of government policy with positive outcomes – Shelley Spriggs;
- a positive picture of what rural and agricultural women have achieved and how women beyond the urban fringe are respected within the agricultural bodies within Australia – Cathy McGowan; and
- an invitation to be part of shadow policy development and Federal discussions regarding rural, regional and remote communities – Kirsten Livermore.

The workshop program reinforced and developed the questions and themes of the keynote addresses. Recommendations and resolutions were drafted during the conference, with the following presented to the delegates as issues for further research and attention:

- funding to be strategically placed in certain areas, notably domestic violence, childcare, rural employment, rural women's history, scholarships and accurate data collection of funding usage;
- data collection to reflect an understanding of the gendering of data, affordability of purchasing the data once collected and appreciation of informal knowledge;

- telecommunications including standards of services, training and mentoring of women in telecommunications and active debate on the further sale of Telstra; and
- invisibility of rural women with themes such as developing an ethical framework for research, valuing the skills and roles that women have, improving knowledge transfer and understanding and addressing the urban bias in women's history.

The conference organising team was endorsed to further the conference deliberations and concepts. This includes compilation of the conference proceedings and recommendations to be distributed in the near future and a networking database for participants.

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