



# Women Toward Sustainability E-Leaders 2015

---

A Evaluative Report into  
Online Leadership, Learning and  
Networking for Rural Women

*The Path to Great Advocacy*

*Webinar Series*



## Contents

About the National Rural Women's Coalition	3
From the NRWC President	4
Executive Summary	5
About the Data Gathering Tool – The Weekly <i>Reflections</i> Survey	7
Evidence of E-Leaders Growth of Skills and Knowledge	8
E-Leaders Participation	12
About the E-Leaders	12
The Resilient Leader – Benita Bensch	13
Leadership in Action – Bianca Jurd	15
Nurturing Relationships and Communication Management – Julia Telford	22
Media, Communication and Working in the Political Arena – Victoria Taylor	29
Conclusion	32
Acknowledgements	33



## About The National Rural Women's Coalition

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) works to support and grow vibrant rural, remote and regional Communities throughout Australia. The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) provides a collaborative national voice for women living in rural, regional and remote Australia by:

- Representing the diverse views of women in rural, regional and remote Australia.
- Providing advice to the Australian Government on policy issues relevant to the views and circumstances of rural women.
- Contributing to building a positive profile of rural women, their achievements and issues.

The core activities of the NRWC centre on:

- Advocacy for women.
- Influencing policy and decision-making.
- Building capacity within women's organizations and for rural, remote and regional women.
- Reflecting the diversity of the women's sector.
- Delivering innovative leadership projects. More information at [www.nrwc.com.au](http://www.nrwc.com.au)

Current NRWC Directors representing the Australian Local Government Women's Association; Australian Women in Agriculture; Country Women's Association of Australia; National Rural Health Alliance; Women's Industry Network Seafood Community; one rural Aboriginal Woman and one Independent Director, bring with them a wealth of experiences, awards, qualifications and passion to enrich the lives of rural, remote and regional women.

The 2015 E-Leaders Program was funded by the Office for Women in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet through the National Women's Alliance Gender Equality for Women Program.





## From the NRWC President

Welcome to another National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) E-Leaders Program.

The NRWC has offered E-Leaders courses to rural, remote and regional women since 2011. Women from all over Australia are given the opportunity each year to develop and strengthen their leadership skills so they can represent themselves, their communities and industries; have their voices heard and work towards building a vibrant, sustainable and viable future for rural, remote and regional Australia.

To overcome the isolation rural women experience, and the distance associated with caregivers leaving home, business and family to travel to attend training and information sessions, the NRWC has embraced emerging technologies as a tool to offer short web-conferencing webinars to these women.

The web conferencing software used is free for participants and allows for open and collaborative communication and proven to foster strong networks amongst the women who join the sessions. You do need an internet connection and a headset is an advantage.

In 2015, the NRWC offered an online E-Leaders webinar course over the period March to May, on a weekly basis, The *Path to Great Advocacy* Webinar series.

The NRWC Directors acknowledge the wonderful work of Karen Tully and Kerry Suttor whose combined expertise, initiative and leadership skills have delivered an amazing program as we shared the experiences and practices of the facilitators: Benita Bensch, a resilient leader; Bianca Jurd, a leader in action; Julia Telford, a nurturer of relationships and communication management and Victoria Taylor, a media and communicator in the political arena – such a wealth of talent. And, of course, the success of the series was enriched by the commitment and involvement of the participants.

We invite you not only to share the journey along the pathway to leadership and advocacy but also encourage you to support rural women wherever you find them.

Enjoy reading and sharing our report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Hamilton".

Dr Patricia Hamilton  
President – NRWC

## Executive Summary

The *Path to Great Advocacy* Report has been compiled to provide a snapshot record of the event for the purposes of informing funding agencies (e.g. the Office for Women and National Rural Women's Coalition) as well as being a memento of this truly inspirational and memorable event for the E-Leaders. It identifies the process of the program and introduces the reader to the presenters and the reflective thoughts of the attendees.

The program has given women the ability to grow their own leadership skills, enhance their rural businesses (often in the food and fibre production areas) and build capacity in their communities (particularly with not-for-profit groups). Rural Australia, industries and communities benefit immensely as a result of this unique opportunity where women have gained skills without having to leave home.

Twenty rural, remote and regional women from all corners of Australia were able to interact in a virtual classroom and network with other women. There were 78 applications received from rural women from all over Australia apply to participate in the program, and twenty women were accepted after a rigorous merit selection process had been completed. Of these twenty women, eighteen regularly attended the webinar sessions.

Throughout the course, women were invited to provide feedback on the course in the form of 'weekly reflections' and it is these weekly reflections from which the majority of the data for this report was captured. However, pre and post surveys were completed by the women to gauge knowledge and skill levels in generic leadership areas. Quotes taken directly from the surveys are written in italics throughout this report.

There were eleven formal learning sessions offered in 2015, and the average attendance was 8 sessions per e-leader. This included two formal group mentoring and discussion sessions with recognized rural women of significance, as well as a welcome session at the start of the program.

The growth in learning in different generic leadership skills and knowledge sets can be measured by the following data:

**Being a Resilient Leader** – At the start of the course, 36% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to be a resilient leader. Upon completion, 94% had the skills to be a resilient leader.

**Effective Leadership Skills** – Only 21% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to take action that would inform effective and courageous leadership prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.

**Effective Interpersonal Relationships** – There were no E-Leaders who rates themselves as having strong skills or knowledge that would enable them as a leader to build and nurture effective interpersonal relationships at the start of the course. By the end of the course, 100% of women believed they had this understanding.



**Effective and Efficient Communication Skills** – Prior to the course, 57% of women rates themselves as having skills in managing a range of effective and efficient communications. By the end of the course, 100% of women had skills in this area.

**Media and Advocacy** - E-leaders were asked to self-assess their level of skills and knowledge on their ability to work as a leader with the media and present strong verbal cases for advocacy and sharing and at the start of the course, only 14% agreed that they had skills in this area. At completion, 100% self-assessed themselves as having skills at fostering effective working relationships.

**Effective Media and Communication Skills for Working in Political Arena** – Only 7% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to work with media and communicate in the political arena prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.

**Leadership in a Rural Setting** – At the start of the course, 43% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to take the actions required to be a strong and effective leader in a rural setting. Upon completion, 100% had the skills to be a rural leader.

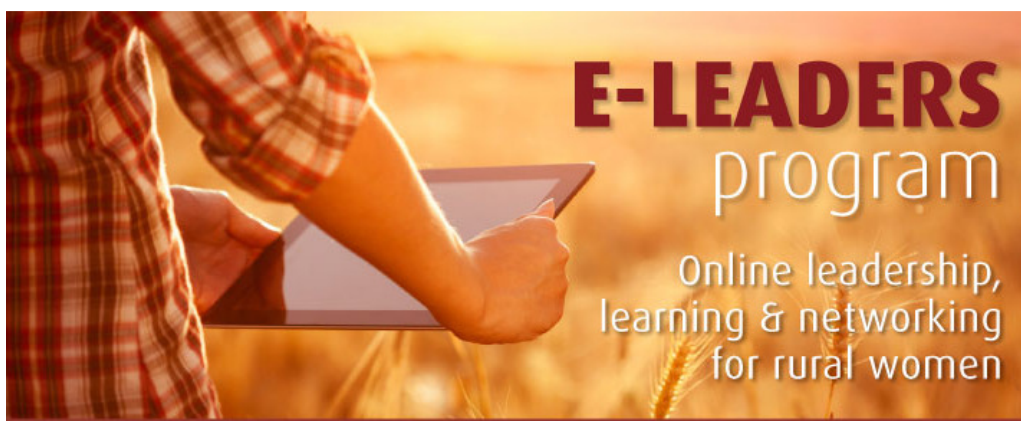
## About the Data Gathering Tool - the Weekly “Reflections” Survey

The NRWC Program Manager undertook the evaluation to develop a process which critically examined the E-Leaders – The Path to Great Advocacy Webinar Series program in order to improve the effectiveness of e-leaders and to inform the funding agency (Office for Women).

An ongoing weekly evaluation process was employed to collect information about the impact of the E-Leaders content upon the participants. This enabled the NRWC to identify areas for improvements as the course unfolded. Summative evaluations were also undertaken once the course was completed to determine the extent that the E-Leaders program had achieved its goals.

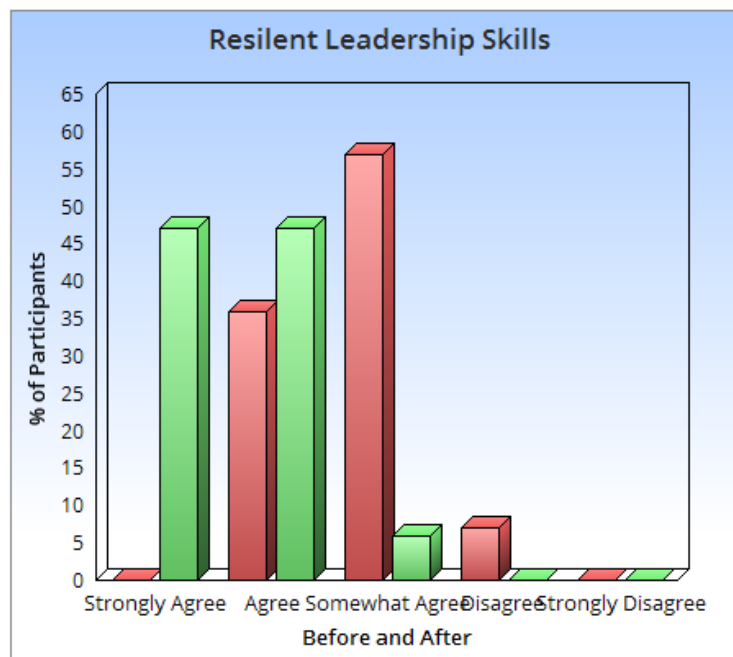
After each webinar, the Program Manager used a customised survey administered by survey monkey and invited E-Leaders to undertake reflection and provide feedback on the session. A desirable trait of effective leaders and rural advocates is that they are reflective practitioners. The survey comprised of 5 questions, thus ensuring that the time commitment to complete the survey was not too onerous. The surveys contained selected response items using a Likert scale, with four or more options presented as well as open-ended items for which the respondent constructed the response. The five questions were ordered in a straightforward and logical manner. Responses were anonymous unless participants chose to identify themselves. The responses were then collated and shared with the group so that the reflections contributed to the group learning. This process could be likened to the debrief chat after a meeting or lecture – however it was done virtually.

At the conclusion of the E-Leaders Program, the Program Manager collated the findings to inform this report. This report will be used to inform the Office for Women and future strategic and operational planning for the National Rural Women’s Coalition.

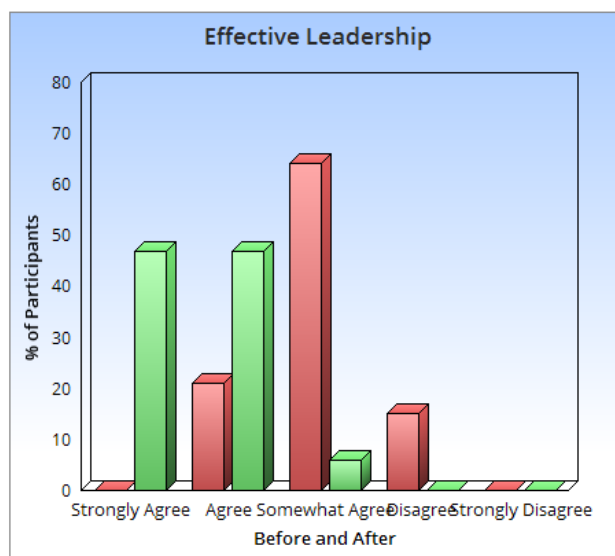


## Evidence of E-Leaders Growth of Skills and Knowledge

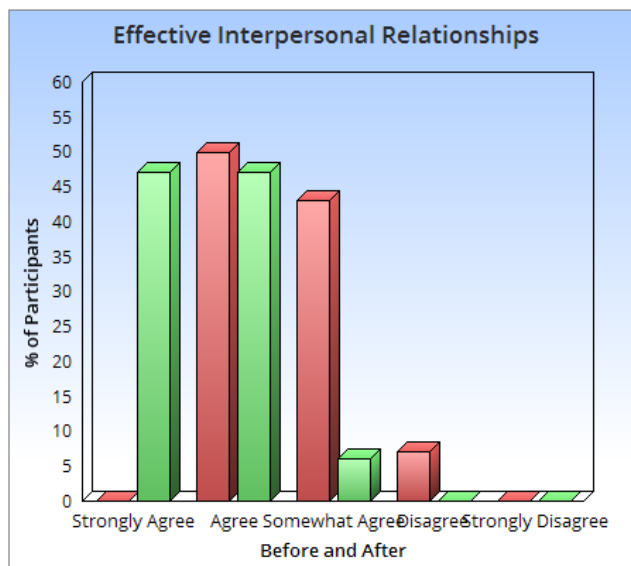
A longitudinal study was undertaken which asked e-leader participants to self-assess their level of skills and knowledge in certain areas. In this trend study, questions were asked of e-leaders prior to the start of the course, and after course completion. These two surveys measured the growth of skills and knowledge of the e-leaders from start to close of the course. The result of the pre and post E-Leaders skills and knowledge are captured here.



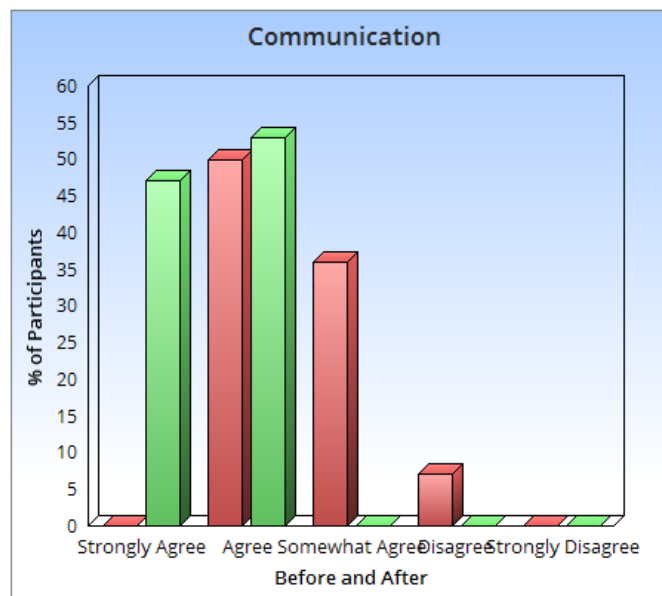
**Being a Resilient Leader** – At the start of the course, 36% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to be a resilient leader. Upon completion, 94% had the skills to be a resilient leader.



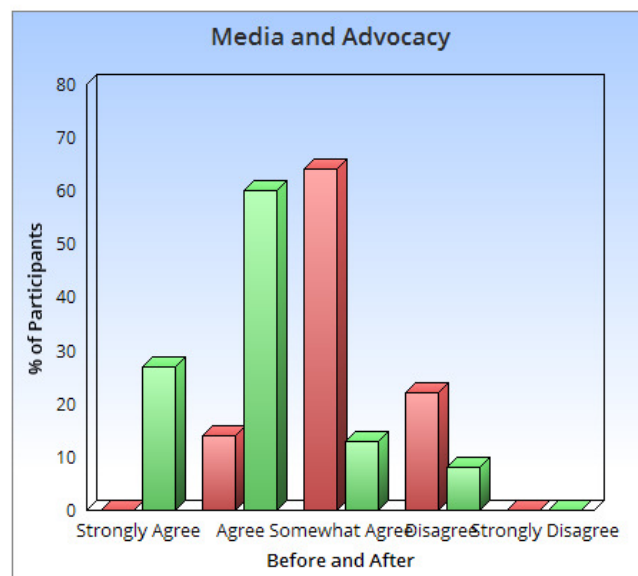
**Effective Leadership Skills** – Only 21% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to take action that would inform effective and courageous leadership prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.



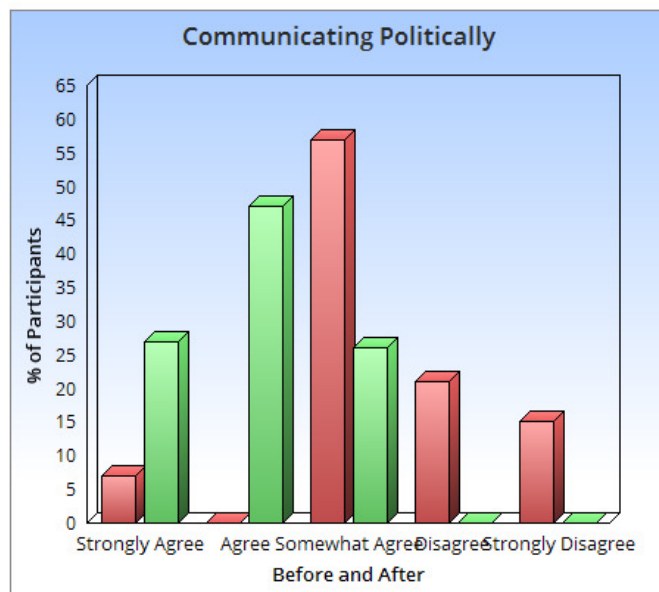
**Effective Interpersonal Relationships** – There were no E-Leaders who rates themselves as having strong skills or knowledge that would enable them as a leader to build and nurture effective interpersonal relationships at the start of the course. By the end of the course, 100% of women believed they had this understanding.



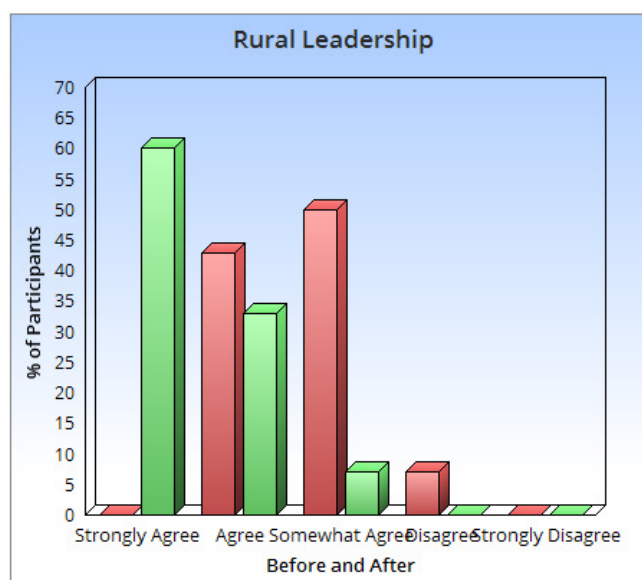
**Effective and Efficient Communication Skills** – Prior to the course, 57% of women rates themselves as having skills in managing a range of effective and efficient communications. By the end of the course, 100% of women had skills in this area.



**Media and Advocacy** - E-leaders were asked to self-assess their level of skills and knowledge on their ability to work as a leader with the media and present strong verbal cases for advocacy and sharing and at the start of the course, only 14% agreed that they had skills in this area. At completion, 100% self-assessed themselves as having skills at fostering effective working relationships.



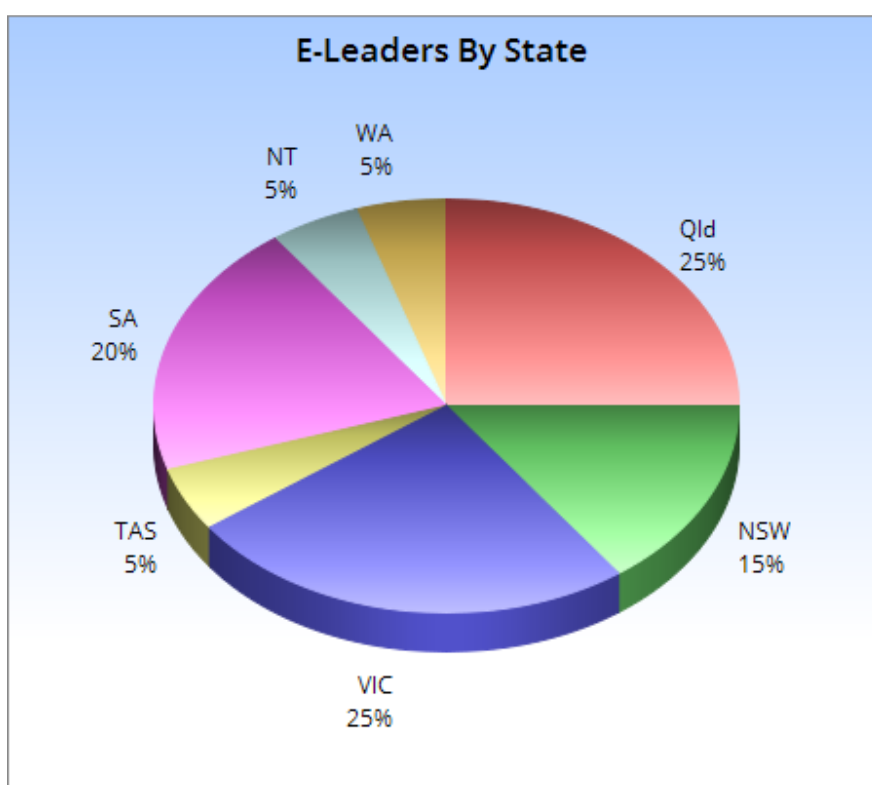
**Effective Media and Communication Skills for Working in Political Arena** – Only 7% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to work with media and communicate in the political arena prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.



**Leadership in a Rural Setting** – At the start of the course, 43% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to take the actions required to be a strong and effective leader in a rural setting. Upon completion, 100% had the skills to be a rural leader.

## About the E-Leaders

There were 78 applications received to do the webinar series. The twenty women who were selected to undertake *The Path to Great Advocacy* Webinar Series were a mix of women who had previously participated in E-Leaders sessions (known as E-Leaders Alumnae) and women who were new to the National Rural Women’s Coalition E-Leaders courses. Seven of the 20 participants were alumnae who were wishing to continue their leadership journey and grow their advocacy skills. Of these seven women, 4 had completed the 2014 – 2015 Women Towards Sustainability E-Leaders; 2 had completed the 2014 Social Media E-Leaders and one was a graduate of the 2013 E-Leaders program.



One E-Leader identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and one E-Leader identified as a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women.

## E-Leaders Participation

Of the twenty women were selected to do this course, eighteen women completed the requirements of the program and participated in sessions on a regular basis. As the sessions were recorded, women who were not able to attend were sent a link and were able to listen to the recording after the session. Personal reasons, not related to the content of the program, prevented the two women who did not complete the course from participating fully. There was a total of 11 webinar sessions offered in 2015. The course had an average attendance of 8 sessions per e-leader in 2014.

## The Resilient Leader – Benita Bensch



**Being a Resilient Leader** – At the start of the course, 36% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to be a resilient leader. Upon completion, 94% had the skills to be a resilient leader.

Benita Bensch lives in Goondiwindi (Queensland) and through her business, Sunburnt Country Consulting, she works with rural people and businesses to help them to be their best. She believes that when we are at our best within ourselves, we can be our best for our families, our businesses and our communities.

Benita embraces her roles of mother, wife and farmer and she has a strong connection with the land and agriculture. She is known for her compassion, determination, integrity, openness and intuition.

This session was held on the 24th March 2015 and introduced participants to the general leadership concept and in particular, the traits of the resilient leader. Topics covered included self-awareness, self-esteem, resilience, growth for effective leaders, fundamentals of communication with family, colleagues, mentoring and personal growth and staying on track to a leadership pathway. 33.33% of participants found this webinar to be extremely useful, whilst 55.56% thought it was very useful with the remaining E-Leaders (11.11%) rating this session as useful.

Some of the key learnings from the Benita Bensch “The Resilient Leader” webinar included:

*“Self-awareness and building self-esteem and importance of resilience”.*

*“The importance of being true to yourself as you lead. How to handle people who challenge your leadership role”.*

*“Taking the time to do a visualisation. This is an underestimated way to really grasp and own a vision and spur you on to make it your reality”.*



*1. That it's OK not to be perfect, we all have setbacks 2. Recommended resources have been great, I am really enjoying Brene Brown's book.*

*"Mistakes are all part of the leadership journey".*

*"Understanding the word gratitude; recognising the importance of resilience in everyday situations. Practicing my breathing and visualising opportunities".*

*"That resilience and vulnerability are something that can be dealt with together".*

*"It's important to take care of yourself and find out what the best you is, in order to make yourself a good leader".*

*"Reminded me of who I need to BE to be a leader".*

## Leadership In Action – Bianca Jurd



**Effective Leadership Skills** – Only 21% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to take action that would inform effective and courageous leadership prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.

**Leadership in a Rural Setting** – At the start of the course, 43% of E-Leaders agreed that they had strong and adequate skills which enabled them to take the actions required to be a strong and effective leader in a rural setting. Upon completion, 100% had the skills to be a rural leader.

The leadership in action session offered the E-Leaders opportunities to learn about the qualities that make a successful leader. They were able to analyse a leadership model that identified the various stages of leadership development and undertook a mapping exercise that enabled them to define their own personal leadership connect. As a result of tracking their own leadership pathway, there were able to choose areas to focus on for their own personal growth.

Bianca Jurd facilitated three webinar sessions on leadership. Bianca is a facilitator and program coordinator for The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation. She facilitated many of the Foundations programs including the flagship program, The Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP). Bianca also designs and coordinates customised programs. She gathered her experience from a diverse background spanning 15 years and five Australian states and territories. Her dual passions for experiential education and breakthrough thinking drive her to invest in assisting Australia's rural leaders, giving them those skills needed to face the industry's toughest challenges.

The first webinar session was on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, whilst the second session on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015 and the final session was on the 26<sup>th</sup> May. The topics covered:

*Leadership 1* – Review and discussion of leadership theory, including the opportunity to look at personal leadership journeys, challenges and successes.

*Leadership II* – Part II of leadership. Includes further workbook activities and application of leadership theories and case studies. Challenges leaders to be in the “stretch” zone.

*Rural Leadership In Action* - Issues, challenges and strategies, the future, where to, review and implementation / plans going forward.

22.22% of E-Leaders found these two sessions extremely useful; 44.44% found them very useful whilst the remaining 33.33% rated them as useful.

E-Leaders were asked to highlight their key learnings from the leadership webinars and comments included:

*“Understanding my own capacity and identifying my leadership challenges”.*

*“How leadership comes in all different forms”.*

*“Thinking about the repeating events that are encountered in the journey to be a leader. Some can be easily identified and counter acted now”.*

*“The clips were very useful and thought provoking. It was good to have discussions about male dominated environments”.*

*“Many different qualities make a useful leader. There is no one recipe for success”.*

*“Second webinar - identity and behaviours”.*

*“Determining who I am as a leader - my key challenges and strengths”.*

*“You need to identify what you're good at and celebrate those successes. And work on the things you're not so great at”.*

*“That I have a lot of stuff that needs work :-)”.*

E-Leaders were invited to reflect upon what they had learned about themselves in the first three weeks of the E-Leaders course, and the following comments were received.

*“I can do it, I am capable of doing it, but I need to look after myself to bring my best self to the challenge”.*

*“My ability to adapt my leadership styles dependent on the requirements at the time”.*



*"I have made some serious progress from where I was 12 months ago. My confidence has grown because of the insights I now feel I have gained, particularly with respect to networking and building partnerships".*

*"I prefer to lead by example but I need to have more confidence in my leadership I need to take more time to reflect. Self-care is not a want - it is a must".*

*"I have natural abilities that make a good leader, and also areas I need to improve upon".*

*"Self-awareness, thinking before I speak, taking a better view of the world and how I can be a leader in person not in title or status. Giving to others and creating the environment for others to experience self or personal development. I have listened to some podcasts about leadership and how my thoughts have changed. It's not a title or status, it's my journey in life, becoming better at what I do by reflecting on my mistakes, learning about to be me and how that can make an impact to others. My life is better for it".*

*"That I have the capacity to grow in this area - and that I want to take this journey of growth".*

*"That I am capable and resilient and I need to believe in myself a heck of a lot more".*

*"I am a leader by example, more than the other types of leader".*

*"I am loving the webinars almost as much as the muster - the recommended resources have been excellent. It's great to be able to continue to discuss the issues that are relevant to our communities".*

*"I have felt very inspired after these sessions and look forward to continuing this pathway".*

*"Bianca's questions about what difficulties re-occur and what patterns can be seen - I found those interesting and I'm still reflecting on them. I've thought about them before but not with a focus on leadership. It was also interesting how many of us had our toughest challenge as leading men".*

E-Leaders nominated the following key messages from Bianca Jurd's first two webinars, as having the biggest impact on themselves, as leaders.

*"More than one way of achieving leadership success".*

*"Leadership has many faces, as do we, and it's important to know if you're doing what you're doing for the right reasons".*

*"The possibility dawned on me that I had dropped out of the corporate world to start my own business partly because I didn't feel welcome there".*

*“Allow strategic thinking time. We would no sooner trot into our wedding day with no planning, especially when we are so emotionally invested. We should give ourselves this same importance - we are emotionally invested in ourselves”.*

Bianca Jurd spoke about stakeholder relationships and personal identity. E-Leaders were asked to reflect upon their ongoing work in building their leadership identity, as they move forward in their leadership journey.

*“Self-management and controlling inner voice to develop my leadership identity”.*

*“Turning up every day and giving all of me, with all my vulnerability and all my quirks. Aiming to build my confidence and work out how to sell my message. Working on the best version of me”.*

*“I always try to go for a win-win situation. Rather than acting like a bull in a china shop I try to see things more from their point of view”.*

*“I think the whole authenticity factor resonates well with me. I am fairly confident with who I am and I know my message so now there is no excuse for staying silent. I need to be a leader now”.*

*The following comments were forthcoming when E-Leaders were asked about what challenged them in the webinars hosted by Bianca Jurd.*

*“Developing a thick skin so that I don't worry about what others think of my behaviour. And experimenting/stretching myself to do some unexpected behavior”.*

*“Knowing I have to push myself and that I can't hide. Accepting that not everyone is going to love my message. Thinking about ways to challenge myself rather than sitting back and letting things and stuff wash over me”.*

*“That no-one has a clear definition of leadership. That we need to find our own way”.*

*“I find it hard that there seems to be almost an acceptance that we as women have to conform to someone else's notion of how we behave to succeed. I will just continue being true to me and not be swayed by having to placate any other sectors to achieve. Old Chinese proverb - he who whittles himself to suit everyone else soon whittles himself away. Not this little black duck”.*

Bianca Jurd joined the group as the final presenter in the webinar program, where she was able to reconnect and re-inspire the group. The final session was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> May and was titled “Rural Leadership In Action”. 61% of participants rated this session as having content that was extremely useful; 31% indicated that the content was very useful and 9% thought it was useful.

E-Leaders were invited to reflect upon their leadership journey throughout the 2015 webinar-series and share what they thought might be their toughest challenge that they face in the coming months of continuing their leadership learning. Comments received included:

*“Continuing to practice 'delivering my contribution' in a different way even though it may feel uncomfortable, and having a positive answer to throw back at that negative voice that tries to be the centre of my attention”.*

*“Clearly articulating my role within my community, and finding a fit for my skills that progress my mission of leaving the earth where I have been a better place”.*

*“Giving myself permission to grow and excel”.*

*“Remembering to be the type of leader that is true to myself. I.e. not trying to fit a stereotype which is not my true personality. Also to remember that it is ok not to know all the answers and to feel comfortable to admit this”.*

*“To keep juggling all the balls in the air”.*

*“Continuing to progress on my journey, having the courage to seek further opportunities of growth, but also to implement learnings in the community. Managing my time”.*

*“Choosing which jobs/projects to let go of and which to focus on. Taking time, regularly and consistently to reflect”.*

When asked as to what possibilities they might experiment with and what do they need to step up and out to do and have a go at, E-Leaders responded with the following thoughts.

*“I am going to start that business! I am looking to form a management collective of great women in our region. I am going to have a go at getting on a board, and do better at the board I am on”.*

*“I would like to maybe aim to get a regular column in a local paper to raise public awareness about soil eco systems”.*

*“Experiment with letting go of some things to create space. Definitely contacting my accountability buddy”.*

*“Possibilities to experiment with - being more inclusive. I don't think I exclude people of purpose but just haven't been in a situation to accept that I don't know everything and need to have an answer for every topic - others can help here too. Which leads onto the next big thing in asking for help as a leader”.*

*“Building a stronger team”.*

*“I've already put my hand up for an opportunity at work to further my skills in communication, - continue to have the courage to take the opportunities”.*

*“A big experiment I am just starting is that I have decided to step down from my role as Treasurer (of the local preschool) and just be a general committee member. I believe this will allow me to better assist the preschool and my local community utilising the skills I have in the time that I am able to give. It is also about recognising my own worth and value. I need to focus my energy on other projects that serve my purpose, encourage me to grow and be happy. In freeing up a bit more of my time I need to really look at what community groups I am involved in and examine if and how I am being effective”.*

The presenter Bianca Jurd took the E-Leaders through a Life Wheel activity where they had to take a ‘helicopter view’ of their life and consider various areas in their life and leadership roles in turn, and assess what might be off balance and what areas may need more attention. E-Leaders were asked to share what did they learn about themselves in the Life Wheel activity and what surprised them.

*“I suspected what I had learnt from that exercise, which is what started me to make a change, and have a go at the E-leaders course. What did surprise me is that I hadn't picked up the relationship between those lower scores are always the source of discontent with my partner. This is a good tool to start that dialogue”.*

*“Maybe I am over critical in my scoring numbers. I could have scored my answers higher on the number scale, and on review I did”.*

*“I usually do the life wheel every year but I hadn't applied the peak performance to it before. That gives me more options and more ways to look at my life”.*

*“Overall my life wheel was fairly rounded and quite big. It did surprise me but I had been feeling a level of contentment lately so it was nice to actually see it pictorially. The only area that I did need to work on was the work area - which I am currently looking into and changing my role and even looking a lowering my workload and hours to concentrate on what I see to be the important things in life - does that mean my wheel can go outside the circle?”.*

*“That I live a more balanced life than I first thought”.*

*“That I'm pretty balanced in my life, which surprised me”.*

*“Overall I felt very lucky and blessed as it confirmed that I am very content with my job, community & family. However I knew I wasn't particularly happy with my work space but I didn't realise how unhappy I was. I love where I live but my work spaces a.k.a working from the kitchen table or local cafes when in town is less than ideal”.*

Other comments and reflections on the final webinar in the E-Leaders series included:



*"Bianca is a very 'nimble' presenter!! A loved the whole-systems approach to resilience and leadership, it makes perfect sense".*

*"An inspiring session, with good strategy advice to make forward progress".*

*"Although the course is about leadership - initially I took that to mean leadership in the community or in business but it's actually about leadership of your own life. What you want to do (when you grow up) and what you want to be known for in the world".*

*"I really enjoyed the sessions with Bianca. She has a very firm understanding of the topic and is a great role model. I learnt something new and enlightening every time so a huge thank you".*

*"It was a great session - lots of challenging interaction".*

*"Thank you for this wonderful learning experience over the last few months, so much learning and growth".*

*"I thoroughly enjoyed this last session, the inspiration suggestions were terrific".*

## Nurturing Relationships and Communication Management – Julia Telford



**Effective Interpersonal Relationships** – There were no E-Leaders who rates themselves as having strong skills or knowledge that would enable them as a leader to build and nurture effective interpersonal relationships at the start of the course. By the end of the course, 100% of women believed they had this understanding.

**Effective and Efficient Communication Skills** – Prior to the course, 57% of women rates themselves as having skills in managing a range of effective and efficient communications. By the end of the course, 100% of women had skills in this area.

Julia Telford presented the fourth webinar in the series on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014 on the topic of Building and Nurturing Relationships which included communication principles, crucial conversations, behaviour, building and nurturing relationships.

Julia Telford hails from rural Queensland and has ten years of experience working with Landcare and catchment groups. She has worked for government, industry, non-government and community groups. In 2013, Julia started her own consultancy business and her work involves a range of projects including on-ground technical training, strategic planning support, natural resource management and project development. Julia's vision is to contribute to the viability and vibrancy of regional Australia. As such she is involved with several key organisations at a national state and regional level.

Participants were required to reflect upon which single idea in the online session had the biggest impact upon them and the responses included:

*“Understanding behaviours”.*

*“Consider the feelings and position/history of people in positions of control/power - who you perceive as being difficult. They may not be difficult deliberately - talk to them, try seeing it from their perspective”.*



*"Remembering just how different people's personalities may be and remembering to effectively communicate to them it may be necessary to deliver the message differently".*

*"I think the whole webinar was very useful. To choose one point it would be the skills in identifying others personality type".*

*"The personality testing and how this impacts relationships with others. Understanding how other personalities will interact and how to best sell your message is very important".*

*"That it is ok to be different you just need to be able to use your strengths but find way to make your weaknesses stronger".*

*"The reason why I have difficulty working in one of my community groups with one particular person. He's not a detail person and I am".*

When asked to share what they learned about themselves and what might some of their ongoing work be in the area of building and nurturing relationships, the following responses were received.

*"Communication, understanding personalities".*

*"You bring your own baggage to relationships (as does everyone) i.e. feeling from family relationships, previous employment. Try to determine these issues, and address them".*

*"Having to be stronger and stretch myself with difficult conversations as the outcome could be win win. I will continue to work on tough people instead of giving up on them".*

*"I naturally avoid conflict, but going forward I need to back myself and work even in heated environments to achieve the desired results".*

*"I learnt that I have to be much more prepared to move out of my favoured personality traits to get the outcomes I seek".*

*"I learned that I have developed strategies to cope and go against my natural personality traits to help me function in different situations. Working on pushing myself out of my comfort zone (moving away from being a classic introvert) has been important in me continuing to learn and grow".*

*"That it is ok to sit in your most comfortable "room" but that you may need to drag some "furniture" into the other rooms to be able to stay there longer when necessary".*



*"That I need to change my communication styles when dealing with people who won't take in the info with the current way I present it".*

E-Leaders identified when they felt challenged or troubled during the webinar and were asked to reflect upon what value was being challenged and how did they respond. Responses included:

*"When you realise you may not be as rational as you first thought. Everyone has baggage that influences their responses to situations".*

*"Talking about tough conversations was making me uncomfortable! However having a process to follow and suggestions on what to say if very supportive".*

*"Again, I don't like conflict. I normally associate it with disrespect and lack of self-control. Going forward I'm going to be prepared to lift the heat a few degrees as necessary".*

*"It challenges me that I have to continually "evolve" in my behaviour to meet other people's needs in negotiations. It feels a bit like I compromise myself all the time. The skill I need is to know when I am being compromised rather than making a compromise".*

*"I felt challenged when having to think about my intuitive behaviours and analysing the way I respond to situations. It's not always pretty to think of yourself in that way. I had to reflect on both positive and negative examples of behaviour and think about ways I could improve my reactive behaviours to certain situations. I'm not perfect, and I never will be, but I can always improve".*

*"When we looked at what we are going to discuss next session as I thought - these are all the things I need to work on but I still felt anxious nonetheless".*

*"I felt challenged because I didn't know the Myers Briggs test (see below) but since then I've done several online versions but have had 6 different results because the questions they ask differ".*

E-Leaders were asked to nominate what might they do differently, as a result of the learnings and new understandings gained in the webinar on building and nurturing relationships. Responses included:

*"Trying to look at all problems from many perspectives".*

*"Being more mindful of other people's body language when I'm talking to them and vice versa. Observing my conversations more and how I listen and respond, esp. during heated discussions. Get more buy in from committees".*

*"Put a space between stimuli and my response. Become more comfortable standing up for what I believe in".*

*"Work more on knowing how I can stay true to me while still achieving advancement in my cause".*

*"Focus on my behaviours and stop and think about how I can present information to others in order to help sell my ideas, and get people moving with me".*

*"Have the confidence to speak my mind a little more - or ask for more time to consider something and then reply once I have had a chance to think".*

*"Pay more attention to how I present info so that my message can get across to more personality types".*

Other final reflections on this webinar included:

*"I found these webinars one of the best on this topic. Julia is very knowledgeable and shares a lot of information with us in a short amount of time which is great. Very generous. I like how she gets buy in from the group too and mixing up the webinars by using the drawing tool".*

*"Fantastic webinar. The most useful yet!"*

*"There is hard work to be done here because of my lack of clarity about how much I have to move out of my Comfort zone in my behaviour and personality to accommodate someone else to achieve progress".*

*"This was another fantastic situation. I loved the Myer-Briggs testing and have started trying to slot people into categories to apply strategies to deliver my ideas to them. Great. Thank you Julia".*

*"I really enjoyed the session with Julia. I also feel that the other participants are contributing and sharing more as are more comfortable which assists in this learning and empowering process".*

Julia Telford presented a webinar on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015 on Communication Management, which covered negotiation, strategy and managing conflict. Reflective feedback from the E-leaders was received in response to the following questions.

When asked to reflect upon their learning from the 'vices in communications' topic, E-Leaders nominated the following as areas or skills they need to work on.

*"I don't listen enough".*

*“Active listening is key and I need to ensure I pay attention, not be the joker, and change my sentencing -such as 'I don't understand' to ' Can you please repeat that for me, thanks' or ' I not sure I'm grasping that concept' etc., and also the use of negative comments such as, ' I can't do this' or 'how are we going to get that done' etc. - to 'we need to ensure we have adequate planning time; or 'allow me to review our options with this time frame' - takes practice”.*

*“Being more aware of when I am putting my foot in it/not communicating clearly enough. Already been trying to work on it - but now have added impetus”.*

*“I think retaining clarity of my communication regardless of who I am delivering it to, and learning how to fit my message to the way other people best hear it”.*

*“Looking at issues from the perspective of all participants”.*

*“To try not to detract from the flow of discussions by "butting" in with a joke etc”.*

*“Asking the right questions in group discussions/meetings to ensure we stay on topic learning to say "I'll take that as a comment" & move on”.*

*“Very informative and lots to think about”.*

E-Leaders were asked to reflect upon their learning on the ‘turn up the heat’ conversation and suggest what they may now need to work upon.

*“Be comfortable having uncomfortable conversations but with compassion”.*

*“I need to be more engaged in the communication to enable the 'heat' moment not to cause me to react or be miss the important points or comments”.*

*“I can remember what was discussed, but sorry not what fitted into this particular topic heading”.*

*“I tend to probably boil the pot more than have it at a simmer. More heat doesn't always equate to a faster cook. Learning moderation is a task for me”.*

*“Avoid the temptation to make a joke. Keep the heat/tension to build to facilitate meaningful discussion”.*

*“I need to continue to remind myself that conflict is not always bad and use that "heat" to achieve results.*

*I need to work on being able to keep the 'heat up' to get effective & meaningful results. And keeping emotion out of the conversation”.*

*"This was such a great topic - I need to not be afraid to turn up the heat and maintain momentum to achieve a successful outcome - but not to boiling point".*

E-Leaders had to consider if they need to make any changes to the way they listen, action or engage in group communications and the following thoughts were shared.

*"I think before I speak and I speak up more. I try to see how my communication will come across and then amend it to make sure it comes across as intended. The message doesn't change but the delivery does".*

*"Yes - I know longer interrupt others, or at least I am very mindful of doing it. I listen to others who I admire and watch and observe their style, language and words used and how they interact with others. I put my hand up more now and keep it up. I take more notes about my thoughts and comments - so I can use facts or comments that have been raised".*

*"Yes, paying more attention to alternative ways of doing things".*

*"Hmmm probably not giving up on cooking even though I tend to burn things often lately".*

*"I am much more aware that I am bringing my own prejudices to the table - that affects the way I am perceived and respond to people and issues. I am aware that others do the same - and this needs to be considered".*

*"I'm being more aware of the way I communicate and working on implementing strategies to communicate more effectively".*

*"Yes. I am trying to be more aware of other people's communication style and adjusting the way I approach them".*

*"Yes, I am more attentive and listen for potential hooks to use in further communication".*

When reflecting upon the webinar, participants were asked to nominate what they learnt about their strengths in communication.

*"Active listening, posture, mindfulness".*

*"Good at asking questions. Good at listening, but I need to talk less (umm, that's going to be hard, lol)".*

*"Well I guess I have been known as a good listener in the past, but I need to work on getting my opinion heard more in a constructive way".*

*"I hope I am improving my ability to listen to all viewpoints equally and not prejudge. Trying to consider all perspectives".*

*"Now I am more aware of the process of "turning up the heat" - I realise that when I do feel strongly about an issue, I can usually control the heat in a conversation to ensure it stays in a productive rage".*

*"That I have a solid base to start with but I need to work on all areas of communication".*

*"I think I am not afraid to speak up but maybe phrase it in a suitable way for the person/group concerned".*

Final comments and reflections in relation to the Communication Management webinar included:

*"Learning to speak up and in the conversation. During a recent meeting for task negotiation on a project I asked the other members of our group ' how can I assist you to get the best outcome' .....there was silence, then 'um we don't know yet...but we need you'!! I also followed up with giving someone else some feedback (positive) on a systems problem I had been having in my workplace, commenting on how helpful they had been and I was pleased with the outcome. This came back to me via my manager by way of the other person commenting to the management team how proactive I was".*

*"Having more completely new ideas about alternative ways of communicating (including - what not to say!) Combination of great presenters, great women in the group, and good timing for me".*

*"This is challenging for me this time around. I guess I have more conviction in my message and find it hard when there are so few willing listeners, even when I try different tactics. Maybe they are just not ready to hear".*

*"Very worthwhile discussion, providing us with a fantastic "tool kit" to use in many areas of our lives".*

*"My favourite session so far, Julia was very engaging. I had a light bulb moment afterwards when I read "you cannot change a person who doesn't see an issue with their actions" which has given me so much freedom to let it go and move on".*

*"Julia was great - thanks for getting her to speak again".*

## Media, Communication and the Political Arena – Victoria Taylor



**Media and Advocacy** - E-leaders were asked to self-assess their level of skills and knowledge on their ability to work as a leader with the media and present strong verbal cases for advocacy and sharing and at the start of the course, only 14% agreed that they had skills in this area. At completion, 100% self-assessed themselves as having skills at fostering effective working relationships.

**Effective Media and Communication Skills for Working in Political Arena** – Only 7% of the women self-assessed themselves as having the skills and knowledge that would enable them to work with media and communicate in the political arena prior to starting the course. By the completion of E-Leaders, all women agreed that they had skills in this area.

A webinar hosted by Victoria Taylor was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015 on the topic of “Media and Structuring a Verbal Case” which discussed how to prepare media releases and effectively communicate using various media channels and how to structure a verbal case. A further session was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015 titled “Media and Communication in the Political Arena” and covered how to engage with politicians and advisors, engage policy makers and government agencies.

Victoria Taylor is the Director of Flourish Communication, a Canberra based business providing strategic communications, government relations and policy advice to clients involved in primary industries and natural resource management.

Having spent many years as a political adviser and industry lobbyist, Victoria now assists clients navigate government processes to achieve positive policy outcomes. Victoria has also worked with government agencies to tailor engagement strategies helping them identify and communicate with their key stakeholders. She loves a challenge and takes great pleasure in bringing industry and government together to achieve great things!



Feedback on a question inviting E-Leaders to share their key learnings from the two webinars included:

*"The structure of writing a media release and how it is important to be clear on what your message is and who you are targeting".*

*"S-E-X was an easier way to get my thoughts together for a teaser piece that can be turned into a press release".*

*"Choosing your words carefully to provide a clear snapshot and hook to your target audience, whether that be the journalist, editor or general audience. There is a need to really drill down to make it clear what is making the biggest impact. The tools and tips provide a great framework to prepare content for media releases, and get your media releases read".*

*"The process of breaking down the pitch, expand and call to action has made doing media releases easier".*

*"The reinforcement of the knowledge that no one likes a whinger and that a good news story is really what a media release should be about. I liked the simple framework we were given as a tool and the skills to develop a succinct message.*

---

E-Leaders were asked to nominate one idea from the Communications webinars that had the biggest impact upon them.

*"Using the repeat structure as part of the explain sections. I also found the web pages to submit info to very interesting and something I think I will look into a bit more - and podcasts".*

*"S-E-X".*

*"Reaffirming that you need to think about what your target audience wants, whoever that may be (farmers/journalists/politicians), putting yourselves in their shoes and trying to find that common ground with your issue and what is important to them. What does your audience want/need to hear?"*

*"S.E.X concept".*

*"The idea that somewhere in the world someone is actually reading something I may write, and that accountability should always be for front in any message I put into the public arena".*

When invited to consider what work that they may have to do on developing a successful media strategy within their leadership / community / business role, the following responses were received.

*“Work out exactly what message I am trying to articulate. Often it seems like there are a number of different components that are all worth highlighting - but not to do them all at once. Give each topic its own limelight”.*

*“Think about what items are news worthy and then how we can get the news out there”.*

*“Good practice makes perfect is the best strategy to developing a successful media strategy! Using the tools learnt through the webinar will allow me to practice, practice, practice. That’s why I will be using these tools to develop success in communicating with my audience”.*

*“Better use of superlatives in the pitch to grab attention”.*

*“Work on making my message one that people will want to pick up and run with. Finding ways to link it to a bigger picture with more impact across a larger audience”.*

Final reflective comments on the Victoria Taylor sessions included:

*“I think I will use this technique not only for media releases but also in structuring some emails - where I need to grab attention”.*

*“The webinar from Victoria was very effective in tying in a lot of the learnings from presentations in Canberra including Karen Tully (advocacy), Karan Gabrielle (media), Lynne Duckham (strategy), and David Pembroke (audience). Feel very lucky to have been provided with this opportunity. Great range of speakers”.*

*“As always the content was relevant and easily applied”.*

## Conclusion

As identified throughout the report, *The Path to Great Advocacy* Webinar Series E-Leaders program was successful in enhancing the personal and professional skills and knowledge of rural, remote and regional women and assisting them to undertake on-ground projects in their local community, develop leadership skills and share their learnings about Landcare and Sustainability issues across the group.

The E-Leaders program was a key part of the 2015 workplan for the National Rural Women's Coalition. The e-leaders course assisted the NRWC to achieve its strategic goals.

This report will be used by the NRWC to provide feedback to the following:

- **NRWC Board of Directors** – The report will inform the Board of the outcomes from *The Path to Great Advocacy* Webinar Series E-Leaders course and will provide feedback which can be used to modify future webinar-based learning to rural, remote and regional women.
- **NRWC Contractors** – There are a number of contractors who worked diligently to deliver the e-leaders program and this report will be shared with them so that continual improvement of their services can be engaged.
- **Office for Women** – The findings in this report assist in keeping the Office for Women fully briefed of not only the work of the National Rural Women's Coalition, but also the outcomes.
- **Rural Women** – All participants in *The Path to Great Advocacy* Webinar Series E-Leaders course will be sent a link to an electronic copy of this report.
- **Marketing** – The NRWC will use this to assist in the marketing of future E-Leaders courses, and to inform policy and decision-making bodies.
- **Information** – The NRWC will share the findings in this report with relevant persons who might be interested in the work of the NRWC. This may include government ministers and departmental staff and any future funding applications which the NRWC may generate.

## Acknowledgements

The National Rural Women's Coalition thanks the following people for their support to this successful *The Path to Great Advocacy Webinar Series* E-Leaders Program.

- NRWC Directors Dr **Pat Hamilton**, **Alwyn Friedersdorff** and **Lisa Shipley** for their support in the merit selection process of applicants, and Dr Pat Hamilton and Alwyn Friedersdorff for their ongoing mentoring role.
- NRWC Contractor **Kerryn Suttor** for her skillful and diligent leadership provided to the planning and operationalization of *The Path to Great Advocacy Webinar Series* E-Leaders.
- Course Presenter's **Bianca Jurd**, **Victoria Taylor**, **Benita Bensch** and **Julia Telford**, for enthusiastically sharing their vast knowledge with the *The Path to Great Advocacy Webinar Series* E-Leaders.
- NRWC Program Manager **Karen Tully** for oversight to the program, and for undertaking all aspects of the evaluation of E-Leaders.
- NRWC Finance Manager **Keli McDonald** for financial management.
- The **Office for Women** located within the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet for providing the funding to use for the leadership advancement of rural, remote and regional women.
- All the rural, remote and regional **women across Australia** who participated in *The Path to Great Advocacy Webinar Series* E-Leaders.

