

Rural woman of the year

SECTION 1 OVERVIEW

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More than 100 government, industry, and community representatives attended a gala dinner in Sydney in March to recognise the achievements of the NSW Rural Woman of the Year awards. And the cotton industry had a special interest this year, with Gillian Hogendyk from Warren the runner up in the award.

The Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, was a special guest at the dinner and announced the winners.

Gillian was recognised for her efforts in using her knowledge of cotton and other irrigation industries to involve her peers in conservation activities that help achieve better natural resource management.

Gillian has shown incredible leadership by inspiring cotton industry members in the north west of the State to play their part in improving wetlands such as the Macquarie Marshes, and sharing their new knowledge with the general community, university and school students.

In accepting the award, Gillian acknowledged the tremendous support and encouragement she received from so many people in the Macquarie Valley community and also from the Cotton Research and Development Corporation.

“In the Macquarie Valley we understand the concept of the triple bottom line: that healthy and happy rural communities depend on economic, social and environmental well being,” she said. “In our valley irrigated agriculture, and in particular cotton growing, is a major contributor to our economic and social well being. And we have turned a popular paradigm upside down by also being at the forefront of the push for environmental sustainability.

“We have purchased a degraded wetland property in the Macquarie Marshes, and are actively contributing to its rehabilitation towards a showcase wetland. We are tremendously proud of what we have achieved to date, and we hope to inspire other communities.

“But this journey has also made us humble and very aware of the challenges we face. We know that wetland management in Australia’s inland is a complex and controversial task. The questions of how to best manage the threats of fire, invasive weeds and feral pests, sustainable grazing management are all sensitive issues. Appropriate access for visitors and the growing ecotourism market also bring their own challenges.

“I have left the most controversial aspect of wetland management of all until last, water. The people of Australia have been told that wetland management in inland Australia is not complex at all, that the solution is a simple if extremely costly one: just buy the water – or perhaps more accurately the water entitlements – and all these other issues will miraculously disappear. They have been given the example of the Paroo River system which has no water extraction from it, and told that this river and its wetlands are therefore pristine. But anyone who has camped on the Paroo River, as I have done, will assure you that it is very far from pristine, and perhaps the worst of its many problems is the thousands of feral goats that call it home.

“Our work in the Macquarie Marshes has shown what can be achieved by changing the landuse practices that are a fundamental cause of wetland degradation. Our work has been supported by our Catchment Management Authority, the body entrusted with helping landholders to improve their on ground environmental management. It concerns me that funding to the Catchment Management Authorities has been cut by 40 per cent, while \$3 billion dollars has been allocated towards water purchase in the Murray Darling Basin. I worry that such an emphasis on water purchase as the only solution will not give the expected environmental outcomes, while at the same time negatively impacting on many rural communities.”

BOTTOM LEFT: Gillian Hogendyk with husband Chris at the presentation. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Part of the focus has been sharing the knowledge with the community.

