



AUSTRALIAN
RURAL
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FOUNDATION

LEADING THE NATION

AUSTRALIAN RURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

COURSE 13

FINAL REPORT

by

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Australian Government
Cotton Research and
Development Corporation

The end of a chapter

With the graduation of Course 13 in Canberra on the 16 November, the formal learnings of the ARLP journey have ended. It is with much sadness that this chapter has been brought to a close.

Throughout the last 18 months, I have had the tremendous opportunity to work and learn with a unique group of individuals. The bonds that I have formed and the friendships that I have made will last a lifetime.

The journey has been long, but definitely worthwhile. It is refreshing to feel that it is now up to the individual to go forward and provide a return for the investment that has been made.

The next period of my life is sure to contain many challenges. It takes some adjusting to see the world in a new light but I look forward to moving on and applying myself in ways that I was not capable of before I started the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP).

Why did I do the ARLP? To learn and experience new things. Did I achieve my goal? Yes, and much more. With a united vision of Connected People – Vital Country, I am now a part of a greater group working for the betterment of rural and regional Australia.

In this final report, I wish to cover some of the key learnings and insights I have gained from my participation in the Course. I would like to mention the role that structured capacity building could play within the Australian cotton industry and finally would like to offer a vote of thanks for those that allowed me to participate fully in Course 13.

Key learnings

One of the most enjoyed aspects of the ARLP is the diversity of people that are drawn together to participate in the Program. Some of the greatest learnings that I have achieved have been through firstly acknowledging that diversity and then using it to gain a greater understanding of the issues at the heart of the problems that we face.

At first, I was attracted to the other primary producers within the group. We all spoke the same language, discussed the same things and most times thoroughly agreed with each other. As time went by I started listening more to the thoughts and concerns of the other participants who didn't have the same background as I did. I didn't always completely understand their line of thinking or what they were trying to say but I was intrigued to think that there was another plausible point of view when previously there had been none.

Throughout the journey, I then took the time to find common ground with the other interests within the group. In the end, I found this one of the most worthwhile and rewarding aspects of our time together. Although we often agreed to disagree, we realised that we had more in common than we would care to admit.

Australian Rural Leadership Program: Course 13. Final Report

This engagement has opened my mind to the many issues that face us in rural and regional Australia and what and how we should go about improving our future. I understand how much of a trap can be set by spending too much time in your own little world and not considering all the other groups out there doing the same thing.

A key learning that I took from this was to have an open mind and to really challenge my own perceptions and not just everyone else's. I found that a certain degree of confidence in myself was required to allow this scrutiny over my own thoughts and beliefs.

Spending time in the environment created by the ARLP also gave me a great opportunity to try some new behaviours and practise the skills that I had learnt. Watching others do the same and seeing how far they have progressed gave me the confidence to go forward as well.

An important part of the progress throughout the Course was creating opportunities back in everyday life to utilise the skills as they were being developed. This is an important role, which the funding bodies can play to capitalise and support their investment in the program.

Changed leadership behaviours

Now that I have completed the Course, I am ready to apply some of the new skills and outlooks that I have gained.

One of the key new behaviours that I have established is a clear mind when it comes to thinking about the future. The future is where we are going and, as a leader, it is what I must prepare those that I am leading to be ready for.

There are many challenges facing the Australian cotton industry specifically at this point in time. Although many of these challenges are not new, they have been present before, it is quite clear that the industry we had 10 years ago will not be the same as the industry we will have in 10 year's time.

Because things do not change overnight, preparations must be made and plans put in place to create the future we would like to achieve.

I believe that I am in a position to actively participate in the shaping of the future of the Australian cotton industry and that I have a role to play in its future success.

One of the areas that need some attention is a proactive process of strategic capacity building within the industry. I feel a certain level of frustration at having achieved some capacity building for myself but then reengaged with the industry to find that there are deficiencies in both industry structure and the skills of the participants in general throughout the industry.

I believe there is a large gap between those that have had a significant investment in

Australian Rural Leadership Program: Course 13. Final Report

capacity building and those who have not. An analysis, I am sure, would identify some significant areas where capacity is lacking.

A consequence of this is lack of coordination, inefficient succession planning, lack of synergy and, most importantly, a diminished level of collaboration. This has a large impact on the overall harmony and effectiveness of the industry as a whole.

I believe this is a critical issue for the cotton industry. The ARLF could also play a role by participating in the lifting of overall capacity in a systematic coordinated effort.

This would involve both groups looking to the future and adjusting the processes they both run to achieve this goal.

Vote of thanks

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to those who have sponsored me during my participation on the journey that is the ARLP.

I would particularly like to thank Bernie George and Dave Anthony from Auscott for their support. The course itself requires a significant sacrifice of time and I have been supported by them throughout the entire Program.

Further thanks must also go to the CRDC for their support and creation of opportunities have really been to my benefit and I appreciate the help.

Gratitude must also be given to the ARLF and the time and effort that Rob Patrick puts into the creation and running of each course of the ARLP. Without the professional approach and the fine example set by the organisation, the respect that graduates obtain would be greatly diminished.

Last but not least, I thank my family who have endured and supported me the entire length of the journey. We must never lose sight of the fact that there may only be 34 people sitting 'in session' but behind that is a much larger group of families and friends who have shaped those people to be who they are today.

Ben Stephens
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