



Australian  
**Rural Leadership**  
Foundation

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**ARLP**

# COURSE 27

PARTICIPANT DIRECTORY **2020-21**



The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation is delighted to introduce the participants of Course 27 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP).

These participants commenced the ARLP in November 2020 during a period of unprecedented global disruption. The Foundation commends this cohort on their tenacity, patience and commitment in uncertain times. They are already exhibiting the hallmarks and traits of resilient and adaptive leadership and will certainly experience an ARLP unlike any other cohort in the 29 year history of the Foundation.

Each cohort of the ARLP is comprised of individuals who have been selected through a rigorous application process to embark on a lengthy, immersive leadership development program which will contribute to transformative outcomes in rural, regional and remote Australia.

We pay our respect to the First Nations people of this country, and to the traditional custodians of the country on which we meet during the multiple sessions of program delivery.

**30 LEADERS FROM ACROSS RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA  
15-MONTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM  
FOUR SESSIONS OVER 50 DAYS**

More information about the ARLF leadership approach can be found at  
[rural-leaders.org.au/our-programs/arlpl](https://rural-leaders.org.au/our-programs/arlpl)



## Hayley Abbott NAROOMA, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Fisheries Research and Development Corporation**

[www.frdc.com.au](http://www.frdc.com.au)

Hayley is part of a third-generation family fishing business, Abbott Fisheries. Here, she has played a pivotal role in vertically integrating the organisation's supply chain, which catches, processes and sells seafood domestically and internationally. Hayley represented Australia in school soccer for four

international tours and was captain for three tours. She completed a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Business Administration and Sports Management from the Southeast Missouri State University. Hayley is committed to developing leadership in the seafood industry in order to create a robust and viable industry for future generations and the communities they operate in.



## Lisa Anderson WAGGA WAGGA, NSW

Scholarship funded by **AgriFutures Australia**

[www.agrifutures.com.au](http://www.agrifutures.com.au)

Lisa is a mixed farmer, producing grains, legumes, prime lambs and pasture seed in the Riverina. She is passionate about agricultural research and development that delivers innovation, increasing profitability and sustainability to Australian farmers. Lisa is the chair of the AgriFutures Pasture Seeds Advisory panel, chair of FarmLink Research, and chair of SNSW

Southern Australia Livestock Research Council. She has a curious, enquiring mind, and is focused on developing the skills required to think critically, strategically and collaboratively.



## Ross Anderson DENISON, VIC

Scholarship funded by **Gardiner Dairy Foundation**

[www.gardinerfoundation.com.au](http://www.gardinerfoundation.com.au)

Ross is a fourth-generation dairy farmer, born and bred on the family farm that he now manages in Gippsland. He returned to farming in 2006, after 10 years as a builder. Building took him from Queensland to London and then to Perth and surrounds. He is currently chair of Herd Improvement Co-Operative

Australia. Ross is proactive about taking opportunities that will enhance his skills and abilities to manage both his on-farm and off-farm ventures. By continuing to develop himself as a team member and leader, Ross aims to leave the people and places he encounters better off.



## Julie Andrezza WILLBRIGGIE, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Grains Research and Development Corporation**  
[www.grdc.com.au](http://www.grdc.com.au)

Julie is from Griffith in the Riverina and was born to Italian immigrant parents. She and her husband Glen manage three farming properties totalling over 630 hectares. In 2018 they won the NSW Farmer of the Year award for their resilient, innovative farming practices as grain producers. Julie is the mother of four adult children, who are her pride and joy. She is passionate about family, mental health and well-being, and the health of her community. She is committed to building a thriving, sustainable farming business for the next generation of Australian farmers.



## Trudi Bartlett DALBY, QLD

Scholarship funded by **Ningana Trust**

Trudi is the Director of Regional Development for Regional Development Australia Darling Downs and South West. She is from Kingaroy, Queensland and currently lives in the Toowoomba region. Trudi was formerly the Economic Development Officer for the Western Downs Regional Council, CEO for the Dalby Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and CEO of Transforming Small Business, a company she founded to service and support small businesses in rural areas. She also has a background in retail training and management. She has a strong fund-raising track record, and applies these skills supporting not-for-profits and community groups.



## Jackie Bennett GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS, QLD

Scholarship funded by **National Indigenous Australians Agency**  
[www.niaa.gov.au](http://www.niaa.gov.au)

Jackie is a Kamilaroi/Bigambul woman from St George in South West Queensland. As well as being a mother of four, and grandmother of nine gorgeous grandchildren, Jackie is the Director of her cultural consultancy business, Connecting 2 Culture. She supports early childhood services, schools, government and not-for-profits to improve the services they provide to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Jackie was previously Melbourne University's Regional Implementation Manager for the Moreton Bay Region. She is a Global Leader for Young Children through the World Forum Foundation, and a director on the Koobara Kindergarten and Pre-prep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Board.



## Ben Boland ARMIDALE, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment**

[www.awe.gov.au](http://www.awe.gov.au)

Based in Armidale, Ben is a partner in an agricultural business focusing primarily on the production of ultra-fine merino wool. He is originally from Warialda, NSW, and has lived and worked in Sydney and in Inverell, NSW, as a mechanical engineer, predominantly for the meat industry. He is heavily involved in the management of abattoirs, projects and developments. Ben is passionate about developing people within their chosen fields, as well as growing personally within the agricultural industry. He has a keen interest in preventative mental health measures in rural communities, with a particular focus on male suicide.



## Nicole Bond LONGREACH, QLD

Scholarship funded by **Telstra**

[www.telstra.com.au](http://www.telstra.com.au)

Nicole is a Media and Communications Manager with the Remote Area Planning and Development Board, and also runs her own media consultancy and freelance journalism business. Nicole went to school near Roma, and has worked throughout QLD, NSW and overseas. She settled in Longreach over a decade ago. Nicole's passion is storytelling, due to its valuable role in promoting understanding, respect, connection and knowledge. She wants to tackle the challenge of algorithm-driven news feeds through relevant, meaningful rural stories. Nicole aims to become a more effective leader through collaboration.



## Erlina Compton DUBBO, NSW

Scholarship funded by **NSW Local Land Services**

[www.lls.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lls.nsw.gov.au)

Erlina is the General Manager for Western Local Land Services in Dubbo, working with a team of staff to provide key services for farmers, and help them make better decisions about the land they manage. Erlina is originally from Narrabri, NSW, and is passionate about the Western Region of NSW, and about helping rural and regional communities to be sustainable and profitable into the future. She is keen to develop new skills to become a better leader in her role, and influence greater positive change in the management of landscapes and agriculture in Western NSW.



## Peter Day SPRING HILL, NSW

Scholarship funded by **NSW Department of Primary Industries**  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au)

Peter works in the biosecurity section within the NSW Department of Primary Industries, helping to protect the Australian environment and primary producers. He is originally from Queensland but has spent over 25 years in NSW, working in a range of regional locations, and in Sydney. Peter is married and has two daughters. He is heavily involved in his community as President of a local pony club and as Deputy Captain of the local Rural Fire Brigade. Peter wants to develop his leadership to have a greater impact at work and within his local community.



## Tom Deery NARRANGULLEN, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Meat and Livestock Australia**  
[www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au)

Tom works at historic Merino sheep, wool, lamb and beef property Cavan Station near Yass, NSW where he is part of the operational staff. He grew up in a family farm environment near Bairnsdale, Victoria and then at Quandialla, NSW. Tom attended boarding school at Forbes, NSW and completed a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Wollongong, before the family farm passed to him. Tom has also worked at Northparkes Mines, NSW, and on a property near Keith in South Australia. He is married with three primary school-age children.



## Donna Digby ALICE SPRINGS, NT

Scholarship funded by **Ningana Trust**

Donna works in Alice Springs as an Economic Development Officer for the NT Department of Trade, Business and Innovation. She grew up in Chelsea, Victoria and at 17 fell in love with the spirit and resilience of people living in the bush, their can-do attitude and the opportunities that life in remote Australia brings. Donna is driven to create opportunities for remote communities and regions to thrive by attracting investment and building networks and capabilities. She is a former NT Director of Australian Women in Agriculture, and was a finalist in the 2019 NT Rural Women's Award.



## Jillian D'Urso MELBOURNE, VIC

Scholarship funded by **Minerals Council of Australia**  
[www.minerals.org.au](http://www.minerals.org.au)

Originally from North Queensland, Jillian is now based in Melbourne where she is Manager, Social Policy at the Minerals Council of Australia. Jillian is passionate about building opportunities for people in regional and remote Australia, and celebrating and supporting the diversity, strength and resilience of regional communities. She is committed to learning new skills to develop herself as an inclusive and thoughtful leader, and to learn from people with diverse backgrounds, across Australia.



## Cath Geiger QUEANBEYAN, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment** [www.awe.gov.au](http://www.awe.gov.au)

Cath is the Assistant Secretary for Biosecurity Risk and Innovation with the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. She is originally from Brisbane, and is now based in the regional town of Queanbeyan, near Canberra. She is focused on collaborating internally and externally with government to strengthen biosecurity systems to enable growth in the agricultural sector. Cath wants to hone her public service leadership skills and to engage more closely with rural and regional communities.



## Bernard Gooch DUBBO, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Australian Meat Processor Corporation**  
[www.ampc.com.au](http://www.ampc.com.au)

Bernard Gooch is General Manager, Marketing and Development with Fletcher International Exports – a privately owned meat processing business which exports to over 90 countries. Bernard is based at head office in his hometown of Dubbo. He has been with the company for 27 years, and his current role includes the day to day running of the business – from production, sales and client liaison, to market visits and overseeing new product development. Bernard believes leadership involves commitment and passion, and is focused on motivating his team and their belief in what they are trying to achieve.





## Michael Graham ORANGE, NSW

Scholarship funded by **CBRE** [www.cbre.com.au](http://www.cbre.com.au)

Michael works for Paraway Pastoral Company as General Manager, Central West Region of NSW. He grew up on his family farm near Gundagai, NSW and is now based in Orange, where his role involves overseeing the management of five properties. Michael is passionate about agriculture and about the development of people within the industry. He is excited to build relationships and broaden his industry network along with the opportunity to continue to develop and strengthen his leadership capabilities.



## Bernie Keenan THURSDAY ISLAND, QLD

Scholarship funded by **Torres Strait Regional Authority**  
[www.tsra.gov.au](http://www.tsra.gov.au)

Bernie Keenan is Senior Project Officer with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. He is a passionate and proud Torres Strait Islander descendant from Mabuag Island's major tribe of Wagadagam. He was born on Thursday Island and predominantly raised on Thursday and Horn Island. Throughout his career Bernie has gained significant experience in local, state and federal government as well as the not-for-profit sector. He is keen to adopt new skills and strategies to strengthen his role as a mentor and leader for his region.



## Lukina Lukin PORT LINCOLN, SA

Scholarship funded by **Fisheries Research and Development Corporation** [www.frdc.com.au](http://www.frdc.com.au)

Lukina is the owner and managing director of the Lukin group of companies, which operates tuna farming and prawn and sardine fishing businesses. Originally from Thailand, Lukina has over 20 years' experience in the fishing industry. In 2011, Lukina took over the management of her late husband's tuna farming business, determined to build on his industry legacy. Her business's processing facility in Port Lincoln is using minus-temperature freezing technology to provide new market access to southern bluefin tuna. Lukina is passionate about improving product value and bringing the best seafood to the market.



## Kirsty Lush NARACOOORTE, SA

Scholarship funded by **Prime Super** [www.primesuper.com.au](http://www.primesuper.com.au)

Kirsty is a primary school principal, currently undertaking a Principal Consultant role in the Mount Gambier region in South Australia. She also teaches at the Mount Gambier campus of the University of South Australia. Kirsty is passionate about quality education in regional and rural areas, in particular attracting and retaining quality teaching graduates and increasing leadership capacity in schools. She is married to a farmer and has two young children. Kirsty is looking to develop her leadership skills to further influence stakeholders in the education sector and improve the education outcomes in her region and beyond.



## Louise Martin TAMBO, QLD

Scholarship funded by **Australian Wool Innovation**  
[www.wool.com](http://www.wool.com)

Louise is a sheep, wool and cattle producer who grew up in Western and North West Queensland, primarily on cattle properties. She then travelled extensively overseas, before settling back in Western Queensland on a sheep stud at Tambo, where she has since been absorbed in growing sheep and wool. Louise is the Queensland Vice President of The Isolated Children's Parents Association, working to ensure equity of education for rural and remote students. She is passionate about ensuring the survival, regrowth, and continuing vibrancy of rural communities in Western Queensland.



## Michael McIvor BROKEN HILL, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Thyne Reid Foundation**

Michael is the Operations Manager for his family-owned tourism business, Experience Broken Hill. Originally from Geelong, Victoria, Michael has been based in Broken Hill for the past ten years. He is passionate about supporting tourism-related businesses and stakeholders to thrive in regional, remote and rural communities. He believes that a diverse economy, supported by the right infrastructure, is key to developing resilient communities. Michael is committed to developing the contemporary knowledge and real experience necessary to lead in his industry and community.



## Jody McMiles

PERTH, WA

Scholarship funded by **CBH Group** [www.cbh.com.au](http://www.cbh.com.au)

Jody has built her career with grain growing co-operative, CBH Group, where her current role in business improvement looks at innovative ways to create and return value to its grower members. She comes from the grain growing region of the central wheatbelt of WA and is currently based in Perth. Jody has a background in corporate communications and believes that good communication is one of the most important skills in work and life. Her regional roots mean she understands many of the major issues and opportunities facing agricultural communities. She is committed to raising the profile of women in her industry.



## Alison Mobbs

BUNYA MOUNTAINS, QLD

Scholarship funded by **John B. Foundation**

Alison is a beef cattle grazier with a background in government and community programs and project development. She manages the Dalby Regional Saleyards, and strategic planning and maintenance for the Western Downs Regional Council's almost 800 facilities. Alison is the director of Mobbs Cattle Co. She has also held roles as a board director, and as the operator of a motel in outback Queensland. Alison is an experienced director, leader and innovator, and has devised and delivered cultural and skills development projects, events, and training in diverse settings.



## Ruth Redfern

NARRABRI, NSW

Scholarship funded by **Cotton Research and Development Corporation** [www.crdc.com.au](http://www.crdc.com.au), **Auscott Limited** [www.auscott.com.au](http://www.auscott.com.au), **Cotton Australia** [www.cottonaustralia.com.au](http://www.cottonaustralia.com.au)

Ruth is the Cotton Research and Development Corporation's Communications Manager, based in Narrabri, where she grew up on a family farm. A 'countryphile' and communicator, Ruth has a passion for telling the stories of rural Australia and its people, places, produce and providers. Ruth is a writer, editor, graphic designer and photographer, with 17 years' experience in media and communications. She has delivered programs for federal and state government departments, industry bodies, farming organisations and rural not-for-profits. She holds a master's in media from the University of Sydney.



## Jacqui Rovis-Hermann PERTH, WA

Scholarship funded by **Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment** [www.dese.gov.au](http://www.dese.gov.au)

Jacqui is the Director of the WA Office of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Her current responsibilities include delivering early education programs to regional and remote WA. Although based in Perth, Jacqui has lived extensively in remote WA and the NT, and is passionate about improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal communities and regional areas. Jacqui is committed to finding local solutions to deliver quality education to all children and their families. She believes in the power of leadership on-the-ground, and wants to expand her connections with leaders working right around Australia.



## Jeff Schuller TINTINARA, SA

Scholarship funded by **Australian Lot Feeders Association** [www.feedlots.com.au](http://www.feedlots.com.au)

Jeff is the Feedlot Operations Manager with family-owned food business, Thomas Foods International in Tintinara, where he heads up a team of 25 staff. Originally from Southern NSW, Jeff is passionate about agriculture and quality in production and supply chains. He has a strong interest in effectively engaging people and building strong relationships. He is looking forward to learning diverse new skills and becoming a stronger and more empowering leader within his business, industry, and broader community.



## Ellen Smith BROOME, WA

Scholarship funded by **WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development** [www.dpird.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpird.wa.gov.au)

Ellen is Principal Policy Officer with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development WA. She grew up in Albany on the state's south coast and is now based in Broome in the north-west. She has worked across the primary industries sector in fisheries management and most recently in northern agricultural development. Ellen is passionate about developing capacity and leveraging the amazing resilience of regional communities. She graduated from the National Seafood Industry Leadership Program in 2012, was a finalist in the WA Rural Women's Award in 2013 and completed the CEDA Copland leadership Program in 2019.



## Damien Tessmann KINGAROY, QLD

Scholarship funded by **Dairy Australia**

[www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au)

Damien is a fifth-generation dairy farmer from Kingaroy in the South Burnett Region of Queensland. 'Hillside' has always been home and a touch point during time spent working off-farm. Damien has served eight years as a Councillor on the South Burnett Regional Council in addition to working in agricultural policy roles in both Canberra and North Queensland. His greatest passion is for rural advocacy, particularly on issues affecting the dairy industry, but also in relation to investment in regional communities. Damien would like to have an impact shaping policy that secures a better deal for Australia's food producers.



## Richard Turnbull CAIRNS, QLD

Scholarship funded by **National Indigenous Australians Agency**

[www.niaa.gov.au](http://www.niaa.gov.au)

Richard is an Environmental Health Officer for Queensland Health (Tropical Public Health Unit), based in Cairns. He is passionate about all areas of the environment and health sectors. Richard is committed to building strength and resilience in his industry, while reflecting on and improving his own work challenges. Originally from Chinchilla, Queensland, Richard is involved with his native title claim (Mithaka People) – something he values for broadening his outlook on current and future issues. Richard is committed to expanding his knowledge and skills to establish a foundation of better health and well-being in his industry and community.



## Marcus Verstraelen MELBOURNE, VIC

Scholarship funded by **Agriculture Victoria**

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au)

Marcus is a District Veterinary Officer for Agriculture Victoria, currently based in his home city of Melbourne. Marcus has worked in a number of roles with Agriculture Victoria, including Regional Manager, Senior Veterinary Officer and Principal Veterinary Officer. Marcus' passion is for achieving optimal outcomes in all aspects of Agriculture, with a focus on animal production and husbandry. His other work involvements include with a creative publishing company and an animal ethics committee. Marcus is currently finalising a Master of Business Administration through Melbourne Business School. He aims to become a more resilient, strategic and future-focused leader.

## THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

## C27 Scholarships



## C27 Program







[www.rural-leaders.org.au](http://www.rural-leaders.org.au)