



Media Release.



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For further information
Julia Collard
Media Relations

0409 311 176
jcollard@westpac.com.au

Queensland women lead the way

On the eve of announcing the national RIRDC Rural Women's Award winner, in Canberra, Queensland women lead the way in bringing back the benefits to their home states, according to one of the national judges, Sharyn Gordon.

Sharyn Gordon, Westpac's State General Manager Regional Banking Queensland, said that the award ties in closely with Queensland's wide ranging initiatives to empower women across primary industries and agribusiness.

Hailing from Charleville herself, Sharyn has been active within Westpac to ensure that the gains achieved by women in regional Queensland are supported and nourished. As well as sponsoring the national RIRDC Rural Women's Award, Westpac is a major sponsor of the Queensland Rural Women's Network (QRWN).

"The QRWN is an extremely active group that supports the social and economic well being of rural women," said Ms Gordon. "It is headed by two previous QLD runners up of the RIRDC Rural Women's Award, and many other women involved in QRWN are previous RIRDC award winners too.

"Both beef producers, the 2009 runner up Wendy Agar and the 2008 runner up Georgie Somerset are the current joint presidents of QRWN out there working with their sleeves up to empower women and help them achieve leadership roles in their workplaces and communities.

"I'm always inspired when I see them come home from cattle mustering, put on a suit and fly to Brisbane or Canberra to actively help rural and regional women achieve their potential."

Georgie Somerset, who with her family owns and manages an 8500 ha cattle property near Durong, said that Westpac's support is an important component of QRWN's work to empower women in all areas, including in leadership development.

"Westpac provides QRWN with hands on support in our conferences, seminars and events such as International Womens' Day," said Georgie.

"This week our executive is participating in a workshop in Brisbane with Sandy Blackburn-Wright, Westpac's Head of Organisational Mentoring, as part of the banks three-year mentoring program to support the development and effective operation of the board."

Wendy Agar said that this form of hands-on support is important in helping women break into leadership in primary industries.

“According to RIRDC’s recent research, while women contribute more than 49 per cent of the total value of agricultural output in Australia, they continue to be significantly under-represented in management and decision-making in primary industries,” said Wendy.

“Support like that given to our board provides training that will help rural and regional women to advance in primary industry leadership roles.”

Sharyn said that this year’s finalists for the title of RIRDC Rural Woman of the Year are a profoundly inspiring group of women who are bucking the overall trends of declining representation of women in leadership and management.

“Our 2010 Queensland winner, Sharyn Garrett, is a partner in a macropod harvesting enterprise and secretary of the Queensland Macropod and Wild Game Harvesters Association,” said Sharyn. “She is working to raise the profile of kangaroo harvesting and create an industry which is profitable, sustainable, and enjoys a more positive image.

“To win the national award next week she is up against an extraordinary group of female finalists who are commercialising pork biogas, establishing a philanthropic foundation for agriculture, taking a leadership role in the native flower industry, coordinating the rural aid organisation ‘Aussie Helpers’, managing the Darwin Fish Market and pioneering biological and organic farming in Australia. We wish her lots of luck.”

Sharyn says that Westpac has the achievements to prove its commitment to real change and empowerment for women.

“We are the only major bank and the only top 10 ASX company with a female CEO and we have more than double the national average of women in executive positions (24 per cent versus 10.7 per cent), with a third of our senior managers and half of our managers being women. Westpac has been bringing back Bank Managers nationally with 47 per cent across Australia being women and which goes up to 55 per cent in Queensland,” she said.

Ends.

For further information

Susan Sims
Sefton & Associates
Phone: 02 6766 5222
Email: susan.sims@seftonpr.com.au

Julia Collard
Media Relations, Westpac
Phone: 0409 311 176
Email: jcollard@westpac.com.au