# Science to Practice Forum 2023

Day 3 Session 2 transcript

(Duration 51 mins 5 secs)

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## Introduction

This is the transcript of one of the Future Drought Fund’s Science to Practice Forum sessions, presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. This transcript is for Day 3 of the Forum, session 2, Engaging First Nations farmers.

Learn more about the [Science to Practice Forum](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/drought/future-drought-fund/research-adoption-program/science-to-practice-forum).

## Transcript

[Recording begins]

[Pip Courtney [00:02]:

Welcome back to day 3, the final day of the Science to Practice Forum. I’m Pip Courtney. It’s great to have your company. A reminder, if you miss a session, the forum is being recorded and will be available on the Department of Ag’s website. There are some great presentations coming up on First Nation’s stakeholder engagement, overcoming barriers to change, and you’ll also meet today’s panel guests. First, let’s head to Queensland to meet Dr. Raelene Ward, a proud Kunja woman and Knowledge Broker at the Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales Drought Hub. Drought was part of Dr. Ward’s life growing up as a Traditional Owner in Koumala, 800 kilometres west of Brisbane, where her grandparents were cattle drovers. In fact, the word Koumala means long stretch of water or big water hole in the language of the Kunja people. But as conditions in the region have become warmer and drier, driving and shearing has reduced dramatically. Now in her role at the Hub, she’s giving First Nations farmers and communities a voice across Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales, to better prepare for future dry times.

Raelene Ward [01:12]:

Thank you very much for the introduction. And I’d like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners on where everyone sits across the country. I’d like to also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of where I sit, here in Toowoomba, Queensland, pay my respects to those who have passed, those who are present, and those who are emerging in our communities. So as you can see from the first part of this presentation, the title is First Nation’s Stakeholder Engagement. I’ll give you a little bit about me. So my background is a registered nurse. I’ve been involved in the application for funding for this particular Drought Hub, writing First Nations perspectives. I’ve then come in to actually fulfill the role of Knowledge Broker First Nations engagement in August last year. So I sit within the Southern Queensland Northern New South Wales Hub.

So this slide, I always acknowledge my late grandparents who are no longer here with us. As Pip said, they were drovers in their time. They were very much connected to country, did a lot of their Traditional Practices, engaged a lot of people whom they worked with, as well as travelled with, including non-Indigenous people. The map that you see in behind the slide comes from my grandmother’s book. She had published two books before she left us and it’s called Matya-Mundu and it documents all the Traditional Owners in the southwest of QLD. So our totems is the Bilby that you can see down the bottom of that screen. And that’s the Kunja people’s totem and Kooma people is the Red Belly Black Snake. So, you know, my grandparents and my parents have always made sure that we receive a good education, but also be culturally grounded in who we are as people.

So this is a slide that just illustrates where we are located as the Southern Queensland Northern New South Wales Hub based in Toowoomba. We have 6 nodes. I’m the only Aboriginal person within the Hub, and we hope to actually expand on that workforce in the future. So we’ve got more than 35 Traditional Owner groups that sit within our entire Hub. So this slide just gives you the breakdown of Traditional Owner groups within each of our node areas, so we have quite a lot, and I’m sure we share, you know, very much the same information with other Hubs across the country. So I always try and incorporate Cultural Safety in the beginning of any of the work that I do when I engage with First Nations people. So, Cultural Safety, as you can see on the slide, it originates from New Zealand, the nursing background of, you know, where Cultural Safety originates from.

But it’s also keeping Aboriginal First Nations people culturally safe. But it’s also supporting the broader non-Indigenous community and stakeholders to make sure that they are being culturally safe in their practice, their engagement, and making sure that, you know, we cater to all diverse groups, particularly, in our Hub and the work that we do. You know, a lot of these points that you see on here is not new to some people, but we need to acknowledge the historical journeys of many of our First Nations people. They are the people with the knowledge, they know how the environment changes. We know that colonisation certainly has brought about not only radical changes for the health and wellbeing of people, but certainly in the economic status of people, but also governance structures. So it’s important to understand that we recognise and address those negative impacts that have been imposed on First Nations people.

Free prior informed consent is always the framework of where I start a lot of my engagement. And it’s also been spoken about in other forums as well when it comes to working alongside First Nations people. So it’s important to understand that, you know, we incorporate cultural values. We make sure that Indigenous people and their self-determination is being positioned correctly, but it’s also not imposing on their ability to give consent and participate in many different avenues, particularly in the Drought Hub. The United Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People is important when we engage First Nations people. I’m not going to read through all these words, as you can see, there’s quite a bit, but I want people to take away these key international policies and national policies that are very key when engaging First Nations people. This slide, particularly for our Hub, you know, we base our engagement around the principles of empowerment and self-determination.

So we’re mindful that we must listen and take the time to really engage people on the ground, and don’t do it from, you know, your office or a computer. Make sure you’re getting out there and you are, you know, building meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners. In relation to engagement, we also work to 3 key aims, and it’s about making sure that we have effective and built and, you know established relationships over time. And that’s what I’ve been able to bring into this role is the longevity of relationships that I’ve built, not only in my nursing and community capacity, but also bringing that into the Drought Hub and the engagement that we want to see happen with Traditional Owner groups. Respect is the second one there, making sure that we acknowledge and respect the histories of not just one Traditional Owner group, but every group that we need to engage with and make sure that we truly listen to what they say and where they come from.

Yep, so holistic Nation-based engagement. You know, you can see from the slide we’ve got to acknowledge the history, make sure that we’re working with historical and current issues from a First Nations perspective, and that we’re making sure that we, you know, engage people from their perspective. We’re not using their information, you know, to position ourselves, but to more or less position them in the future. And I’ve probably gone a little bit quick through those slides, but this is the last one that I have, and it’s around making sure that, you know, we understand the importance of engagement, make sure that we engage early, we take the time to get to know people. Don’t just do one visit to a community and engage one particular group. I make it my business to make sure that I embed myself in the communities where I’m engaging and make sure that I truly understand the social dynamics, the, you know, the impacts of natural environments, but also understand the health and wellbeing of people, because we know that, you know, first Nations people are, are not well represented or participating at the same rights or the same levels as non-Indigenous people when it comes to drought and water.

However, we can use that to be able to become creative with how we work with First Nations people within those communities and the regions where we’re meant to engage. Make sure that you understand the expectations you know, of your particular position, but also make sure that you are understanding the expectations of First Nations people, that we’re being realistic about what we can do with them but also work with them to build their capacity, and that we’re not setting them up to fail. Communication and the language that you use is also important. We need to communicate in a way that people understand, but also be sensitive about how we engage in the language that we use, particularly on Country, making sure that we respect the cultural authority of Traditional Owners and key people that sit within those communities, the Traditional Owner groups.

You know, there might be native title sitting over a particular area, so it’s also important to engage them as well. But consider everybody when it comes to engagement, making sure that you know, you are building authentic relationships, you’re respectful, and the partnerships that you build are going to grow from those first initial meetings. Respect the governance structures within communities and making sure that people are involved in decision making and empower the leadership. You know, we see Knowledge Brokers like myself given authority to lead some of this engagement across communities and the country. So that’s important. And we don’t see that as much in communities. And then lastly, they’re just acknowledging and recognising, you know, past injustices that have occurred, that we currently see and continue to see in our communities, and how can we ensure that First Nations participation is embedded in every aspect and conversation that we have on the ground. So thank you very much.

Pip Courtney [12:12]:

Thank you, Dr. Raelene Ward. We’ve got a question in from our Slido app here for you. What are some key things for the Ag sector to consider when engaging First Nations people? And what are some of the common mistakes?

Raelene Ward [12:30]:

The key thing to consider is, you know, if you haven’t engaged an Aboriginal person or a Torres Straight Islander person, or even a service, you know, be upfront about that. You know, don’t think you’re going to offend people if you ask the wrong question. You know, make sure you are, you know, being part of what the community represents, you know. If there’s different activities happening, embed yourself in some of those activities that are coming up. For instance, NAIDOC Week is occurring in different communities. You know, just trust the journey and, you know, be prepared to be involved in a lot more than what you anticipate, and just be very trusting and build from there.

Pip Courtney [13:36]:

Another question we’ve got through for you. What conversations can farmers have with First Nations people or with the local mob?

Raelene Ward [13:46]:

I think a lot of the conversation that I’m trying to facilitate and advocate on behalf of First Nations people is really about, for example, if I go to a community and I know there’s, you know, an Aboriginal group, and that the Ag sector is quite huge, you know, I would try to understand, from a local perspective, are First Nations people involved in any of the enterprises that occur or that are being rolled out in that community or region? If not, I would, you know, then better understand from, you know, the Ag sector and farmers that sit in that region, why has that been the case? And truly understand what have been some of the challenges for them. So build those conversations about employment opportunities. Maybe there’s some negative connotations about First Nations people in that area. So I’d also want to support non-Indigenous people to, you know, be more aware, be culturally safe. And in some of the conversations or even questions that they may have regarding First Nations people.

Pip Courtney [15:18]:

Can you give us any examples of how you, through your work have been able to give First Nations people a voice, in particular, as a community or individuals, prepare for drought? Or is it too early?

Raelene Ward [15:35]:

I think the opportunity here for me Pip, is really about how creative can I be? You know, when we look at the Future Drought Fund and what the key objectives are in relation to drought and preparing communities for the future, I have to take a step back and think about, well, you know, where do First Nations people position themselves in community? And truly understand, you know, how has drought affected their community? How has it affected the movement of population? Does it have an impact on health services? So I come from that perspective, you know, I have this ability to, you know, consider those from a holistic perspective for First Nations people, but I also translate that information back to how our Drought Hub needs to better understand, but also the Future Drought Fund in relation to, you know, the future of conversations. I’m collecting information and hearing the stories, but it’s probably a bit too early to share exactly what the people have to say on the ground.

Pip Courtney [17:11]:

Dr. Raelene Ward, thank you so much for your time and for joining us.

Raelene Ward [17:15]:

Thank you very much.

Pip Courtney [17:17]:

Thank you very much. Joining us now is Professor Allan Dale from the Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub. The TNQ Drought Hub is hosted by the Cairns Institute at James Cook University in Cairns. Allan leads the Hub’s innovative Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Enterprise, or SATSIE program. Over to you, Allan.

Allan Dale [17:40]:

Thank you Pip, and thanks so much to Raelene for doing a lot of the heavy lifting here, and some of the key messages that she was giving in terms of successful engagement. I’m in Perth today, so just acknowledging I’m on Noongar country, and it is actually great to be in Perth right at the moment because of the AIATSIS conference where Traditional Owners from across the country are actually, right now in Perth right today. And it’s been great to be catching up with a heap of friends from across Northern Australia. I’m from Mareeba on Buluwai Country, which is part of the wider Djabugay nation, within far north Queensland wet tropics. So thanks so much for the opportunity today to be talking to people around these foundationally important issues of making sure there is real engagement in the conversation around drought and climate stress generally with Indigenous communities across all of Australia.

But in particular, we work in tropical North Queensland, which starts around Rockhampton and the Fitzroy catchment, all of those eastern catchments up to the tip of the Cape Torres Strait and the Gulf catchments leading into the Gulf of Carpentaria. So a massive area, hundreds of Traditional Owners. Many of the nodal regions that we have, have 20 to 25 Traditional Owner groups each. So it’s a vast landscape with an incredible array of Traditional Owner interests. In reality, it’s very important to start with the foundation that in reality, Northern Australia, Northern Queensland, is an Indigenous domain with a hundred percent Traditional Owner interest across the landscape in northern parts of the region. 85 to 90% of the landscape sits within Traditional Owner rights, specifically through Native Title Aboriginal Land Act, and a range of water and other particular rights. So we live in an Indigenous domain in the north, and it was important from the formation of the Hub’s point of view that the voice of Indigenous communities was fundamentally part of this conversation.

I will start that the whole language of drought across the, and particularly in more northern communities, does seem to be quite a farming community or an agricultural communities conversation. And the word drought is not particularly well used right across many parts of our region. People will talk about failed wets, the impact of a wet that was late, or a wet that was early. Some of the long-term cultural sort of impact associated with that economic, other and water security issues that people are facing because of changes in climate stress, both on the drought side, but also on the other side in terms of significant weather events as well. So it’s a very important concept to be talking about, but quite often the language of drought is not the right way to be having that conversation within communities.

Jess, I’ll get you to move on to the next slide, where Raelene very nicely talked through a couple of key concepts, which I think are very important. The first of which, from the point of view of the SATSIE program, our job is not to be out there doing things, it’s to be standing behind Indigenous interests right across tropical North Queensland, in these conversations about building greater resilience to a range of climate stresses, but in particular drought and water stress related issues. So our job as a program is to stand behind and support the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners across Tropical North Queensland. And all of our activities are focused on investing in and supporting Indigenous institutions to take these issues on themselves. So all activities are focused on lifting the resilience of Indigenous people, businesses, organisations, and communities to drought and to other challenges that they are facing in this context across tropical North Queensland.

And a very important part of the SATSIE program is recognising the diversity of Indigenous interests across our region, not least of which of course is Aboriginal and Torres Strait, the communities right across the region as a whole. Firstly, it’s important for us to recognise and be supporting and working with the 17 to 20 Indigenous local governments that exist within our region, which are local governments in their own right and effectively manage discreet Indigenous communities right across Torres Strait, Cape York, and other parts of Northern Queensland as well. So there’s a very important foundational sort of relationship that needs to be with those councils. There is, of course, Traditional Owners, hundreds, plus Traditional Owner groups across the north, as people are in the business of rebuilding their nationhood beyond Native Title and other processes. And finally, there’s a network and wide range of Indigenous businesses, which might be family-based or individual-based, which might be tied up with traditionally-owned institutions or which might be associated with the councils and other components.

So we’ve found it very important to be working with all three of those components. And as we’ve said, our activity, consistent with what Raelene was saying, is very much about supporting and building self-determination, and empowerment associated with that. Jess, I’ll get you to move on to the next slide. Because I just wanted to give people a feel for the types of stand-behind partnerships and stand-beside partnerships that are very important to the future of the program. So, as I mentioned, one of our most important ones is with the 17 plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils across our region. So we work very closely with what’s called the Torres and Cape Indigenous Council Alliance. And one of the very practical examples of the work we’ve been doing there is very strongly partnering with that alliance, to lead the regional, the first regional Drought Resilience Plan emerging out of the federal future drought arrangements.

That’s been an incredibly important process to allow this conversation around what is effectively drought and water stress, but to start that conversation from the language that’s used around these things within Northern Queensland communities. We could walk into communities and talk about drought and have a very confusing conversation, but it’s far better to be actually working with the language that people use around these issues, which is very much around water stress, cultural issues associated with water stress, economic and social issues that arise from these things, [inaudible], long drys, whatever the case may be. So the Regional Drought Resilience Planning process has been very important because it’s brought to the fore the very significant issues communities are facing, like, for example, very, very significant water security issues, basic delivery of drinkable potable water within those communities. It’s a very large stress in every community, and it’s deeply exacerbated by drought, both in terms of the quantity of water available and the quality of water for drinking.

So water security has come through as a very significant issue going forward. It flows into issues of economic development, it flows into issues of food security, and there are other major issues around basic resilience of communications and infrastructure associated with these. So we’re doing a lot of work around trying to support the progression of those. Some significant investments are emerging now coming out of this work for water security improvement, greater demand management, and we feel it’s had a great influence in the conversation about major federal investments around drought-based investment towards greater water security for communities as well. So that’s one part of the work we do. Another is very much around working very, very strongly with our Traditional Owner institutions across the north, whether that might be a clan-scale or tribal-scale, or whether that might be working with alliances of Traditional Owners at a sub-regional scale or in some places like across Cape York or across the Fitzroy Basin.

So one example of some of the work we’ve been doing there has been working very closely with Cape Land council who have been able to sort of encourage a significant amount of investment in working on this issue of the fact that in the Cape York, through the water planning process that’s been progressed by the State government there, Traditional Owners now have rights and access to some 480 gigalitres of water across Cape York. Very significant economic, social and or cultural opportunity for Traditional Owners to be making decisions about the use of the water that is existing under the Cape York Water Plan. So the whole process of starting those conversations across Traditional Owners about the actual existence of those rights, the aspirations of Traditional Owners to be taking advantage of those rights, either in economic terms or in maintaining cultural flows and values associated with water.

That whole process is coming through this major project that’s been worked up in partnership with Cape Land Council, across the Cape. So the issue of water, I shall say, for Traditional Owners, and the importance of water in this drought conversation has been at the heart of many of our conversations. And with the review of water plans coming up in Queensland and across our landscape, there’s firstly a desire for Traditional Owner groups from across big basins like the Fitzroy or the Burdekin, to be having a strong, united Traditional Owner voice in the review of those plans. That there is good engagement in those processes, that issues of Cultural flow and Cultural value associated with water are fundamentally locked in. And that issues of Indigenous and Traditional Owner rights associated with water are negotiated fairly and equitably. Again, using those sort of core principles that Raelene talked about are free prior and informed consent.

So the water issue is a big issue for us in the region and is very much at the heart of the aspirations of many Traditional Owners in relation to their world, where it intersects with drought and water stress. And finally, we work, as we’ve said, with Indigenous businesses and business networks across the north. So we’re very closely associated with supporting and investing in a range of Indigenous-led networks and support arrangements for Indigenous business. One of those is the newly emerging Queensland Indigenous Business Network or QIBN, which is, at this stage, just about forming and looking to sort of form long-term partnerships where we can bring university support from a range of areas of across the university and across the Hub, into supporting Indigenous business at many levels right across the tropical North Queensland landscape.

Other work we’ve been doing with Traditional Owners and associations within the community, leadership organisations in places like the Western Cape, where we recently held a major symposium and supported the bringing together of some 180 people into the remote Western Cape York. We are looking and supporting the conversation from Indigenous businesses and councils about the future of the Western Cape, about real business opportunities going forward. As that community changes and as the Peninsula Development Road gets close to completion and sealing. There’s very significant work to be done there. And those types of investments are important. We’ve been investing in supporting a range of other networks, such as the Indigenous carbon networks across the country, beef related institutional networks, a range of network-based investments. And so very important to be getting in supporting those networks that are existing, that are Indigenous led.

So the final slide is really some of the lessons from the program that I think again, reflects some of the key things that Raelene raised already. Firstly, remembering that wide spectrum of Indigenous interests, so Traditional Owners and communities and businesses, and to really get in behind those existing foundations to invest in and walk beside the strengthening of Indigenous institutions, really reflecting that, effectively, those conversations of self-determination, empowerment, that Raelene was talking about. The long-term supportive relationships that emerge out of that work are the key to success, rather than in our projects or in our initiatives. It’s really about long-term permanent relationships that we need to be able to build through these types of mechanisms. And it’s one of the reasons why I think the future of continuation of Drought Hubs is a really important issue going forward.

The fact that drought is not necessarily the word that people use to talk around water stress and water related issues. Raelene talked a little bit about the issue of actually raising the cultural awareness within farming communities, in the Drought Hubs more generally, has been really important, and bringing very strong Indigenous capability into those Hubs, but also that these sorts of issues associated with water, are some of the very important conversations we’re hearing very consistently, particularly as we see reviews of the water plans across the Northern Queensland landscape at the moment. All of this I think ultimately means greater resilience in the face of not just drought, but other climate risks and opportunities that potentially emerge out of some of the changing climate related issues for our communities across the north. So I will wrap up there. This last slide is really just to get in touch for more information, but very happy to open to questions.

Pip Courtney [31:28]:

Professor Dale, thank you so much for your presentation. We’ve got quite a few questions coming in for you on Slido here. One of them is, what kind of things do you think are key to Drought Hubs working successfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests?

Allan Dale [31:44]:

Look, I think the point where we started from was recognising Northern Queensland as an Indigenous domain. It’s a very important starting point, rather than coming at the whole conversation of droughts, probably much more largely as an agricultural community issue alone. If there is significant Indigenous interest in the landscape as there is across our entire nation, we need to be starting with this foundation conversation of what do these stresses mean for Indigenous communities as much as we need to be able to support our rural and agricultural communities around these issues. And then, as Raelene was suggesting there, there are also great opportunities for agricultural communities to be working far more effectively with Traditional Owners and Indigenous interests, and communities as well. So it’s not just about making sure that that foundational issue of Indigenous interests is on the table, but we really look to get a greater relationship between communities right across the landscape.

Pip Courtney [32:43]:

You mentioned that drought isn’t really a word that features with the Traditional Owners. If they want to get involved, say in the carbon economy and maybe be paid for biodiversity results, how important is it that they do understand what drought is if they’re gonna be signing multi-decade contracts, that they really understand what drought is and what climate change is going to bring?

Allan Dale [33:12]:

I’d probably reposition that in the sense that people understand, certainly understand, what drought is and what it means for them, and the opportunities that are emerging through things like the carbon economy and the ecosystem services economy. People are already thinking very progressively about their future, both in communities and in Traditional Owner institutions. It’s also probably more about changing the language in a programmatic sense and understanding that there is a different narrative to be talked about in Northern Queensland, which is very progressive, in the sense of people’s future, which doesn’t necessarily use the drought word, but it absolutely recognises and understands the importance of times of water stress. It’s just that the language is different. And what I’d like to see happen is a recognition nationally, and particularly more in the southern parts of the country that the drought word itself doesn’t necessarily reflect what Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities already know deeply and are very progressively working to improve their resilience to deal with the issues that they face. So yeah, let’s mash up the language a bit nationally around some of these things. It’s not so much about Northern Queensland accepting the drought narrative. It’s about the nation having a wider narrative, a more inclusive narrative about what water stress means from a cultural perspective, from an economic perspective and a social perspective.

Pip Courtney [34:41]:

And we’ve got another question which is, what are some key things for the Ag sector to consider when engaging First Nations people and what are some of the common mistakes? That was the question we put to Raelene and I think we might put it to you as well.

Allan Dale [34:58]:

Yeah, I heard that question with Raelene, and it’s one I’m really interested in because the future of agriculture, particularly in Northern Australia, will rely on very strong partnerships between agricultural communities, agricultural investors, and Indigenous communities, Traditional Owners, significantly and increasingly securing water rights. And Cape York is one of those examples that I talked about before where, under the water plan, the vast majority of water allocated for consumptive use actually sits in the hands of Traditional Owners. So for future growth of agriculture, that opportunity will be led through the aspirations of Traditional Owners in Cape York, which will mean if there’s investment interest in agriculture, it’s about partnerships that are in genuine, equity-based partnerships with Traditional Owners in places like that. But that’s pretty much the case across the north. And we need to be thinking about the future growth of agriculture associated with that.

But for existing agricultural communities, building a stronger relationship with Indigenous interests and particularly Traditional Owners is so important, both in terms of the sustainability of those agricultural industries, issues of workforce and relationships, are very critical. Traditional Owners and Indigenous interests live and reside within those communities. They’re a very important part of the agricultural economy. So the stronger those relationships are, the stronger rural communities are, the more resilient rural communities are. So my call is for seeing a much bigger step towards greater partnership in rural communities across Australia in terms of their relationships with Indigenous communities that live in the same environment and the same community.

Pip Courtney [36:48]:

Professor Allan Dale, thank you very much for your insights and I would love to have a chat to you in five years’ time to see what’s happened.

Allan Dale [36:55]:

Thank you Pip.

Pip Courtney [36:59]:

Jane Oorschot is also in North Queensland at James Cook University in Townsville. Jane heads up the Building Human Capacity program for the TNQ Drought Hub. It aims to build skills to deliver transformational change for profitable socially and environmentally responsible and drought resilient agricultural systems and supply chains. Jane’s recent work has taken her to Cooktown, where she’s partnered with AgForce to deliver an Ag Inspirations event with the Cooktown State School to highlight the many career opportunities in agriculture. Here she is, to tell you more. Take it away, Jane.

Jane Oorschot [37:37]:

Thank you Pip, and thanks for everyone for joining me to discuss my building Human Capacity Program. As Pip introduced me, one of the key areas that I found some success with was a recent Cooktown event, which I’d like to talk a little bit more about. So basically, this was a partnership that we brought together with the Cape York NRM, AgForce and the TNQ drought hub. So basically taking a program that wouldn’t normally de be delivered in a place like Cooktown, taking that program to them. So we ran an event in April. We had some very keen Cooktown students, which were primarily Indigenous. The event commenced with career-based activities. We looked at their personality profiles, give them some sort of growth and understanding of themselves. We talked about jobs in agriculture, very much transferable skills and some career snapshot discussions.

We visited five properties, but I’ll just talk to two of those. The first one was Lily Creek Farm, which is on Endeavor Road just outside Cooktown, which is a 70-acre property which grows dragon fruits, lychees and passionfruit and other things. And for the students that attended, they got to share the journey of the producers about how they’ve recently transitioned to electric vehicles and how they’ve had extensive use of solar panels for a very long time. It was also a lovely event in that the students sat around with the property owners and talked to them about their experience. We then went to Red Valley, which is a state-of-the-art, purpose-built facility, which has been designed from some inspiration from Switzerland. And the first batch of mushrooms will be grown and will be sent to sale over the coming months.

What was great about this visit is, this person was a very inspirational agricultural entrepreneur. The students were inspired by his passion, and many of them spoke a lot about their experience with him over the coming days. Because it was a 3-day event. So this event brings a proven AgForce event to a remote location. Due to the success of the event, we’ll be building on that and doing something much more large scale in the new year. In terms of the event, it provided students with an understanding of how they can stay with their community and have inspiring careers in agriculture. So basically we got some attention from the media for that particular event. The Queenslander stated that this experience allowed students to discover cutting edge agricultural business practices, look at career paths and roles in the agricultural sector. So we are very keen as the Hub to pursue a greater event in scale next year.

So my program is quite encompassing and as Allan suggested, we’ve got a really large foot footprint across the region. Another initiative that I’ve been involved in is 8 top-up scholarships. And essentially, we’ve been giving students that are doing their Honour studies or students that are undertaking a mini Masters. And what we’ve tried to do with the scholarship program is move away from the actual academic side as much, because that will happen through their studies anyway, but we’ve asked the students in terms of their milestones to provide a summary video or insights into their key findings. And a key here is asking them to provide an overview of any practical applications that can be shared with industry representatives. So we feel that that’s a good insight in terms of bringing research to the audience. So the students are undertaking research that aligns with the TNQ Drought Hub priorities. And I’ll just quickly give you the topics just so that you see how varied they are. The first one is the effects of beef stocking, stocking strategies, on ant communities and removal in Northern Australia. The second one looks at Bush Food enterprises and business opportunities in Indigenous community development. Another topic is carbon dioxide and sugar cane yield improvement.

Then we have a topic around groundwater sampling techniques in Northern Queensland. One of the other studies is looking at the assessment of Mitchell Grass Rangelands using high resolution drone imagery and machine learning. We are also looking at the influence of social identity on water conservation behaviour in Australia during periods of drought. The seventh one is optimising drought surveying and terrain mapping in the Gulf Savannah. And so you can see from these topics that they’re wide ranging and the important thing from the scholarships is we want people to apply their practical learnings. I recently ran an influential women’s workshop in Cooktown, sorry, not in Cooktown, in Mount Surprise, I apologise. That was in April. And what that did is it brought together a range of women from that region that were either in the agricultural sector, or are actively supporting the agricultural sector. In the feedback, basically, the participants indicated that they really enjoyed the workshop and they felt much more confident in contributing to their community. And they were able to consider more confidence in their ability to influence others and influence change. So this program goes to the heart of building resilience, within community from an agricultural point of view.

So we’re also in the process of organising workshops in Cloncurry, Hughenden and Richmond, and these forums are going to be bringing together, once again, people that work in the agricultural sector or people supporting the agricultural sector in these regions. So we’ve identified an Ag industry succession expert. We are bringing in someone from Royal Flying Doctor Service and the NRM that’s supporting this initiative will give a presentation and offer discussion around drought resilience planning.

Another arm of my program is building our internal capability. We’ve run two successful programs, one in November last year in Townsville and one recently in Cairns. And we brought in various industry experts, Climate Mates, Enablers for change, Long Paddock, Climate Services Australia, Royal Flying Doctors, focusing on mental health and Evidn looking at behavioural science. So these 2-day forums enable us to spend quality time together as a working group. We also bring into those forums our Drought Resilience Coordinators or a node representative. And it’s all about building collaborative relationships, learning from each other and learning from industry perspectives. We’ve brought together a comprehensive series of videos. There’s two key speakers here. Firstly Roger Stone and secondly Bob Shepherd. Roger’s key message was during the drought years, we need to prepare for the floods that follow, and during the flood years, we need to be prepared for the droughts that follow. For Bob Shepherd, one of the things that he shared with us in many of his stories and his relationships with people was that one of the main things he puts his time into is encouraging producers to manage their business enterprises better during periods of drought or hardship.

And coming up for my program is a governance program that will be commencing in August. And this is sort of an online program that we are going to deliver across our region. And we’re also hoping to do financial literacy programs in a remote location such as Hopevale. And I’ll leave it open for questions then.

Pip Courtney [47:42]:

Thank you very much. We have quite a few questions coming in for you. One here, is there potential for this TNQ Hub scholarship program for First Nations students to be rolled out nationally beyond Northern Queensland? Any plans to do this in collaboration with other FDF Hubs Jane?

Jane Oorschot [48:04]:

Well Pip, I guess really all I can say is we are really proud of what we’ve done so far and I do believe that we should be able to leverage what we’ve done so far and work with others. That’s probably, in my role, probably all I have the capacity to say. But yeah, I think it’s a successful event, sorry, a successful activity that should be replicated wherever we can.

Pip Courtney [48:32]:

One of the talks that we heard yesterday gave a figure that was very low for Indigenous graduates from a university level in agriculture. How do we increase this?

Jane Oorschot [48:46]:

Well, I think going to communities, I mean, whilst the Cooktown event, it was fairly small in scale, I can honestly say that the students that were there, their eyes were opened up to the agricultural sector. They didn’t realise that there were so many opportunities at their doorstep. And that facility that’s been built in Lakelands, you know, the one-hectare mushroom facility, which is real state of the art, the students were really taken back because I think it’s some of that myth busting, you know, it’s not, what they might perceive as a career in agriculture has grown and developed. I think that’s where we can play a part.

Pip Courtney [49:32]:

What do you think the success rate with the kids in Cooktown that did that day or did that visit, how many do you think you can sway to working in agricultural or even considering a career in Ag?

Jane Oorschot [49:45]:

Well, I think when I just look at my notes from my first slide, when we got them to fill out what they thought about the event, the main take takeaway from me is that they just didn’t realise that there was so many jobs in agriculture. You know, that to me, they use the words like lots of jobs on farms in our area, more job opportunities than they thought. And also, I mean, one of the students actually got offered, if they’d like to, come and work at Red Valley as an apprenticeship, in an apprenticeship capacity. So I do believe being available to the students and taking them through different experiences can only grow that capacity. So I’d say it would be more favourable than not, with that attendance.

Pip Courtney [50:39]:

Jane, thank you so much and good luck. I hope lots of farmers open the gates and you and the students can go and check out all sorts of Ag operations.

Jane Oorschot [50:47]:

Thank you, Pip.

Pip Courtney [50:50]:

Keep your questions coming in. Some of Australia’s rural and regional mental health heroes will join you shortly. They champion the importance of talking when times are tough, and would love to hear from you.

Recording ends]

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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