



# A HISTORY

*of Women's Gatherings in NSW*

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*Updated June 2012*





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### History of The Women's Gathering

In Orange in 1993, NSW Agriculture's (now NSW Department of Primary Industries) Rural Women's Network (RWN), along with FarmSafe Central West and a committee of volunteers, instigated the first Gathering in NSW as a way of bringing rural women together for networking, learning, gaining inspiration and ideas and sharing information. The idea came from Victoria where *Women on Farms Gatherings* have been an annual event since 1990.

Four hundred women from NSW and other States came to the Orange Gathering. From that event came enthusiasm for NSW Gatherings to be held each year. Gatherings have been held in Bega, Bourke, Cobar, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Gloucester, Grafton, Gunnedah, Hay, Junee, Kempsey, Moree, Orange, Temora, Tocal, Wellington, Wentworth and Yanco. The 2012 Gathering will be held in Parkes from 12–14 October.

Gatherings are organised by local committees who make key decisions, develop a theme and the weekend program. Each Gathering reflects the unique culture, industry, tourism and environment of the host community.

Over the years perceptions have remained that the Women of the Land Gatherings were only for farm women – despite the hard promotional work of the organising committees to ensure that all rural women were welcome.

In 1998/99 the RWN conducted a review of the RWN program and its activities. Using this information and after long discussions, the RWN's State Advisory Committee decided to rename the annual event to 'The Women's Gathering' in the hope of making the Gatherings more inclusive to the full diversity of rural women.

### The importance of The Women's Gathering in NSW

Women's Gatherings are for ALL rural women including: farming women; Aboriginal women; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; mining women; women in the fishing industry; women who live in regional cities, towns and villages; and coastal women.

The Rural Women's Gatherings:

- provide an opportunity for rural women to network, share experiences and support each other through good and tough times. It is not a 'conference' but a special event which brings women together;
- provide opportunities for rural women to have a direct voice to decision makers through government, Ministers and other decision makers attending the Gathering and through the distribution of a Report which committees may produce after the Gathering;
- enable rural women to access information on existing services, resources and assistance;
- provide an opportunity for rural women to learn from listening to inspiring and informative speakers and participating in workshops;
- raise the profile of rural women and highlight important issues through wide media coverage; and
- be inclusive and involve women from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure all women participate both in the events and on the organising committees.

### Gathering locations and how they are decided

Gatherings are held in different locations around the State, to ensure the greatest accessibility for rural women across New South Wales.

The RWN is responsible for ensuring the Gathering is shared fairly around the State by deciding on the host group each year. The selection is based on proposals received according to set criteria in the gathering guidelines.

If you are interested in having a Gathering in your area contact: NSW DPI's Rural Women's Network on 02 6391 3620 or [rural.women@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rural.women@dpi.nsw.gov.au)

It's also a good idea to have a look at the Gathering Guidelines which can be found on the Rural Women's Network website: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn)



## 1st ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Surviving and Thriving

Orange Agricultural College, 9 to 11 July 1993

Margaret Carroll, (NSW Agriculture Rural Women's Network) and Ronnie Hazelton (FarmSafe Central West) coordinated the first Annual Women's Gathering attended by 450 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

The official opening was performed by The Hon Kerry Chikarovski, Minister for the Status & Advancement of Women and Minister for Industrial Relations & Employment. The plenary and close was performed by The Hon Ian Armstrong, Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries and Minister for Mining.

### Keynote Speakers included:

Christina Hindhaugh, an author and farmer 'extraordinaire' who inspired the audience. As one participant noted, *"a great asset to our country and rural Australia in particular"*.

Professor John Chudleigh, Principal of Orange Agricultural College, spoke on finance and provided as one participant noted, *"good factual, sensible, in-depth information – an important message for farmers in this economic climate"*.

Magistrate Pat O'Shane spoke on 'You and the Law' and concentrated on domestic violence and its impact on rural women. One participant said, *"Pat has travelled the road of enlightenment – we must follow or stay in the dark"*. She called us to stand in solidarity as 'women hold up half the sky'.



The workshops aimed to emphasise the theme of the Gathering – 'Surviving & Thriving' and focused on themes relevant to rural women. These included finance, learning, the environment, health and personal development.

Two panels of experienced people addressed important issues on: The Whole Woman – Health & Safety Issues; and Political & Legal Issues.

Farm Tours giving a flavor of Central West farming enterprises and interests included Dooncarrick Apple Orchard, three wineries, a canola mill and Orange Agricultural Research Station.

A Hypothetical in which a complex scenario was developed involving personal relationships and financial management of a farming family held the attention, interest and involvement of the audience.

An Ecumenical Service was held on the Sunday morning and was an important part of the Gathering. The service was delivered by Dr Helen Clements (Orange Presbyterian) and Deaconess June Armstrong (Orange Anglican).

The theme 'Surviving and Thriving' was carried through with Deaconess Armstrong giving examples of the hopes of women through the ages supporting their menfolk and families with faith in God who created us and our world. The service provided inspiration and hope for the future.





## 2nd ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Sharing and Caring

Gunnedah, 16 to 18 September 1994

Janet Redden of NSW TAFE convened the 2nd Annual Women's Gathering attended by 370 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

The official opening was performed by The Hon Kerry Chikarovski, Minister for the Status & Advancement of Women and Minister for Industrial Relations & Employment. The plenary & close was performed by The Hon Ian Causley, Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries and Mining.



### Keynote Speakers included:

Marie Mahood who began her keynote speech on sharing and caring by defining limits. The first main area of caring touched briefly on Landcare and the second, because it was the Year of the Family, on caring for the rural family, particularly during the current drought conditions.

Maree McCaskill talked about two simple things – realising how important you are and getting involved in the things that matter to you and proving it!

Four wonderful women; Pat Studdy-Clift, Marianne Lichti, Gwen Griffin, and Judy Simson, gave personal accounts of life on the land. Heidi Austin spoke on her interesting and varied life as a country veterinarian.

Workshops focused on themes relevant to rural women. Some of the topics included; education beyond 2000, public speaking, superannuation, sustainable agriculture, farming for the future, computers, self defence, suicide awareness, coping alone, women's health and home hosting – just to name a few!

The Ecumenical Service was held on the Sunday morning and was conducted by Sr Gemma. During the singing of *Bring Forth the Kingdom of Mercy*, yellow, red, blue and green balloons were released.





## 3rd ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

Today's knowledge, Tomorrow's success

Yanco, 22 to 24 September 1995

Margie Fixter of NSW Agriculture convened the 3rd Annual Women's Gathering attended by more than 300 rural women from across rural and regional NSW.

Official proceedings began on Saturday with The Murrumbidgee Chorale singing *Advance Australia Fair*. A welcome address by the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture Principal, Mr Geoff Creek was followed by words from Mr Noel Hicks MHR, the Federal Member for Riverina. The Hon Richard Amery, Minister for Agriculture officially opened the Gathering.

Mrs Beryl Ingold, State Treasurer of the Agricultural Bureau of NSW, Riverina Regional Development Board, farmer and Murrumbidgee College Advisory Council member, chaired the official closure.

Margaret Carroll spoke about the Rural Women's Network and Sonia Muir shared some of her experiences from the Beijing Women's Conference. At the closing Margie Fixter passed the 'tilly lantern' to the convenor of the 1996 Gathering at Cobar, Mrs Pat Le Lievre.

Keynote Speakers included Dame Leonie Kramer AC DBE, Chancellor, The University of Sydney, Ms Linda Burney, President, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc, and Mrs Ella Lowe, Director of Nursing, Mildura Base Hospital. Ms Robyn Tredwell, 1995 ABC Rural Woman of the Year gave an insight into life in the remote Kimberly region of Western Australia at the Gathering Dinner.



Workshops focused on education and health issues and covered topics such as story telling/writing, leadership, Aboriginal people, stress management, self-esteem, women and fatigue, utilising technology, marketing, computers, communication, succession planning and native plants.

*The Land* Newspaper ran a special Photography Competition and art displays from various exhibitors were opened for viewing.

Participants also had the opportunity to take part in a special farm tour at Eric and Jan Male's Alabama Ostrich Farm in the picturesque Colinroobie Hills north of Narrandera. Included in the visit was a fine display of egg craft, painting and carving, together with high fashion products such as handbags and belts.

The Ecumenical Service was held on the Sunday morning and was conducted by Sr Clare Gaynor. The Service was one of the highlights of the Gathering – 'To Care for the Earth is to Share with God in the Act of Creation.'





## 4th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Resourceful and resilient

*Cobar, 27 to 29 September 1996*

Pat Le Lievre a former member and Co-Chair of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee along with Ruth Barclay of NSW Agriculture, convened the 4th Annual Women's Gathering attended by 370 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

Clr Lilliane Brady, Mayor of Cobar gave the official welcome with Helen Board, National Rural Women's Unit performing the official opening. The plenary and close was performed by Dr Kevin Sheridan, NSW Agriculture Director-General.

Keynote Speakers included Dr Wendy Craik, Executive Director – National Farmers' Federation who spoke about 'Agriculture, Business and the Environment'; Sally Milne, Women's Health Worker – Bathurst Health Centre spoke on 'Health and Wellbeing'; Vicki Dickman, from the Australian Country Information Service at Chinchilla; and Nancy Snow of Skilful Solutions in Chinchilla. Nancy spoke on 'Personal and Community Development'.



Action Group Forums provided the opportunity for delegates to raise issues of concern about rural life within the three areas of Agriculture, Business & Environment, Health & Wellbeing, and Community & Personal Development. Each session was facilitated by a key person who directed questions from the floor to a panel of persons representing relevant authorities, agencies and politicians. Lively debate and ideas were encouraged.

Lyn Sykes, a relationships counsellor from Dubbo spoke at the Gathering Dinner about forms of communication, how families relate to each other, and the involvement or otherwise of a person marrying into that family, especially a woman.

Mr Ben Bennett, Chairman of the Orana Regional Development Board implored the audience to take every opportunity to promote the agricultural industry in a positive light to those who perhaps did not have a true appreciation of the issues involved and the commitment of farmers to sustainable production.

A special Partners' Program was introduced by Cobar for the first time and included the Cobar Cultural & Mine Heritage Tour and the Mt Drysdale Mine Heritage Tour.

The Ecumenical Service was held on the Sunday morning and was led by Sr Megan Brock in conjunction with the Cobar Christian Women's Choir. Sr Brock described the breads of the world that were presented, broken and shared as symbols of the women they represent and their contribution to life and all that sustains life.

At the official handover, Bronwyn Norman a member of the 1997 Gathering Committee accepted the lantern and the challenge to host the 1997 Women's Gathering at Tocal.



Four wonderful women; Joan Myors, Vivienne Davis, Anne Rogers, and Carol Buckman, gave personal accounts of life on the land. Joan spoke about life in the pastoral industry in Western NSW. Vivienne spoke about life in a mining family and town. Anne spoke about growing up in a country town and Carol shared her expertise of growing up as an indigenous woman.

Some of the workshop topics included; low maintenance gardens, permaculture, approaching your bank manager with confidence, understanding insurance policies/ superannuation, mothers and daughters, now that I've got kids, good health naturally, First Aid for accidents in rural areas, domestic violence, time management, Aboriginal culture, poetry, speaking out and marketing your produce.



## 5th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Inspiring and Achieving

*CB Alexander Agricultural College Tocal, 9 to 11 October 1997*

Jane Reynolds of NSW Agriculture convened the 5th Annual Women's Gathering attended by 320 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

Cameron Archer, College Principal welcomed women to the Gathering with the official opening performed by The Hon Fay Lo Po', Minister for Fair Trading and Minister for Women. The plenary and close was performed by The Hon Richard Amery, Minister for Agriculture.

The Gathering was organised into three special themes; Women & Technology, Women in Decision-making, and Women Managing Change.

Keynote Speakers included Barbara Scott of Coonabarabran, 1996 ABC Rural Woman of the Year; Catherine Harris, Federal Director of the Australian Affirmative Action Agency; and Libby Darlison, a consultant for health, physical activity and sport. Each of the speakers addressed one of the three themes.

Three wonderful women; Fay McGuigan, Wines Export Manager – McGuigan Wines, Margaret Francis, a student amongst the first intake of women at Tocal, and Nancy Snow, from Skilful Solutions gave personal accounts of life on the land.

Tony Parry, a bush poet and ex student of Tocal was the special speaker for the Gathering Dinner.

Twenty five workshops were offered including: public speaking, no news is not good news, meeting procedure, a sense of place, Stepping Stones training kit and networking, farm business planning, self-esteem, women managing change, practical home healing and negotiation – to name a few.



A spiritual ceremony was held outdoors in the grounds of the 'homestead' followed by breakfast.





## 6th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# High country, high hopes, high achievers

*Cooma, 16 to 18 October 1998*

Sally Martin from Cooma Council convened the 6th Annual Women's Gathering attended by 280 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

The official opening was performed by Mr Peter Cochran, Member for Monaro and Dr Kevin Sheridan, NSW Agriculture Director-General.

Amanda Gore who holds a Bachelor of Physics majoring in Psychology focused her address on stress and change management, male and female communication, differences in relationships and how we can better understand each other.

Robyn Henderson, a master at networking looked at utilising these skills in our business and personal lives, and shared simple strategies and skills to enable individuals and businesses to achieve full potential.

On the Friday evening following registrations two local women shared their stories about what it was like to live in a rural community. This was complimented by cheese and wine.

A variety of workshops were offered throughout the program including, paddock to plate, family stays and B&B's, back for life, deciding which venture, keeping the farm in the family, turning your weeds into profit, wandering the world wide web, river corridor management, and my soul mate the fridge.

All participants enjoyed a spectacular Gathering Dinner with a fantastic cabaret performance by the Braemar School of Dance.

Following on from the previous years' gatherings there was a special men's program which included farm tours and other activities such as viewing a film about the snowy mountains Hydro-electric scheme, a training young working dogs workshop, a snowy river winery wine tasting and lunch, a fly fishing demonstration, a traditional wood displays, and 18 holes of Golf.





## 7th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Participation, persistence, partnership

Moree, 10 to 12 September 1999

Helen Zilm, a cotton producer from Moree convened the 7th Annual Women's Gathering attended by 400 rural women from across rural, regional and remote NSW.

Helen, Myrana Harris and a representative from the local Kamilaroi tribe welcomed participants to the Gathering with the official opening performed by Mr Michael Montgomery, Mayor of Moree.

Terry Underwood was the Keynote Speaker for the Saturday. She lives on Rivern Station, 600 kms from Katherine. She was the recipient of the 1997 Telstra Northern Territory Business Women's Owner of the Year Award and is an author of the best selling autobiography entitled *In the Middle of Nowhere*.



The Internet Cafe organised by the Department for Women and NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network provided an opportunity for women to experience new technology, chat to friends and family and send them an 'e-card'.

*The Land* Newspaper once again held their photographic competition which showed the Gatherings theme in a different light – categories provided for humour, hard work and play. The competition was judged by Keynote Speaker Terry Underwood.

There were over 70 workshops for participants to choose from. Some of these included: kinesiology, sip 'n' spit, growing old disgracefully, bush tucker, olives into the new millennium, menopause, computers for beginners, Aboriginal art, culture and history, reconciliation, organic farming and photography.



Phoebe Fraser was the speaker for the Gathering Dinner. Phoebe joined CARE Australia in 1989 as the Victorian Coordinator. Her work has involved extensive travel to many Asian and African countries and her experiences include distributing supplies to flood victims in Bangladesh and coordinating emergency centres for up to 2000 lost and orphaned Rwandan children. In 1996 Phoebe published *A Single Seed*, which talks about many of her experiences.

There was a special panel session that ran on the Saturday with a variety of speakers covering relevant issues. The themes for the panels were: Production for the New Millennium, Health Wise, and Community Responsibility.

There was a market place located at the Town and Country club which offered a wide variety of clothes, crafts and local industry samples.





## 8th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

*Information & inspiration = innovation*

*Wellington, 6 to 8 October 2000*

Meg Strand, ABC Radio convened the 6th Annual Women's Gathering in Wellington attended by over 250 women from across NSW.

A local Wiradjuri Elder and Neita Scott, a Aboriginal representative on the Premier's Council for Women welcomed the women to their lands. This was followed by a local children's Aboriginal dance group performance.

The Gathering featured over 50 workshops and a variety of guest speakers including well-known local identities – former ABC Rural Woman of the Year, Netta Holmes (Wellington) and artist, author and cancer survivor Katie Barton (Mudgee). Christine Hindhaugh, the Keynote Speaker, shared her experiences as a Churchill Fellow and fledging broad acre herb farmer.



Throughout the Gathering there were lots of opportunities for networking between women's groups, service providers and the women themselves.

An interactive panel on the Sunday morning explored managing change through local women sharing their stories.

John Pym from Ausbuy (Dick Smith's supermarket campaign to buy Australian) also challenged the audience to control change by looking before buying to ensure products are truly Australian.

Numerous displays provided women with access to a wide range of information as well as an opportunity to talk with service providers direct.

Friday night highlighted a local (and very talented) vet/poet as well as singers extraordinaire! The Gathering Dinner featured a local children's choir and amateur theatre as well as a fashion parade.



An ecumenical service was held on Sunday morning at the beautiful Cameron Park.

The local Mayor and Elizabeth Jones, the Wellington Gathering Convenor, as part of the closing ceremony handed over the Gathering 'torch' to Kempsey Gathering representative, Barbara Huntington.



## 9th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Unity in diversity

Kempsey, 21 to 23 September 2001

The 2001 Gathering attracted about 150 women (and a few men) to the Kempsey showgrounds on the Mid North Coast on a sunny and warm weekend in September. Women came from up and down the coastal fringe, others travelled hundreds of kilometres showing that there was no 'great divide' where rural women were concerned.

We received a warm welcome to the land by a Dunghutti Elder and a Councillor from Kempsey Shire, followed by Dr Kevin Sheridan AO, NSW Agriculture Director-General, who officially opened the Gathering. A seafood dinner followed the formalities – very befitting for the first ever coastal 'saltwater' Gathering.

Throughout the Gathering women were continually encouraged to be involved in the many interactive activities which often include trying something new or feeling confident to voice their opinions and concerns to the wider group. Acceptance of others, reconciliation, forgiveness and valuing our multicultural Australian way of life were also strong Gathering themes that emerged over the weekend.



The broad scope of activities included sessions on women in business, natural resource management, reconciliation, leadership, health, computing, arts and crafts, music and dance... so there really was something for everyone. There were also lots of opportunities for women to share stories and concerns, speak with exhibitors or just take time out to enjoy the sunshine.

On Saturday morning a moving bread ceremony first used at the Cobar Gathering, set the theme of 'Unity in Diversity' which was continually reinforced over the three-day program in many different ways.

The ever inspiring Madeleine Randall, well know ABC Local Radio presenter, was the Keynote Speaker. Madeleine spoke about the recent global developments and challenged us to think about what we could do on a more local level, in our own communities and lives.

The Gathering Dinner had a wonderful international flavour through the food, entertainment and ambience created by the setting, as we were all seated under a silken canopy in the semi-outdoors. Octogenarian, Tony Mooy Hurley, the delightful dinner speaker from Coffs Harbour, gave us an insight into an expedition that she and her twin sister took to Antarctica. They retraced an earlier journey taken by their father, as part of the Shackelton expedition in 1914.

The Sunday ecumenical services was a continuation of the Gathering theme with representatives from a range of religious beliefs giving short presentations.

The Sunday changeover to the 2002 Committee saw many women already making a commitment to travel to 'outback' for next years Gathering, confirming the importance of such an event to rural women regardless of where they live.





## 10th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Fortitude and far horizons

*Bourke, 27 to 29 September 2002*

The 300 plus women (and a few men!) who attended the 10th Women's Gathering came from all corners of the state – by public transport, in cars and buses or vehicle convoys. If you can imagine these energised women on a balmy Friday evening under the stars networking, sipping wine, dining on outback treats and listening to bush poetry in the courtyard of an old historic colonial building, then you'll have a sense of the flavour of this special gathering.

Saturday morning began with a small group of talented local Aboriginal dancers performing Indigenous stories following the official opening. The Older Women's Network was next on the program. They took us on a fun and thought provoking journey exploring social themes and more serious issues such as domestic violence – through song, dance and theatre.

There were four strands of workshops, which ran over the two days. They included sessions on climate, organics, discussions on health issues, explorations of the arts, Feng Shui, self-defence, grass weaving, belly dancing, Aboriginal culture, women's story panels and more. In fact most people found it hard to choose which workshop to nominate – the scope was so broad and enticing.

For those who wanted to see more of the Bourke district there were also tours to Mt Oxley, a cruise on the Darling, a tour of outback agricultural enterprises and a visit to a unique sustainable energy home built in the scrub 20 kms out of town.

Keynote speakers included Rachel Oakes-Ash and Lachlan McLachlan. Rachel challenged us to look at how we see others and ourselves. She also asked us to think about the ways we compete with each other, as women, and also talked about having a positive body image. Lachlan spoke of his 'surreal' life as an undercover police officer bringing into focus a dangerous profession many of us can only ever experience through film, television and novels.

The Gathering was also an opportunity to celebrate outback people doing extraordinary things. Tertia Butcher and Annabel Walsh were each presented with a Year of the Outback Women's Overseas Study Scholarship by Richard Sheldrake, NSW Agriculture Director-General.

The Rural Women's Network's *Living Out Back* coffee-table book was also launched by the Director-General and is a tribute to those people who tackle isolation and other problems of living in the outback.



The Darling River and the old historic wharf provided a perfect backdrop for the ecumenical service on the Sunday morning. Following the service, participants again had an opportunity to check out the many agency and group displays as well as complete two more rounds of workshops.

An official handover to the 2003 Gathering organising committee completed the program events. The Chair of the Temora committee, Margaret Duck welcomed everyone to visit her region and come to the next Women's Gathering.



## 11th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Golden beginnings, harvesting our future

Temora, 10 to 12 October 2003

The Golden Beginnings – Harvesting Our Future 2003 Gathering theme was high in our minds as we drove through the dramatic yellow splashed fields of canola on our way to Temora. The theme reflects the historical development of the Temora district and the roles women played in its early gold mining days to the later flourishing agricultural enterprises.

The Gathering weekend provided a wide range of activities which included workshops, tours, entertainment, great food and plenty of time to network.



The warm, friendly and nurturing tone for this year's Gathering was well set on the Friday night at the local Bowling Club by Wiradjuri Elder, Flo Grant's warm Welcome to Country using her local language, 'Gawaimbann-gu, Wiradjuri Ngurangbaang' and the women's stories told by three extraordinary locals. Each shared their incredible lives and achievements.

Rosie Blachut is an unassuming dynamo. She is a qualified radiographer with an interest in physics and flying. Rosie told her story of how these interests lead to her spending five years building her own plane.

Elizabeth Kirkby originally from the UK came to Australia in 1960s after a diverse career in theatre, radio, television and the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Many may remember her as Lucy in the TV show *Number 96*. Elizabeth then spent 17 years on the NSW Legislative Council. She now runs a farm near Temora.

Writer Felicity Lehmann, was born in the UK and came to Australia as a young child. In 1998 Felicity was one of a group of 10 courageous breast cancer survivors who paddled 1000 kms down the Murray River to raise awareness and funding for breast cancer research.

The program also featured many and varied speakers who took participants on journeys into the worlds of business, health research and ways of developing and extending oneself.

Dr Ann Villiers described herself as a Mental Nutritionist and has written a book called *Gorgeous Daring Dames*. Ann challenged us to think about the way we do things. Using a clothes line she demonstrated the many supposed 'right' and 'correct' ways to peg socks on the line! Participants could easily identify with this analogy and went away with a strong image aimed to make them think about other aspects of their lives where perhaps they need to reassess the way they do things and acknowledge that there can be many approaches to a problem. Ann also talked about the 'pantries' in our minds and the need to take a stock-take now and again to check on our 'jars and packets' of beliefs and values.

Michelle Nugan is the CEO of a very large Griffith-based family business employing over 150 staff. Michelle shared insights gained over the years as she transformed from wife and mother to highly successful business woman, a position she fell into after the untimely death of her husband. Her approach included listening to others and being responsive to change, maintaining core values, building loyalty and trust with staff and using mentors. Michelle believes in giving back to the community and funds leadership programs for women and young people and opens her house each Christmas to elderly residents of Griffith.

Professor Eileen Gallery was born in Ireland and is a highly specialised physician and researcher who studied in Oxford and Australia. Eileen gave an informative presentation in her wonderful Irish lilt called 'Are adult diseases already programmed in the womb?' This generated lots of questions and proved to be a very lively and interactive session.



Workshops covered a wide range of topics from marketing, women's health, essential oils and starting your own business to genetic testing and research, floral art and drought support to name just a few.

The Gathering Dinner featured local produce and wine. The evening also included a fashion parade of woollen scarves and wraps inspired by Wiradjuri designs. They were produced by a group of regional wool producers represented by Diana Gibbs of Cootamundra who won the NSW Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation Rural Woman's Award in 2000.

The men's Partner's Program featured bus tours to surrounding towns and tourist attractions and even attracted a few women who wanted to see more of the region.

Other activities included a cookbook *Teapots and Tractors* launch, a wonderful art exhibit by Heather Valance called 'Conversations with Rural Women' and talented local dancers.

The frosty Sunday morning did not deter the Tai Chi participants or the group assembled for the ecumenical service where a minute silence was taken to remember the Bali bombing victims.

The Gathering was closed by the Director-General of the Department for Women who also lead everyone in some singing.

The finale of the Gathering was the handing over of the candle to the 2004 Women's Gathering Committee. A large number of Coonabarabran women travelled to Temora to experience the event and gather ideas for next year's Gathering. They thanked Temora with a song they had written the evening before.

I feel certain everyone went home floating with memories, new friends and better informed than when they arrived. With 270 participants, 50 presenters and 42 workshops it was a huge achievement so congratulations Temora!





## 12th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Reach for the stars: Holistic health, wealth and wellbeing

Coonabarabran, 17 to 19 September 2004

Reaching for the Stars is such an apt name for the small town of Coonabarabran in the North West of NSW. Not only is it the home of the Siding Springs Observatory but the town really showcased its star qualities at the 2004 Women's Gathering held there.

Co-convenors, Cis Bruce and Liz Fox, along with their hardworking team showed yet again what a small group of dedicated, resourceful and creative rural women can do. They provided participants with a unique opportunity to experience their region's hospitality and, for the many locals to learn more about the talent in their own back paddock.

Many participants this year were first timers and by the end of the weekend were certainly Gathering converts!

Women, and a few men, travelled from far and wide to gain a sense of health, wealth and wellbeing – this year's Gathering themes. We spent time laughing, listening to guest speakers, participating in workshops, enjoying the entertainment and sharing stories.

The Shire Hall became the centre of activity throughout the weekend and registrations began there on Friday afternoon as Gathering participants drove into town. The benefit to the town was obvious. With more than 420 participants all accommodation was booked and the shops stayed open catering for memento hunters.



Friday evening kicked off with an art exhibition featuring over 250 works from across the State. This was followed by an informal networking dinner and an evening of entertainment which included singing *We are Australian* in the Gamilaraay language.

This Indigenous language is slowly being revived and is helping to reinvigorate pride among the local Aboriginal people. Thanks to Maureen Sulter and her daughter, by the end of the Gathering we had all learned a few Gamilaraay words ourselves by doing the Hokey Pokey.

The Older Women's Network Theatre Group strutted and sang their stuff and had many women nodding knowingly as the group on stage dispelled many myths about being old.

Alice Springs Comedian Fiona O'Loughlin, kept up the buoyant fun-filled atmosphere by telling hilarious stories of her childhood car trips across the Hay plains and life as a mother of five.

The Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, NSW Minister for Primary Industries and the Deputy Director-General, Richard Sheldrake, attended the Friday evening and were seen deep in conversation with a number of women as they mingled with the crowd.



## Official Opening

On Saturday morning Maureen Sulter performed a moving Welcome to Country speaking in Gamilaraay language. She was followed by the Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire and the Rural Women's Network Coordinator. The Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, officially opened the Gathering pledging his support for women and announced funding for the next year's event to be hosted by Bega.

Rebecca Arnott, 2004 Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation Rural Women's Award winner gave the keynote address. Rebecca spoke eloquently about her early career and the importance of self-affirmations and establishing support networks and approaching mentors. She challenged everyone to question what they could do if they weren't afraid.

Partners were well catered for too and tours were organised through the weekend to a local orchard, the Warrumbungle National Park, the Observatory and other places of interest.

This year's event also featured forums where we learned from others who have nurtured their rural community through Aboriginal employment programs (Dick Estens, Moree), supporting refugees (Jocelyn Stensen, Mudgee) and inspiring young children to read (Rhonda Brain, Parkes).

Along with nurturing community we were also reminded not to forget to nurture ourselves and listened to moving presentations by local General Practitioner Eve Tsironis, cancer survivor Bronwyn Ward and Sister Patricia Powell.

The array and quality of workshops made choosing a real dilemma and we all wanted to be in 10 places at the same time. There really was something for everyone: from singing and drumming, event management, charcoal drawing and understanding soils to grain marketing, Shaping Our Futures Together and belly dancing.

The Shire Hall was transformed for the Saturday evening Gathering Dinner. A feeling of the night sky was created with black table covers and jars of stars and planets dangling from sticks under a galaxy canopy.



Music was a real feature of this year's Gathering with the Coonabarabran Orbital Swing Band, a local ensemble and country singer Diana Cormie. The Gathering song written by Elizabeth Barkley (Coonabarabran music teacher) encompassed the spirit of Gatherings and the role of women while focusing on the stellar theme. It was sung on numerous occasions through the weekend.

I think to be an astronomer you must also have to be a comedian, as Dr Fred Watson took us on a funny journey back to the big bang and revealed some secrets of the heavens.

Emotions ran high throughout the weekend and culminated in the handing over ceremony. Cis Bruce thanked her team and passed the symbolic lighted candle onto Wilma Chinnock and Dawn Hollins representing the Bega Gathering Committee. Wilma read a lyrical poem written especially for the occasion and inspired us to start planning for a trip to the south east of the State where they will be provided with a coastal experience on the long weekend in October 2005.

One can never forget the food at Gatherings and this year's event again showed how sophisticated rural communities have become by providing five star healthy fare and sweet tempting delicacies, no mean feat with the huge numbers.

Tired but full of new ideas and ways of building health, wealth and wellbeing, rural women travelled to their homes comforted in the thought that Women's Gatherings are alive and well and so important for supporting each other, learning new skills, sharing stories and providing fodder for the soul.

I hope this little report has whetted your appetite for more. For the real Gathering experience then you'll just have to come and experience one for yourself!





## 13th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

*Be all that we can be!*

*Bega, 30 September to 2 October 2005*

Stories and workshops, art, music, dance and theatrics enchanted us from start to finish of the 2006 Women's Gathering hosted by the Bega community on the Far South Coast of NSW.

The glamour of local student 'models' strutting their stuff in exquisite wearable artworks of flowing fabrics, transported us to another world of catwalks reminiscent of New York, London, Paris... and now Bega!

Local singer Arati George entertained us with tunes and we hummed or sang along.

Fling Physical Theatre took us on a surreal journey with larger than life fish, chooks and dingoes (or were they kangaroos?) leaping and dancing across the RSL Club stage and through the audience.

We heard inspiring and powerful stories of local women being all they can be. Carole Broadhead talked about her connections with Chinese peasant weavers through 'LoomGrowers' which supports women to break the poverty cycle. Penny Davies shared her experiences of working in East Timor. Margaret Taylor spoke of her many community projects and books she has authored. Simone Coombes a more recent resident from South Africa, stunned us with her high flying professional achievements in the international business world while raising five children!



We baa-ed like sheep to add flavour to author Jackie French's story-time, and put back our second helping of pavlova when Belinda Green took the stage on the Saturday night to share her journey from humble beginnings to become Miss World. She is now living on a property near Cowra with a goat farmer from Bourke and advocating health living.

Workshops included a broad range of topics. We learned about rituals and rites of passage to reclaiming our life, we found out how to be a better fundraiser, Feng Shui our homes or make soap. And for those wanting to experience the coastal environment up close and personal we jumped on buses with the blokes to tour pristine national parks and paddle on lakes.

An instant choir sang as part of the closing ceremony made up of women from the Bega Gathering singing workshops.

Salsa dancing and the women's group Machitun brought an international flair and exotic flavour while Deirdre's Tappers showed you are never too old to learn new skills.

Janine Epere and her Mum shared a very personal story of struggles and heartache but ultimate triumph over drug addiction. With their strong faith, they now help others find their way through the maze.



Bega Valley Calendar Girls - March (Margaret), October (Margaret) and January (Susan) were found selling calendars. They had stripped off their gear and blended artistically into the landscape to raise money for a local aged care home.

Their stall was snuggled amongst others promoting the Sapphire Coast, providing massage therapy showcasing wool, art, craft and quilting to name just a few of the displays on offer.

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald MLC, pledged \$20,000 in support for the 2006 Women's Gathering. This raised loud hurrahs from the Grafton Committee members who'd travelled from the North Coast. The Minister for Women Sandra Nori also popped in to speak to the crowd. The support from the many generous sponsors must be seen as a positive affirmation and acknowledgement of the hard work of all past Gathering committees who maintain this grassroots movement. Well done! You have continued to show your creativity and tenacity to make things happen despite the obvious challenges.

Over 280 women and men travelled from all over the State and beyond to be in Bega and experience the magic that is a NSW Women's Gathering. I know they all went away feeling inspired and reinvigorated with new friends and skills which will enhance their lives and those around them.



Thank you to Wilma the convenor, 'cupboard' poet extraordinaire and story teller who, along with her fabulous Bega Committee and team of recruited volunteers, provided expert coordination and facilitated memories that will stay with us for a long time. I know many of you are already marking your diaries for Grafton... so I look forward to seeing you there!





## 14th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

### Big river dreaming...

Grafton, 20 to 22 October 2006

It has been a long time since I have experienced a wet weekend where not one single person complained about the weather. Such was the glorious rainy, purple jacaranda setting for the 14th NSW Women's Gathering held in Grafton on the mid North Coast. I overheard many women from west of the Great Dividing Range comment on how just seeing the colour 'green' made them feel better and gave them hope that it could rain.

The Grafton volunteer Gathering committee led by Vicki St Lawrence worked diligently all weekend to ensure everyone had time out from the trials and tribulations of life with their excellent program of diverse workshops, tours and guest speakers.

The Committee were always around to make sure we knew where to go for meals and activities. Dawn the 'incident officer' even swapped her sports shoes for someone who didn't have a pair and wanted to go on the tour to Moleville Rocks, which involved scrambling down a slippery bank to see formations where local tribes would have gathered long ago to sharpen their axes on the edge of the mighty Clarence River.

Local Aboriginal women were strongly involved in this year's Gathering – a tribute to the strong connectedness between women in the area regardless of backgrounds. One group of Elders told us there was a local group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women called 'Magpies'. What a great descriptive name!

Pauline Clague, a Yaegl/Bundjalung woman film maker was a Gathering speaker. She has years of experience with television, film and production, and during her 'time off' mentors others trying to break into the industry. Pauline screened her short



local documentary which highlighted local women and their stories and shared some insights into her diverse career and influences.

The Friday night get-together was a time to recover from our long journeys, meet up with old friends and meet new women who were experiencing a Gathering for the first time. We listened to Mandy Nolan a North Coast comedian who took us on a journey of laughter recounting stories such as how the Byron Bay's up-market and new age society brag about 'swimming with dolphins'... and wondered why we didn't promote 'walking with cows' as a close to nature experience? She shared snippets of life growing up in rural Queensland and 'unpacked' our over-devotion to body image. Watching her struggle her XL size into size 10 jeans as part of her closing performance is something we will not forget.

In Mandy's Plan to Laugh workshop, rural women aged 30-80 showed just how funny life can be. Their skits had other workshop participants trembling with belly laughs. There is much to be said about the health benefits of a good belly laugh and over the weekend I heard many of those!

On Saturday morning we were welcomed by three Elders from the Budjalung, Gumbaingirr and Yaegl nations along with the Deputy Mayor, Shirley Adams.

The Chair of the Premiers Council for Women and I also addressed the crowd acknowledging rural women's resilience and the importance of Gatherings for renewal and networking.



Ian Macdonald MLC, Minister for Primary Industries, Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Minerals performed the official 2006 Gathering opening and provided an insight into the impact of drought and government measures being taken to assist rural communities. He also launched a new Rural Women's Network book, *Daring to Dream* (DTD). DTD is a tribute to the many women from rural, regional and remote backgrounds who have dared to take the plunge, set goals and overcome challenges to make their dreams happen. The Minister reinforced the government's strong commitment by pledging \$30,000 for the 2007 Gathering being hosted by Hay.



Along with the array of workshops on topics as diverse as climate change, learning your face shape to cultural awareness and leadership, women had the opportunity to chat to services providers. There were also trade stands where we could indulge in a little 'retail therapy' with the many local women selling their wares.

Saturday afternoon was a time to sit back and check out what Grafton had to offer, take a tour on the river or visit some Aboriginal sites with knowledgeable guides.

That night everyone frocked up, kicked back and enjoyed a lovely meal at the restaurant by the racetrack. The evening included more comedy followed by wonderful music from a local women's group 'La Bia La Zuli' who also had the late stayers belly dancing.

On Sunday, Jenny Hutson, Grafton girl 'made good', gave insights into the machinations of being a Director on a publicly listed company, taking us through her passion for 'the deal' and how she manages to juggle work/family and life's changing priorities.

This year's closing ceremony included handing on the 'candle baton' to the four Hay women lead by convenor, Tertia Butcher. Tertia invited everyone to experience the friendliness of their small outback town. She assured us that despite a population of only 3000 they have lots of beds, history and a free public swimming pool!

Sandra Nori MP, Minister for Tourism & Sport and Recreation, and Minister for Women closed the Gathering and congratulated all rural women for keeping families and communities together especially during such times of struggle and drought.

In true Gathering style the closing ceremony included some impromptu performances from the singing, drumming and belly dancing workshops where women showed what they had learned to rousing applause.



So another Gathering is over but the good news is that you can relive some of the moments thanks to Project Sprout - an interactive training project in citizen journalism. The small Sprout team (three participants pictured) worked constantly over the weekend and produced 34 videos, 26 pod casts, 14 articles and 48 images with stories... all written, recorded and edited by 14 novice women and their seven mentors. For those unable to get to Grafton or those who would like to know more about Women's Gatherings we now have this fantastic resource. To find out more visit: [www.projectsprout.com.au](http://www.projectsprout.com.au)

Major sponsors of this year's Gathering were the NSW Department of Primary Industries, TAFE NSW, Bendigo Bank and Vicki St Lawrence Consulting. Of course there were lots of other minor sponsors who gave either in-kind or donated goods or money. Gatherings would not happen without this wonderful support and on behalf of NSW rural women we thank them all.



## 15th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Contribute - create - collect - curate

Hay, 2 to 4 November 2007

By Sonia Muir, RWN

When Hay announced the dates for the 2007 NSW Women's Gathering hosted by Women About Hay, most of us thought it would be hot and dusty... well the drought may not have broken but the wet weather brought a returned sense of hope and the 260 plus participants cared little about getting a bit drenched now and again although the Sunday ecumenical service tested our resilience! Who would have thought we'd need to pack ski gear for a November weekend in the outback.

The service was held in a private garden at a stunning river bend location. The singing, inspirational words spoken and spirit of camaraderie among women who had travelled from across the state helped us cope with the arctic winds sweeping across the plains.



On Saturday morning Verity Firth, the Minister for Women, spoke to the crowd about important issues for women. She was enthusiastic about her first Gathering experience in Hay and reconfirmed The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald's, commitment to future Gatherings by pledging \$30,000 for the next Gathering to be hosted by Coonamble in October 2008. Ms Firth spent a number of hours engaging with women and learning first hand about their concerns.

Friday evening was a chance to recuperate from long journeys, meet new friends and reconnect with others. A festive marquee was erected at the Waradgerly Club as the main High School venue had been damaged a few months earlier.

As part of Friday night's program a group of young local women dressed in black, performed a short play called 'Eyes Down' which introduced a shocking history lurking within the walls of the Hay Gaol.

The Gaol, now a museum, had been a girl's reform institution up until 1974. Keynote speaker, Christina Green was a past 'resident' of the Hay Institute for Girls. She showed incredible courage as she revealed horror stories of injustice and abuse.

Christina was taken away from her family at the age of three and spent the next decade and a half on a rollercoaster ride of foster care and institutions. Her tale was both enthralling and very sad but showed how healing is possible with strong determination and support from others. It certainly made us forget the drought for a while. I was also grateful to reflect on my own fortunate childhood and be reminded to always look for the good in situations and focus on the positives in life.

The Saturday evening 60s and 70s fancy dress theme and fashion parade featured an array of wild hair dos, crimplene suits, short and long 'frocks' and even the once ubiquitous jumpsuit. The cast of local models led by the incredibly funny compere provided many belly laughs and gasps of horror as past 'statements' were brought vividly back to life.



The array of workshops included visits to Hay landmarks such as the historic Bishop's Lodge and the more quirky Westhaven property. Other workshops provided opportunities to explore creative potential by making mosaics, arranging flowers or painting landscapes. Heritage walkers returned from their stroll around town with a greater understanding of the past and much Hay mud caked on their shoes. Women experienced kinesiology, learned to belly dance, how to use a digital camera and do simple car mechanics. There was something for everybody.

There was also an opportunity to learn about local Aboriginal culture and customs from workshop presenter Gubba Woods a local Waradgery man.



I gave a presentation on the 4th World Congress of Rural Women held in South Africa (April 2007) on Sunday morning before the Gathering handover ceremony. This aimed to provide a global picture of rural women's issues and inform participants of the next Congress being hosted by India (2010).



Congratulations to Tertia Butcher and the Women About Hay team who have been working for months to design this year's successful event and made everyone feel so warmly welcomed. As women drove home in every direction I know they go back to their families and communities with new stories, more energy and secure in the knowledge that they are not alone and have developed some extra skills and inspiration to face challenges that lie ahead.



Gatherings are events where you make a multitude of new friends and contacts. For me it is an opportunity I relish as I get to put faces to names and meet with a diversity of women from across the State.

If you have never experienced the unique opportunity to learn and gain strength from others, become motivated and revitalised by a NSW Women's Gathering, then don't miss your chance next year by marking the date on your calendar. Gatherings are open to all women and I look forward to perhaps meeting you in Coonamble next year!

Special thanks to all the many generous sponsors and especially to NSW DPI Drought program, The Uniting Church, The Salvation Army, CWA of NSW, TAFE NSW, Lower Murray Darling Catchment Authority and Department of Community Services who provided special assistance which enabled over 70 women to attend the Hay Gathering.





## 16th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Looking back... moving forward

Coonamble, 17 to 19 October 2008

By Sonia Muir, RWN

A symphony of zippers heralded the start to this year's Women's Gathering as women emerged from their tents at the Coonamble Gathering 'village'.

This was the first year such an innovative approach to meeting accommodation needs of participants had been explored and the organising committee need to be congratulated for their courage and creativity. Most women agreed the village provided extra opportunities to engage in valuable networking. Over 300 women travelled from all corners of the

Jean Hamilton gave the Welcome to Country followed by a series of short talks from sponsors and dignitaries including the Minister for Women Verity Firth who is now becoming a regular face at rural women's gatherings.

Verity announced NSW Government support for the 2009 NSW Women's Gathering guaranteeing \$40,000 in funding to the appreciative audience.

Keynote speakers included Dr Carol Liston who told fascinating stories about the hidden history of some amazing Australian women.



state to experience Coonamble's outback hospitality.

2008 Gathering chair Amanda Colwell and her small team of dynamic volunteers provided spectacular warm days, cool nights and a weekend of delights ranging from informative and entertaining speakers to many workshop learning and information exchange opportunities.

Friday night was the time to relax after long journeys on the first floor verandah of the historic Commercial Hotel. We were greeted with a cocktail before the warm welcomes and music by two talented women musicians. The women on the Mildura bus were the last to leave the dance floor despite spending 14 hours getting there!

I began Saturday with Tai Chi on the lawn and a quick whiz around the excellent trade stalls before settling in to listen to speakers in the High School Multipurpose Centre.





## 17th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Make tracks to Junee

Junee, 18 to 20 September 2009

*By Joy Beames, Dunedoo, Member of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee*

This was my first gathering and what a wonderful weekend it proved to be. The Junee Women's Gathering Committee led by Gail Commens and her pink-shirted team did an absolutely fabulous job and are to be congratulated.

The whole town became involved in one way or another – catering, setting up or just generally assisting wherever needed.

Friday night was an excellent start to the weekend.

A BBQ and wine tasting provided by two of the local wineries were held in a marquee at the local high school.

Mayor Lola Cummins, hobbling on crutches, welcomed over 400 of us who had 'made tracks' to Junee and provided some background to the town's history and challenges. She also reminded us that it is OK to sometimes put ourselves first and not be the one to always eat the burnt chop after serving everyone else first!



A regional women's choir later led a sing-along of *We are Australian*, so the positive mood for the entire weekend was well established early on.

Saturday morning saw about 100 gatherers attend a Poet's Breakfast hosted at the historic Broadway Museum. I was most impressed with their array of talent and in particular 'The Limping Poet' Neil Smith who also emceed the Saturday night gathering dinner.

Jo Wilson-Ridley from Coleambally, attending the Gathering for the first time, also bravely took to the podium to recite a poem she had written especially for the Junee Women's Gathering.

Back in the marquee, Aboriginal Elder Isobel Reid warmly welcomed us to Wiradjuri Country before the official opening by Nerida Cullen, Co-chair of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee and past Junee high school teacher.

Nerida was a most interesting speaker and the figures she produced about the lack of women on boards were really most disturbing.

The next speaker was ex local girl Kerryn Macauley who enthralled us with her life story. She started by saying she was really just an ordinary person, however, she proved to have lived an extraordinary life.

Kerryn has packed an immense amount of experiences into her 40 something years including teaching and becoming a commercial pilot. Her current role is as one of Australia's foremost air crash investigators!



We then heard from Toni Nugent – a young woman who grew up near Junee – she began our journey of inspiration as she shared stories of being a crew member on the Young Endeavour ship and establishing the Desperate Farmwives group in Tarcutta to organise social get togethers for farming families.

Over 50 workshops were offered in three sessions throughout the weekend - such a choice.

These included - climate change; colour coding and fashion; bread making; line dancing; creative writing; becoming a grey nomad; mosaics; silk and fabric painting; meditation through yoga, to name but a few.

I enjoyed having the chance to try things that I have wanted to do but had not had the opportunity.

The tutors were very professional and knowledgeable – we all had a ball learning and chatting together.



Pink bubbly was served at pre-dinner drinks on Saturday night in keeping with the breast cancer awareness theme. Over \$800 dollars was raised on the night for this worthy cause.

The entertainment was enjoyable and varied including a very talented local classical ballet troupe and the spectacular internationally acclaimed BJ Bandits line dancers.

Neil Smith was again very entertaining... including an entrance as his alter ego bowling mother Eilean!

Richard Sheldrake, Director-General of Industry & Investment NSW addressed the crowd and announced the ongoing support for rural women by the NSW Government with a \$42,500 funding package for the 2010 Wentworth Gathering.

Ella James a comedian, has notched up 20 years in the Australian media including being the voice on our satellite navigation systems. She had everyone exercising their laughing muscles.

Her recipe for happiness was to ensure we all have someone to love, something to do and something to look forward to.

The evening concluded with some great dance music and women were able to really let their hair down.

After breakfast on Sunday morning an ecumenical service was held in the marquee with the gathering – 'making tracks' theme woven beautifully through the service.

Petrea King was the final motivational speaker who led us in a 10 minute group meditation. She spoke of ways to build resilience and appreciate our lives by taking responsibility and committing to really appreciating and loving life on a daily basis, developing challenges and building connections.

Petrea is the Founding Director and CEO of the Quest for Life Foundation and bestselling author of many books and CDs.

A large area was devoted to displays of information and goods we could visit throughout the weekend.

Most were set up Friday afternoon so any early birds were able to sample their wares before the crowds arrived.

Extra optional tours allowed time to visits local attractions such as the Junee Locomotive Roundhouse Museum, Liquorice Factory and Monte Cristo Historic House.

Men accompanying their partners were also well looked after with a men's program so they too had a great time and experienced the value of networking and taking time out.

I thoroughly enjoyed my weekend and am looking forward to next year.

I recommend it to everyone and hope to meet you wander west to Wentworth.





## 18th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

### Wander West to Wentworth...

Wentworth, 29 to 31 October 2010

*By Patty Byrnes, Rural Women's Council member, Pooncarrie*

I wandered West Friday afternoon, crossing the Tuckers Creek and Darling River bridges adorned with big, bright bows and into the historic port town of Wentworth.

The town was a-buzz as over 400 ladies ventured to South West NSW for the 18th annual women's gathering weekend. Even the Wentworth Club palm trees were 'dressed to impress'.



As I made my way to the registration desk I passed huge wool baskets filled with hessian lilies and poppies looked stunning and gave a hint of the pastoral history of our region using bountiful creativity.

'Tastes of Sunraysia' gave us time to have a chat and enjoy pre-dinner drinks next to the Darling river before Dianne Pollard, Chair of the Wentworth Rural Women's Gathering Committee welcomed everyone to the gathering.

White tablecloths with stenciled station names covered auditorium tables decorated with skeins of wool, knitting needles and grape 'dip tins' centre pieces filled with citrus to highlight the all important wool and horticultural industries of the region. It didn't take long for women to get busy and start knitting!

Dozens of flying galahs encircled the auditorium walls and many 'flew' off to new homes with ladies on Sunday.

Friday night's entertainment showcased some of the energetic and very talented local artists, including singers Clancy Griffiths from Pan Ban Station and Holly Weinert.



Raywin Jamieson, the Merbein Guide Leader and past Sunraysia Region Leader, spoke of the important role Girl Guides have played throughout history.

Desiree Baynes, a Bronze medal winner in the women's double trap at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 and Gold medal winner in the women's trap pairs at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, was born and raised in the Sunraysia. She allowed us the privilege of holding her medals and to get a real insight into the Games experience.

Saturday's program commenced with a moving welcome to country by Raeleen Wattata-Drummond who wished all her 'sisters' (women) a memorable weekend in Barkindji country. As a lasting memento Raeleen left a basket of beautiful individually hand painted gum leaves as a token of friendship.

Mayor, Marg Thomson welcomed visitors to the Wentworth Shire then Nerida Cullen, the Co-Chair of the NSW Rural Women's Council gave an overview into the role of the Council and the Rural Women's Network.

Keynote speaker Susan Chase was the South Australian Telstra Business Women of the Year 2009. Susan gave us an insight into the running of a male-dominated power business and revealed how she overcame big hurdles to create a now very successful company.

The rain came down on Saturday but the enthusiasm kept on growing and didn't even stop the kayakers taking to the water and enjoying some of the more physical workshops on offer.

I learnt to colour a silk scarf and the skill of basket weaving. To my surprise my basket is still looking like a basket and hasn't unravelled... yet anyway!

I also made a couple of necklaces and came away with plenty of ideas to revamp some of my more 'tired' jewellery. There was so much variety in workshop choice and something for everyone.

Over 30 trade exhibits and 39 workshops operated over the weekend at the lovely Wentworth school and provided plenty for everyone to see and do.

Even the men had plenty to keep them engaged including listening to the speakers, going on tours and there was even a butchering demonstration on Sunday morning.

The rain eased in the afternoon and we had a couple of hours of free time to discover more of Wentworth, put our feet up and get ready to 'rock n roll' the night away.

The club served pre-dinner drinks and appetizers using local produce overlooking the ancient Darling River.

Special guests included Minister for Primary Industries The Hon Steve Whan MP.

Many of the ladies got into the spirit of Saturday night's theme and dressed in 1950's style.

Twenty eight sponsors mingled and chatted before moving into the auditorium for another night to remember.

Gathering decorator and artist in charge, Marg Whyte, again displayed her creative talents and imagination. Her 'emu' dinner place mats design original was raffled at the end of the Gathering.

Table centerpieces were huge bowls of large pink baubles and contrasting grey sprigs of saltbush. Who would have guessed that the beautiful baubles were spray painted paddy melons – the cropper's scourge.

The Minister officially opened the Gathering during the evening and announced \$42,500 of funding for next year's gathering.

He also launched the inaugural Hidden Treasures Honour Roll for 2010 acknowledging the efforts of NSW rural women volunteers. Three of these special ladies were present at the dinner and were personally thanked by the Minister.

A magnificent dinner featuring local lamb and chicken, Sunraysia wines and delicious sweets incorporating local fruit and nuts had taste buds working overtime.

What a night's entertainment that followed! I haven't laughed so much for years. 'Ratbagz – six young locals performed their very own rendition of the musical Grease. Their 'Greece is da word' version provided entertainment that you would normally have to travel to the city to see. Who's got talent? They've got talent.

Sunday morning's big breakfast got us all off to a good start for the final round of workshops.

The Ecumenical Service was held in the beautiful old 1871 St John's Anglican Church, the first church erected on the banks of the Darling River. The materials for the church were brought to the site by barge and include locally made bricks.

Gradually we wandered back to the Wentworth Club to leave a little something on the 'gate of remembrance', buy a last minute raffle ticket and prepare for home.

Brownyn Roberts, the final speaker gave a 'Lets Laugh' presentation and had us in raptures, wiggling our pointer fingers and learning the value of laughing for wellbeing.

Dianne Pollard gave a closing address and thanked her very dedicated, hard-working and well-travelled committee of 16 ladies and 40 volunteers for a mighty effort.

Di has now handed over the gathering candle nestled in local Perry Sandhill soil to Julie Lyford, President of the 2011 Gloucester rural Women's Gathering Committee dressed in lilac.

Julie introduced her committee members and invited us all to meet again at Gloucester fro 14-16 October 2011.

I left with a tear in my eye after saying goodbyes to new and old friends. It was a wonderful weekend.





## 19th ANNUAL WOMEN'S GATHERING

# Friendship & dreaming beneath the Bucketts

Gloucester, 14 to 16 October 2011

By Emma Regan, RWN Project Coordinator

This was to be my first Women's Gathering, and I was looking forward to it with much anticipation. As I drove into the beautiful Gloucester Valley at the base of the World Heritage Barrington Tops Rainforest, you could tell something was in the air. The town was buzzing with excitement as over 300 ladies had travelled to Gloucester to experience the wonderful community spirit. They were looking forward to having some down time and to exchange knowledge and information with other like-minded women, increasing their confidence, and learning new skills.

The wonderful community spirit was evident from the moment of registration where each person was welcomed personally by one of the Committee members and presented with a unique hand printed scarf to commemorate the Gathering.

Friday we were free to explore Gloucester Shire before we gathered under the marquee for Tastes of Gloucester to savour locally produced finger food and wine. Julie Lyford, Chair of the Gloucester Rural Women's Gathering Committee, welcomed everyone. This was followed by the Welcome to Country Smoking Ceremony, led by Auntie Norma.

Guests sampling locally produced wines Friday night's entertainment showcased some of Gloucester's entertaining and very talented local poets, including Claire Reynolds, Gabby Colquhoun and Wyatt Hall – Gloucester's very own up and coming young poet. We thoroughly enjoyed both Wyatt and Claire's poetry and were left in stitches of laughter from Gabby's hilarious and clever comedic poetry!



After a restful sleep there was opportunity the following morning for some early morning healthy lifestyle activities including: the Birds of Gloucester walk: a walk up the Bucketts or tai chi in the park.

Saturday got off to a great start with free time to enjoy the many trade exhibitions. We then convened to the main hall for the Welcome to Country and Official Opening Address from the Rural Women's Network.

Nerida Cullen, the Co-Chair of the NSW Rural Women's Council gave a comprehensive and passionate overview into the role of the Council and the Rural Women's Network.

A highlight of the weekend was the official opening of the Gathering and the announcement of \$30,000 funding for this year's gathering at Parkes 12-14 October 2012, by Mr Troy Grant, Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources. He also launched the 2012 Hidden Treasures Honour Roll, acknowledging the efforts of NSW rural women volunteers.



Keynote Speaker, Lauren Anderson, then spoke to us on the Collaborative Consumption movement she is pioneering. Collaborative Consumption is the rapid explosion in swapping, sharing, bartering, trading and renting being reinvented through the latest technologies and peer-to-peer marketplaces in ways and on a scale never possible before.



A lovely morning tea of home-made cooking fuelled our bellies for the day ahead! The marquee was busy with new and old networks connecting.

After morning tea we were given an inspiring presentation by Father Chris Riley which allowed everyone the opportunity to provide input, ideas and inspiration for his important youth work.



Lunch and trade exhibition in the marquee was followed by the afternoon workshops. This was a chance for everyone to enjoy themselves learning a new skill and having a bit of fun. The workshops on offer ranged from art for beginners and bee-keeping, to cheese making and lead lighting, from photo editing and mind mapping! With over 30 trade exhibits and 39 workshops operating over the weekend there was plenty for everyone to see and do. Even the men had workshops to keep them engaged!

A magnificent dinner was on the agenda for Saturday Night. The evening started with pre-dinner drinks and some enjoyable singing by the local choir. This was followed by the Gondwana Rainforest Dinner. The sumptuous, locally grown food and wine was magnificent. The atmosphere was set with white tablecloths adorned with centrepieces of wooden candle holders crafted by local men from the Men's Shed.

During the evening we were privileged to enjoy the amazing inspirational life story of Guest Speaker Lorna Tomkinson. She gave us an insight into her life growing up in different parts of the world, often in difficult circumstances and the challenges her family faced.

Many of the ladies got into the spirit of Saturday night's theme and dressed in their favourite House of Vinnies frock. Prizes were awarded for the best dressed ... this provided all with a step back in time of the wonderful array of fashion over the years!

Sunday morning provided another opportunity for some early morning healthy lifestyle activities. The Ecumenical Service

was held at the Gloucester Primary School – Reflecting and Connecting Under the Bucketts.

This was followed by keynote speaker Elizabeth Rogers, CEO Regional Arts NSW Arts & Culture, who provided an overview of her Vital Communities work. This was followed by another lovely morning tea and trade exhibition in the marquee.

On returning to the hall we were then inspired and motivated by the final Keynote Speaker of the Gathering – Mahboba Rawi. Mahboba's Promise was born from one woman's suffering to free herself from depression by working to relieve the desperate circumstances of others.

The weekend wound to a close with Julie Lyford's closing address in which she thanked her very dedicated and hard-working committee volunteers for a wonderful community effort to ensure everyone had time out from the trials and tribulations of life with their excellent program of diverse workshops, tours and guest speakers.

She then handed over the gathering candle to President of the 2012 Parkes Rural Women's Gathering Committee, Caroline Rice. Caroline introduced her committee members and invited us to the Parkes Gathering on 14–16 October 2012.

I left with a renewed energy and inspiration from the wonderful speakers. All in all it was a fantastic weekend and I am looking forward to repeating the adventure at Parkes this year!

I will finish by quoting a lovely thank you letter received from one of the ladies who attended the Gloucester Gathering:

*Thank you for a truly amazing and inspiring weekend! That really doesn't do it justice. It was just SO WONDERFUL! The management of this wonderful event was superb. Every detail was covered ... I couldn't get over how the meals were so perfect – nothing cold and nothing over-cooked. And everything was yummy!*

*The speakers were of impeccable standard. I have started spreading the word about the Gathering and the speakers – Social Media is a wonderful thing! I purchased this week's Gloucester Advocate and saw myself on page 6!*

*I was so inspired I couldn't sleep when I returned home on Sunday. Without your generosity this wouldn't have been possible.*

