



National President's Annual Report 2023

As restrictions of COVID-19 began to recede into the background and we returned to a more normal, pre-COVID pattern, we have started to relax a little more while remaining justifiably cautious. Events have resumed and our opportunities to come together are truly cherished.

Our Annual General Meeting was held in Wellington in November and it was so good to be face to face with our Members again after two years of disruption. While some remained cautious about travel, those who were able to attend made the most of the opportunity to connect with Members from around the country. The NZI Rural Women NZ Business Awards Presentation and Dinner was, once again, a wonderfully inspirational and moving showcase of the entrepreneurial spirit that is so alive and well in rural New Zealand.

Then, in January and February, Mother Nature wreaked havoc in both the North and South Islands with heavy rain events in Nelson and the West Coast, and Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle hit the North Island. Northland, Waikato, Coromandel and Wairarapa were all affected, but Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti were absolutely pummelled with unprecedented levels of rain causing record flooding which left a trail of destruction including silt deposits metres deep, washouts and slips. It will take years to recover from the damage and people in those regions are still under immense pressure. Many have lost their homes, their businesses, their orchards and large tracts of their farms have been affected, not to mention the access issues due to roading damage and bridge washouts. Consequently, the call on our Adverse Events Relief Fund has been unprecedented with 123 grants approved as at 30 June 2023 and a continuing stream of applications since then. We have been very fortunate to have received some incredibly generous donations to the Fund which has enabled us to assist so many families in serious need of support. My sincere thanks to the Adverse Events Relief Fund committee members for their work. In particular, I note the contribution of Sharron Davie-Martin who, as Convenor, has overseen the applications process, checked with the referees, and sought committee members' input to reach a decision on each application.

The other aspect of our support for those in the affected areas has been the amazing donations of funds, food, care packages and goods from our Members throughout the country. Your support is truly heartwarming and epitomizes the charitable give-back and support work that are huge parts of Rural Women New Zealand. To our Members in the impacted areas, who are packing and distributing these donations, especially Sandra Matthews in Tairāwhiti and Tamzin Coull in Hawke's Bay, we sincerely thank you and your teams for all efforts to support your communities when you have been personally affected by the cyclones. The impacts of this year's weather events will continue for the foreseeable future.

On a brighter note, a real highlight of my year, and my tenure as President to date, was attending the Associated Country Women of the World Triennial World Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May. A delegation of eleven Members attended from Rural Women New Zealand which included Claire Mahon who was elected to the ACWW Board at the Conference. Our congratulations to Claire. Rural Women New Zealand had two resolutions accepted for discussion and decision, which I was incredibly proud and honoured to present. One addressed Women's Employment Action Plans and the other called for Rural and Gender Analysis to be implemented across all legislation. Both were passed almost unanimously. Thank you to everyone who worked on these resolutions in the long lead time to presentation at this global forum.

Claire Williamson, on behalf of RWNZ, was a panellist at an online event hosted by ACWW during CSW 67 (Commission for the Status of Women) titled "Rural Women as Agents of Change." We also maintain our connection with international work through participation in the International Women's Caucus, which is facilitated by Manatū Wāhine, the Ministry for Women. This brings together organisations dedicated to empowerment and equity for women from all facets of society.

I have enjoyed attending events around the country that bring our Members together and which showcase what we do. Over the year, I attended Regional Conferences, a 'Spring Fling' and a Provincial 90th Celebration. It is so valuable to make the time to meet our Members. There is a renewed sense of energy in some of the Regions with excellent events taking place, which has resulted in the emergence of new groups, and new members joining the organisation. It is imperative that we continue to build on this momentum.



Our work in the policy area has continued with some changes occurring this year. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Angela McLeod, our former Manager: Government, Public Sector & Academic Relationships, who resigned during the year. Her contribution to RWNZ policy development during her time with us has been very much appreciated. We have engaged an experienced policy Contractor, Sue Trezise, to assist with this work under Gabe's direction. Welcome to the team, Sue.

The Policy Action Advisory Groups are established and meeting to identify and refine their focus areas and future work plans. This is adding a refreshed and reinvigorated dimension to our policy work. We look forward to seeing continued development across these areas of interest. Thank you to those are participating in this important aspect of Rural Women New Zealand's work.

The Centennial Committee has begun work on planning our celebrations for this very special milestone in our history. I thank our committee members for your passion and enthusiasm for this significant project that will see celebrations take place between July 2025 and July 2026 right around the country.

Our Black Heels and Tractor Wheels podcast continues to add another dimension to our offering and profile. It was really pleasing to hear one guest say that an earlier episode had inspired her to start her own business. On that note, we offered our Activator Programme to budding entrepreneurs in three sessions across the country this year and we are building ongoing networking opportunities for participants to retain their connection with each other and RWNZ. Our thanks to the Ministry for Primary Industries for its support for this initiative.

I have continued in my role as RWNZ Trustee on the NZ Landcare Trust. Seeing the work that the Trust does to engage with communities and landholders to facilitate so many valuable biodiversity, wetlands and riparian planting projects to improve our waterways is very interesting and rewarding.

Our staff are central to giving effect to so much of what we do as an organisation. The National Office team provide direct and personal help for our Members, assistance at Group and Regional levels with events and newsletters, support our national projects, connection points, publications and events that we all enjoy. Their passion for the organisation and what we do in our communities is equal to that of our Members. We welcomed Janet Ziegler to the team as our Finance Coordinator this year. Janet is a real asset to the team and RWNZ.

Our Regional Leaders, Chairs, and Committees are pivotal to the success of the organisation. Your ability to support our Members and encourage new initiatives is key to our success and rejuvenation. Thank you for all that you do.

To you, our Members, you are the face of the organisation in our local communities. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do. We look forward to helping you continue to support each other, your communities and our newer members as they bring their energy as the future of Rural Women New Zealand. Our 'Why', to strengthen, support and connect people and communities, remains constant, but it's important that we are open to adjusting the 'How' which means encouraging and supporting new ideas and ways to contribute and come together.

The Board, as a team, brings so many valuable skills to the table. It is a pleasure working with my fellow Board Members as we take RWNZ towards our next one hundred years as a vibrant, relevant organisation that continues the valuable legacy built by those who came before us. Congratulations to Sandra Matthews and Sharron Davie Martin on being re-elected unopposed to their positions as North Island and South Island Board Members respectively for a further two-year term.

I am immensely proud of the good work that we do throughout the organisation as a whole team. I look forward to working together more closely with you all to Strengthen, Support and Connect our People and Communities in the best way possible and presenting Rural Women New Zealand as a relevant, fun, supportive organisation for those who are rural at heart.

Gill Naylor
National President

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It has been exciting to have 2023 marked by the growth of some of the new initiatives that either began in the last financial year or which had been in the planning.

The first part of the reporting year for the National Office team included settling in to our new office space. Despite immediate challenges with internet connectivity, we are now settled in and finding the new streamlined space works well both for us as a team but also as a welcoming place for Members who visit the office.

The streamlined theme has continued over the course of the year with work ongoing on how we can streamline our systems and processes to best manage our increasingly diverse membership needs. Our communications survey provided an opportunity for Members to tell us about what works and what they'd like to see more of in terms of communications. This information fed into our wishlist for a new membership database that was fit for purpose for our organisation and we were very pleased to find a new system that not only meets our needs today but is adaptable and will grow and change with our membership.

This work has led to some changes in the way we communicate and we will continue to build on this over the coming months with further communications improvements, our website refresh and introducing some more of the features that the new membership database offers.

The planning and implementation work in preparation for the launch of the Policy Action Advisory Groups (PAAGs) has paid off with these groups beginning to have an impact on our policy work already. We are very fortunate to have Members willing to give their considerable skills and capability to this important mahi.

The return to more face to face events has seen a rise in group events around the country and we have also worked to increase the resources available to Members to assist with planning and running events and my thanks to Regional Connector, Kylie Bensemann who has supported the marketing of a number of regional projects and events.

A key focus for the National Office is building relationships at a national level. This year this included participation in the working group focussed on mental health and wellbeing in the primary industries and the Ministry for Primary Industries Cyclone Response Group. Our programmes for women entrepreneurs and businesswomen have continued to grow and benefit from the partnerships we have build with a range of Government Departments and Corporate supporters and provide an opportunity for promotion and profiling of our organisation. We have been delighted to have several of our Activators and Award winners take on roles within their regions or as a member of a PAAG.

As noted in the President's report, the Adverse Events Relief Fund has experienced high demand this year given the range of weather events that occurred in early 2023. The team have worked hard to support the Adverse Events Relief Fund Committee and to ensure that applications are processed quickly and sensitively.

Alongside these areas of work, the team has continued to support the Board, the coordination of regional leadership meetings and a range of committees including the Centennial Committee and the various bursaries and grant committees.

Over the reporting year we farewelled Policy Manager, Angela McLeod who had been a key member of the national office team for five years and welcomed Janet Ziegler as Finance Coordinator.

My thanks to Angela for all that she contributed during her time with Rural Women New Zealand and for her commitment to the role of women and the importance of the voice of rural communities.

We also welcomed Sue Tresize as our contracted Policy Advisor who has supported the preparation of a number of submissions, the refreshing of our Policy Manifesto and the PAAGs.

Each National Office team member brings their own skills and experience to their roles but it is certainly true that the sum is greater than the parts. The teamwork displayed on a daily basis is a testament to the team's commitment to the purpose and values of Rural Women New Zealand.

My thanks to Lisa, Mia, Janet, Felicity and Sue for all of the above but also your ability to support each other and our Members in everything that you do.

Gabrielle O'Brien
Chief Executive