# Women on Agricultural Boards Event – full recording: Video description and transcript

29 October 2024

## Introduction

This is the accessible text transcript for the recording from the Woman on Agricultural Boards event on 17 September 2024.

## Transcript

[Video begins]

Screen 1 [00:00:00:00 - 00:00:27:00]

[Audio]:

**Narelle Hooper**

I’m Narelle Hooper. I'm your MC today. AKA the person in charge of keeping things on time on the road and to point. It's my absolute pleasure to be here today and to welcome you all. I've got a, audio. That's just a bit of feedback here, so Ian's going to take care of that for me now. Thank you.

[00:00:27:02 - 00:00:50:02]

It's my absolute pleasure to welcome you to the women and the first one of the Women in agriculture boards event. Now, it's high time for this economically vital sector. We've got a bit of work to do, and I'm really looking forward to the conversation with you today. Before we do that, and thank you for giving up your time.

[00:00:50:04 - 00:01:13:02]

I've got a bit of housekeeping. So a reminder, the event is being filmed with our fabulous team here. So you might there will be photos taken, and during, morning tea, there'll be some people coming around with a microphone who would love to have a brief chat with you. If you don't want to do that, just let them know, but would really appreciate your input.

[00:01:13:02 - 00:01:38:02]

This will be, going online to help the people who haven't been able to be here today to understand what we've been up to and to get your perspective on that. The other important fact, bathroom's so up to the left. Mind the stairs. And I did mention mobile phones. We know you want to be, intimately contacted and contactable, but please, use of the silence switch.

00:01:39:11 - 00:02:00:07

Social media tags. We've got those, on the screen, so it would really love it if you could participate in social media today. Now, that's my bit of housekeeping. We've got a fair bit to get through in a short space of time today. And really vital issues to deal with. The first, most important to task.

00:02:00:07 - 00:02:24:13

And I'm honoured to be here on land today to participate in this is our welcome to country. And I'd like to you to join me in welcoming Auntie Serena a Ngunnawal elder, who gives so much of her time to share her cultural knowledge, her expertise, and her huge heart with our community. Please welcome Serena. Thank you.

00:02:29:01 - 00:02:47:05

**Serena Williams**

Thank you, Narelle. Had a bit of a discussion earlier and I was really quite happy to walk into this space. And I think it's really important because, you know, women give me energy, they give me spirit. And that's how I connect to country.

00:02:47:07 - 00:03:16:09

And we all connected to country through Mother Earth, you know. And it's a special place for us. For me, I can talk to Mother Earth, and I'm sure some of you may have experienced that, but more than anything, I'd like to, thank DAFF for inviting me here, to do the welcome to Country and respecting that old protocols and to be here the first, at the women's business, for agriculture.

00:03:16:11 - 00:03:49:18

I'd like to acknowledge, Tess Bishop, the COO for DAFF and the deputy secretary, Cathy McGowan, the chair of Agricultural Futures Australia, Sally Morgan, a director of CRDC and a proud farmer, and Doctor Harjeet Khanna. And Narelle yourself as MC, and all women that are here today to sit down and talk about, about future of agriculture.

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We’re on the land of the Ngunnawal. This has been my home to myself and my ancestors for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, and is the meeting place. And I'll always acknowledge the countries around me and say, if I'm in my right bearings, which I believe I am to the north of me, I'd like to acknowledge they got in Gundungurra country to the east of me.

00:04:15:16 - 00:04:42:17

I would like to acknowledge the Yuin peoples to the south of me. I'd like to acknowledge them. And to the west, the Wirajduri, I was born here in Canberra many, many years ago. Try to stay young, and and have been raised here all my life. But this place is full of culture and it's full of life.

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And, you know, I always think even better at agriculture. I'm always a bit of a nosey person. So I'd like to know a bit more about it. And I'm thinking how wonderful it would be to have a space for Aboriginal women to come together from all nations across this beautiful country of ours, to incorporate Bushtucker, to go out into our Australian market, a healthy, sustainable food that our people have been living on for many, many years.

00:05:17:07 - 00:05:41:22

I acknowledge my elders, past, present and future and I acknowledge any other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women in this room. And I'd like to say in more revitalized language. TRANSLATED: “Hello. Come. I will sweep the lands for you to leave your footprints here in beautiful Ngunnawal country.”

00:05:41:24 - 00:06:00:21

The water of the Murrumbidgee, the Molonglo, that will clense you of all harm. On behalf of myself, other elders and all family groups, I welcome

00:06:00:22 - 00:06:17:23

you here to the beautiful land. It's a pleasure to be here in a room full of staunch, deadly women. Welcome, welcome, welcome. And thank you.

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**Narelle Hooper**

Thank you. Serena. That gives us a great foundation to kick off today. And as I said, we have a bit of work to do. So what's on the program for the next, between now and 1130? In a moment, I'm going to welcome Tess Bishop, the chief operating officer and deputy secretary of DAFF. Tess will introduce video messages from the Honorable Julie Collins MP.

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New minister. And the Honorable Sam Mostyn, AC, our new Governor-General. Then we'll have a panel discussion, and we want to really dive into some practical pathways and actions that we can take out of today. For those who want to join the energy, we're going to conclude formalities in about an hour at 11:00. And, a quick heads up.

00:07:04:17 - 00:07:28:02

We're going to have some morning tea, catch up with people, ask those questions you really need to ask. And the the team, will be around to do some vox pop. So, take the advantage of that. It's now my great pleasure to introduce Tess Bishop, chief operating officer and deputy secretary at the department. Welcome, Tess.

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Thank you.

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**Tess Bishop**

Thank you very much for that introduction, Narelle. I'd also like to thank Aunty Serena for that very, warm welcome. Before I begin, importantly, I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet today. The Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and region.

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I'd also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event. I'd like to thank Narelle Hooper for joining us. Thank you. Narelle, you bring to, today's event, over 30 years in public life and you are editor in chief of, the company, Board of Directors magazine. So thank you very much for, being here and sharing your knowledge and insights to, we have an incredible panel of women here today, and Narelle will introduce each, in greater detail shortly.

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But to Cathy, Harjeet and Sally, I'm so grateful that you are able to join us and to also share your insights a bit later on. Unfortunately, Doctor Beth Woods, chair of the Fisheries Research Development Corporation, who was meant to join us today, unfortunately, her flight was cancelled this morning and so Beth has been unable to make it. However, I look forward to Beth joining us at Future Functions.

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To everyone, thank you for being here. And also to my deputy secretary colleagues, Tina Hutchison and, Justine Saunders. Thank you very much. Two of my colleagues who day to day hold leadership positions in Daff and who are committed to continuing to support women in leadership positions, and to Padma Ramon, the executive director of the office for women at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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Thank you very much for joining us. For those who have not yet had the chance to meet Padma, she is a leading, an authoritative voice on the rights of women. Thank you for giving your time and your support to today's event. So what a wonderful group. Of people who have gathered, we have several of our current members of the departments portfolio boards and regional development corporations also here.

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I appreciate you not only taking the time today, but also for the impact you make to the members of our portfolio agencies and boards, to all of the distinguished guests. Ladies and gentlemen, I echo Narelle's early sentiments and welcome you all here to Parliament House this morning. For those of you who are local visitors, and from out of town, I thank you very much for taking the time to travel to today's event.

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Today's topic is one that I'm incredibly passionate about. Prior to taking out my role at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, or Daff, I kicked off the Women on Boards program, to align with the Queensland Women's Strategy when I was at the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Queensland. And since joining the department 12 months ago, I saw it as an opportunity.

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We've got, an amazing array of, opportunities for women to take a seat at the table and having the appointments team in my group, I saw it as an opportunity to not only, facilitate greater participation for women, but, to further continue the conversation for how we can mentor and support each other, in important forums of, engagement and leadership.

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In our department, we have a strong representation of women. At 30th June 2024, over 54% of our workforce identify as women working in various diverse roles across staff roles such as science and research, policy. Biosecurity operations, trade, trade, program administration, client services regulation, and across our leadership team. We are very fortunate to work in a country where women are well-represented across all sectors, including in agriculture and within government.

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We are also very committed to supporting the government's objective of maintaining 50% women on boards, and I am pleased that Daff has recently passed that target. Across the 15 boards that fall under the agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio. Each of these bodies represent, the different needs of the portfolio, from primary producers to research and development corporations to examining drought preparedness across the food and fibre industry.

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Engaging with the department is not just limited to these boards. We also have statutory appointments and mechanisms such as advisory bodies, panels and committees that cover research and development, through to industry consultation on regulatory and service delivery. The government's focus on increasing the representation of women on government boards is, however, an important milestone that, at Daff we are committed to.

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As of 31st December 2020, three women held 53.2% of positions on Australian Government boards, meeting the government's targets for women to hold 50% of overall Australian Government board positions and maintaining the highest overall results since reporting began in 2009. Setting these targets provides leadership in the community, across the public and private sectors, and provides important opportunities for women to have a greater access to provide a greater role for women in economic participation, and for them to exercise leadership.

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By reporting on these targets, the government is fostering a cultural change within the professional community by promoting gender equality in the decision making arenas and increasing the economic value of government boards by engaging both women and men in decision making. Now, with this context in mind, I'm excited to see so many of you here today, a kind of a community of people with vast experience, some already on our portfolio boards, but importantly, those interested in joining as well.

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And I've already heard, from many who are already on boards wanting to foster and when to, other women to come through this process, which is really encouraging to hear. So earlier this year, we released a new portfolio boards registration portal on Have Your Say, which can be found on our website. The portal allows people with diverse skills and backgrounds to be informed of board member opportunities that are to be advertised, and to be considered for board and committee positions that relate to their interests, experience and skills.

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Unfortunately, Minister Julie Collins MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry wasn't able to join us today, but she has recorded a short video message for us. If I can draw your attention to the screens on the side of the stage, Minister Collins. Video will play.

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**Minister Collins**

Hi, everyone. It's a pleasure to see so many attendees at this. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person. The Albanese Labor government has set a target this year for women to hold 50% of all Australian Government board positions. I'm personally invested in this outcome, as I had the honor as Minister for the Status of Women 11 years ago of launching the gender balance on Australian Government Boards report proudly.

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We have made great progress on gender equity. As of 1st July, more than 50% of my portfolios directorships were held by women, with 58 female directors out of 115 positions. We want to continue this good work and that's why I'm delighted, Deputy Secretary Tess Bishop's group is organizing a range of communication and networking activities to promote directorships to women, starting with today's addresses and panel discussions.

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Today is about encouraging talented women and ensuring they have the support that they need to step up as leaders and make their mark on the future of Australian agriculture. Thank you and good luck today.

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**Narelle Hooper**

In continuing on, I would, really do encourage you to stay after the event. It is a really, wonderful opportunity. I know that people have come from across, Australia to be here and, it is an opportunity to me network. I'm a big believer that way leads underway and you never know, there might be an immediate outcome from being here or something that comes about in 1 or 5 years time.

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And it's all about creating an ecosystem of supporting each other, beforehand. Back to Narelle. I'd also like to introduce a second video for you. We had also invited, today Her Excellency, the Honourable Sam Mostyn, AC, Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia. Unfortunately, the Governor-General was unable to attend. However, she really did want to, reiterate her support for women and women on boards and women in leadership.

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And the Governor-General has kindly also recorded this message, which we will share. Good morning to you all at Australia's Parliament House. Thank you for attending this important session. You are driving change in a sector that is critical to Australia's future and strengthening our community. As you all know, gender inequality exists across every sphere of life. But addressing inequality isn't just about equity, it's about unlocking Australia's potential.

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It goes to the quality of decision making and governance. And that will always be better when there are more women in the room aboard. To create space for inclusive representation will always make a bigger impact. Networks of women are a powerful catalyst for change. By making connections, having conversations, and empowering each other. When women step up to leadership, they leave a legacy for those who come after.

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You know that agriculture is a cornerstone of Australia's economy. Its long history embeds it in our culture and identity, and women have always played a critical role in the agricultural sector. They have earned a place in the boardroom. So best of luck for your conversation today and on behalf of the women of Australia, thank you for opening the door so that so many more can follow.

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**Narelle Hooper**

I'd like to thank, Tess - we’ll hear more from you in a moment. I just wanted to frame this a little bit. Julie Collins, as our new minister, and Sam Mostyn, both very powerful voices who, day to day, live what they say. My background. I grew up in Wiradjuri land. I'm a journalist, business journalist, and editor by background.

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I've been involved with boards for about 10-15 years. Government, not for profit, and now my own private business, as well as well as re-launching company director magazine for the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Now when I went in to do that very fine institution which had not seen many women in participation and they really knew,

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they need to drive change. Guess who I turned to interview for our relaunch issue, which set the new agenda. Our new Governor-General, that was Sam Mostyn, in her words at the time, were the new environment we were operating in is going to demand new skills of us all. She talked about risk and importantly, the opportunity.

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And then for each of us, we had the capacity to step up and drive change. That was a powerful message for me. I'm hoping that's a powerful message for you. I'm going to invite our panel to join us. First of all, I'd just like to do a little pulse check and see if you wouldn't mind putting a hand up.

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Who's on a board or on a committee? Who wants to be on one? Who wants to be on one? I think we can do better. I'm going to invite you. I think this is a really participatory forum today. So, there's some important issues that we're dealing with. We're dealing with, yes. Targets, skills, importantly culture.

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We're talking about process and the legislative framework as well, and simply how things have been done around here for many years. A lot of that needs to change. Today we're going to start that conversation. We have some, a fabulous panel. And as I collect their names, they're going to join us on the panel. They said that Doctor Beth Woods couldn't be here with us, so I was wanting to hone in on fisheries, but, Linda Thorburn is in the audience, so I'm going to tap her for some important fishery information.

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First up, we have Cathy McGowan from Indigo in Victoria. Cathy is the chair of the Agri Futures Research and Development Corporation, aka Agri Futures Australia, appointed January 23rd. Sixth generation farmer famous as the former independent member for Indi who is building a national community independence movement. Lots of lessons there. She's written the book literally, on participation, not just a personal story, but a call to action for communities seeking to drive meaningful change.

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Thank you, Cathy. Tess Bishop, whom we've just met. Come on up, Tess. Chief operating officer. And 20 years of experience across public, private and NFP sectors in Australia and the UK. She was recently appointed to the Council of the Institute of Public Administration in Australia in the Act. Sally Morgan, an owner manager of cotton mixed Farming in New South Wales, non-executive director at the Cotton Research and Development Corporation.

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The CRCD at this point. I remind you this session today comes with an acronym warning. We're going to hear more about Sally's experiencing policy research and stewardship, technical leadership. Joining us on stage is now Doctor Harjeet Khanna, also a non-executive director of Agri Futures Australia since October 2023.

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Doctor Harjeet is a scientist and agricultural industry leader. And fabulous back story where a that and passionate about fostering a thriving and resilient agricultural sector dedicated to driving positive change. Now am I going to stay up here or am I going to sit down and and have the conversation here? Yeah. Okay. All right.

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Now I've got lots of questions here. I wanted to ask, first of all, if we could have a little introduction from you, Tess, you've given us a brief idea or idea of the scale and scope. What do you see about the the background, the scale, the scope of the at the portfolios? Where do you see the opportunities for driving that change now, given those areas?

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I grew up in country Queensland on the Darling Downs, so I'm a big believer. Oh. Not a big, believer. I've lived firsthand the importance of, rural and regional communities. And I've also had the privilege of experiencing, being on a board and, being in a leadership role and being a woman.

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Unknown

And I, just think that, this is such a unique opportunity where I can, use the, appointments process to be able to make sure information is shared about the the right wide range of boards that the department has, not only the boards, but the other opportunities for engagement, whether it be a consultative committee or advisory body.

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Unknown

To have a seat at the table and to participate. So, I just wanted to work with my colleagues, Tina and Justine, who are equally as passionate to make sure that we're, putting the ladder down for others to come up and, share that that opportunity widely. Doctor Harjeet you're originally from New Delhi. You've got fabulous global experience, here as well.

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Unknown

Don't even start to talk about her doctorate, which has something to do with recombination DNA. And then, I think your post, doctor, it was something about frost tolerant wheat varieties. But you bring a scientist perspective. This is an intersection of science, innovation and so forth. And you also bring a diversity perspective and a global perspective.

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Can you give us your short intro on how you got to do all this and, and how you're seeing your first board in this area? My father was in Army, but we had a farm in India. So as a child, I grew up, on the farm. So that was my first hand experience. Like any other Indian parent, my parents wanted me to become a doctor or an engineer.

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So, you know, I'm a plant girl. I would like to study plants. Now, after doing my honors in botany, in masters in genetics, I went to Cambridge to do my PhD on DNA protein interactions, came back to India, joined the Ministry of Agriculture, started working with the Rockefeller Foundation, to work on rice. And that was when I had first hand experience of meeting farmers, in India and also in Philippines.

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Unknown

And, that was also my first understanding of like, men are farmers, women or farm workers or laborers. And that was a bit of a unsettling kind of feeling. I came to Australia in 2000 to work on First Element wheat for Darling Downs area. Things are different in Australia, but not that different. And then I also started working with Bill Gates Foundation to do some work in Africa for the farmers over there, on nutrition.

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Unknown

And it's the same story over there. It's the women who do most of the work, but because the land title has the name of a mile on it. So whenever you're trying to collect your data or information whose land it is, it belongs to the guy. But all the R&D work that I've done in agriculture, a lot of my problems that I needed to solve, I wanted actual information about the problems I was trying to solve.

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Unknown

I had to talk to the women because they had a better understanding of the problem, and they were actually able to give us the real nitty gritty and the data that we needed to design our projects. And sometimes the information we got from the guys was even wrong. And it was like, oh, really? Okay, fine. Like, for example, it was the bananas on which we wanted to work to improve the nutritional life of the children there.

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Unknown

And the guys didn't even have a clear understanding of the banana varieties that the kids eat, because mothers were the ones who were feeding them. So, like, who's the farmer identity of the farmer? And I've seen that problem even at a scientist identity of a scientist. People think a scientist is a male, a male with the white coat with confused hair and glasses and all.

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Unknown

So we fought for that identity issue as scientists, and I'm seeing the same battle with the women farmers. Like a farmer can be a woman. I think that's the first lesson that the kids in schools need to be taught, that if they are asked to draw a farmer, they should be able to draw them in without feeling uncomfortable about it.

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So it's around the world. And it shows how important that the front facing, user stakeholder viewers is. Now, Sally, as a cotton farmer, normally you might be out doing something else at this time of day. This is your first board. Can you give us some insights on what that experience was like and joining that board?

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Unknown

And did you have to have previous experience on boards or how did it work? Yeah. So this is my first board experience. I joined the Saturday board about 12 months ago. So previous to that, I'd worked in the cotton industry across a range of roles. But most recently in sort of stewardship and research policy. So I knew the industry very well and had worked in, you know, various sectors of the industry, quit full time work a couple of years ago to run the farm.

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Unknown

And I guess I was kind of missing that community, that, of farm kind of making my brain work in a different way. And the opportunity to apply for the CRTC board came up in terms of board experience, did not have any. The thing that I had to offer was good experience in that industry, really good knowledge of the industry, from a range of things, having worked as a researcher and agronomist, the farming experience and working in policy, though, that was really what I honed in on as my sort of start, I guess.

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So the opportunity came up how? I was made aware by some people in the industry that the opportunity was there and that, maybe I should think about a more. Thank you. That gets to another question. Yeah, but coming to Cathy McGowan. Yes, Cathy, you've got, deep experience, across a range of organizations. And we've described the skills, the culture.

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And so where do you see, the biggest, opportunity to drive change? So just what I'd like to acknowledge everybody. And I can't even begin to think of what you had to do to get here. If it was anything like me, It was a lot. So thanks for making the effort and looking forward to staying in touch.

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So, just got to start by saying follow me on LinkedIn. That'd be lovely. To really see the big picture work, and I'm going to come down and talk a little bit about the more detail. But the Australian economy is going to transition to net zero by 2050. That's legislated. It is going to happen. And I think agriculture and land fishery and forest can be the key players in that transition.

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But how and I want to be part of a movement of us women in particular, those of us who are connected to production, families, communities, education, all service stuff that we know about and then have our voices heard. So by the time we get to 2050 rural and regional Australia and agriculture and our food and our fiber is in a better position, and I don't trust the current trajectory, I think if we leave it up to production agriculture, I think if we leave it up to, the developers of the renewable energy system.

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We will become victims of an amazing change. And that's what I see happening. So why do I think we need more women on boards? It's not just because we end up half the sky and we've got half the talent, it's that most of us are in a unique position to understand that interconnection between land production, families and community.

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And when I am around on boards with a group of blokes wrestling, well, I don't sleep with them, whatever. But I don't get that interconnection in the way that I do, because I haven't gone to the kindergarten committee and tried to work out how to do it, but I haven't gone and worked at that. You need childcare if you're going to get production increases on farms.

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Unknown

They haven't understood that to get the next generation in, it's actually not about only, production. You've actually got to manage the transition. And that's really complex. So I'm just putting out there a complex picture of agriculture and what I’ve seen in my very long years is that when you don't have women at that table, you get a really skewed policy position.

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And I've seen it and I've been on the outcome of it. So I'm here today to be a passionate advocate, not just to get women on boards. Like, no way. It's to get people who have got a commitment and a passion to be involved in the design of how we want this country to be over the next 50 years.

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Unknown

And will climb on that letter with you, and then put the hand out to all the youngsters who want to study environmental science at uni and anybody else we can find and say we know how to do this. Will you come on to our team? So that's why I'm so passionate about it and I knew that we could do it because we've got the government, we've got the Governor-General.

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Unknown

But it won't necessarily happen. And then the final thing I want to say is it will be work. But there's not a women in rural and regional Australia or anyone who works in our industries is not up for hard work. So I serve as chair of agri futures and the team leader of that, and I really did want to extend the invitation much more widely to offer our resources and our help and our skills that we've got to work with the government on this transformation.

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Unknown

So, yeah, I'm not shy about that. I'm here with a purpose. You've raised a number of important points there, but I wanted to hone in on this. If you think about the barriers to entry. So we we think about skills, and, and from my perspective over many years to encouraging women to put their hand up and so forth.

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Unknown

There's a there's a supply issue, but equally, there's a demand issue. And I'm really interested to hear about the tap on the shoulder. What do you see needs to be done on the demand side and how? So I’ll briefly talk on the supply side. I've been a member of Australian Women in Ag for a long time, and we women have always networked about jobs on boards.

00:36:40:22 - 00:37:08:23

Unknown

And we've had a database and we've had research, and we've had 20 years of why there's not more women on agricultural boards. And it's not because we haven't applied in large numbers. It's it's getting through what I'm going to gently call the patriarchy, because they know that when we get there, the system changes. And the people who pick the people for the birds often don't want what looks different to them.

00:37:09:00 - 00:37:36:06

Unknown

So there's a system about the supply. I think we've got a lot of women who are bird ready. They've done many. I've said that them in Australian Rural Leadership Program, they've done Churchill Fellowships. They're ready to go to I, I think that's the problem. I think the problem is that the PIRD Act is the act, the define to you get onto boards and the criteria you need.

00:37:36:08 - 00:37:57:17

Unknown

It's very production orientated. There's a bit of something else, but in a lot, the problem lies in some of the systems within the government, like they have a presiding officer and a process for picking people to get through the system. So you've got to jump through hoops. And then the minister themselves actually makes a final decision.

00:37:57:17 - 00:38:20:21

Unknown

So if you're politically incorrect, it's difficult. So I'm just I'm just saying we know about this. What we've got to be doing in the demand side is be cleverer about the strategy of getting there. And I'm just going to do two more things before I finish off. So Australian women in ag is playing a leading role in doing that mentoring work there.

00:38:20:23 - 00:38:38:20

Unknown

But what I just want to put on the table, is what the Victorian government has done. So, for ever, the Victorian government has been trying to get more women on boards, and then a little while ago, like 2 or 3 years ago, they said, enough, enough, we're going to solve the demand problem. We're going to make it by legislation.

00:38:38:22 - 00:39:00:09

Unknown

Every single board has got to have gender equity. And overnight it changed. Now I'm not advocating you guys do that. But I tell you what the minister sends it back if there's not equal numbers. So all out through our catchment management, all our agricultural boards in Victoria have got gender and there's a supply chain coming through this leadership's code.

00:39:00:11 - 00:39:29:18

Unknown

The whole system changed with that change of demand. So I'm putting out to us today that we've got serious work to do. It's not just about us doing it. Padma, I'm so glad you're here from PM&C, because it needs policy support as well. And I think that today in the room and with people like me and Beth Woods is not here and other leading women in ag we can be really good partners with the department in the supply.

00:39:29:20 - 00:39:58:18

Unknown

And then working with you on the demand. Tess, I’d like to hear your response to that in terms of the the issues. And then I'd like to go to Sally about your experience. Cathy covered a lot of ground there. I think it's really interesting to see how each state and territory is approaching

00:39:58:20 - 00:40:43:03

Unknown

women on boards in recent years. And, I think that for me as a public servant, we, you know, honoring and operating within the, the, the framework of the day. So I think, we I will definitely take on board a lot of the feedback and I hear what you're saying about, many of these things have been tried and tested before portals and, and the like, but I think that opportunities like today, provide an information sharing exercise and that we have to keep that network and, sharing the information and creating opportunity and to not give up.

00:40:43:03 - 00:41:06:15

Unknown

So there's always a new way to, to do things. So within the framework that we're provided. Yeah. Well informed, thank you. Sally, your experience - very often in selecting boards that comfort factor, it does drive things that we're not quite sure we know someone. So how do we know to select them. How did you approach that kind of understanding?

00:41:06:15 - 00:41:29:09

Unknown

And then how does that, influence how you operate in your work on your board? Yes, I guess, to use the cotton industry as a sample, it's a very small industry, sort of 1500 growers. So the CRDC board does have an equal mix of males and females. And what it also has is an equal mix of production

00:41:29:09 - 00:41:59:04

Unknown

and outside of industry experience. And so I guess I say, my role as being more of a production, but also, knowledge of the industry, in terms of the sort of tap on the shoulder. It's one of those things where I have conflicting feelings about it. Because I can see the problem with it. I can see that you're potentially tapping people on the shoulder because you already know them, and you know how they kind of operate and how they work.

00:41:59:06 - 00:42:27:00

Unknown

But at the same time, if you are a woman and you're trying to get your foot in the door, I think you take any opportunity that you can get. But we do have a couple of, women on our board, one in particular, who has no cotton industry experience, and brings, a really great level of experience to the board that I don't think we would have gotten otherwise in terms of just a totally different perspective, in how she sort of sees our world, I guess you would call it to.

00:42:27:02 - 00:42:42:13

Unknown

Now, this this is a bit more of a sensitive question, but I think it needs to be asked to what degree, and this is more understanding how people are thinking about their careers and managing their own participation. To what degree does the political cycle [...]

00:42:43:03 - 00:43:07:08

Unknown

how do you navigate career longevity, when we often have a three year cycle of spills and so forth. But you want to contribute for a long time? Has anyone had any experience or thoughts on how that might be navigated? I'm looking between Harjeet and Cathy.

00:43:07:10 - 00:43:29:00

Unknown

Okay, you might get back to us on that one. Have a think about that. Now I'm conscious of time, and I've got some fabulous questions from the audience that I know are coming. So if we could get the microphones happening, that would be a really good start.

00:43:29:02 - 00:43:51:21

Unknown

I wanted to, we do have a little bit of work to do. So Sally's talked about cotton, almonds and avocados, I think needs more work. Where’s Natalie? Would you like to give us some insights if you'd be happy to share about your experience, about those sectors which. Who doesn't eat avocados? Yeah, not many of us.

00:43:51:22 - 00:44:09:00

Unknown

Or almonds. And, but what might change culturally as well as. Yeah, I just wait for the microphone if you could, please. Thank you. It's really interesting listening to the panel, I think, and I really like those guys as they're great, people that are on the boards currently, and I would not like to disparage them at all.

00:44:09:00 - 00:44:26:19

Unknown

But, one of the issues and I hear with cotton is that most of those was that it was all men and 24 months ago, there were full 13 men on Avocados Australia. And so they've now both, I think, got one, one woman on avocados, I know, on almonds has just been appointed and the other so avocados.

00:44:26:21 - 00:44:56:11

Unknown

You can't get in. I've been doing agriculture all my life. I'm on a farm. I'm a farmer. Unless I buy an almond farm, I can't. It appears to be I'm unable to get on the board. And I just wonder, you talk about 50% boards. I know of those two boards that are so far below 50%. There's obviously some boards somewhere else that are making up the numbers, because these guys and they're great people, but you can just see the lack of diversity and the lack of, this just cut cookie cutter people on the board.

00:44:56:13 - 00:45:15:06

Unknown

So the question in that might be how how might we think about, because that's a cultural change and a process change. Can I tell a story? So that's sort of what I'm saying about the supply and the demand. Yeah. So I'll just tell you a little bit of a story because it's again, why we need to work together.

00:45:15:08 - 00:45:37:15

Unknown

And why are organisations like Australian Women in Ag are so important. So back in the day in the Victorian Farmers Federation, the rule was there was one vote per farming business. And we women, there's no women in it. I mean, there was one, Heather Mitchell, she's a widow and just got up. But there's no other women anywhere in farm politics.

00:45:37:17 - 00:45:57:11

Unknown

So, we Australian women and I got together and we talked to the VFF and said, you've got a problem. You’re never going to get more women because your rules say one vote per business, and then who gets the vote? It's the person whose name is first on the title. So even if you're the title and you still can't get in because it’s usually your father in law.

00:45:57:13 - 00:46:18:17

Unknown

So there was a structural problem. So through Australian Women in AG, we formed a subcommittee. We worked really closely with the VFF, Victorian Farmers Federation, and we explained to them that the benefit was that if they could change their rules, their their membership would increase, which was at a happy about. There was also the other benefits of diversity.

00:46:18:19 - 00:46:43:12

Unknown

So eventually through working through that organisation, we got the rules changed so that they if now has multiple membership of farming businesses. So you get I think you get to two votes for the price of one. And then you can buy more if you've got the next generation coming in. Anyhow, we allowed them to change the structure. And once we changed the structure, the organisation changed.

00:46:43:14 - 00:47:00:17

Unknown

So if you look at the VFF now, gender is absolutely not an issue and I don't think it is on any of the other farm organisations because they've changed it. But we did try the same thing with the sugar industry in Queensland, not the not the government one, but the actual... Anyone here from Queensland?

00:47:00:19 - 00:47:27:08

Unknown

Yep. Sugar it. We tried really hard to convince the the powers that be that they could change their rules, but they were not going to move. So still the rules for the sugar industry organization in Queensland is one vote per business and we're still caught within that structural rules. And so that's when partnerships with Daff are really important, because we're not able to do I don't think it would be very, very hard job for us to change that.

00:47:27:10 - 00:47:51:10

Unknown

But the minister, a new meeting with the ministry in Queensland and actually looking at the structural barriers that exists to gender representation, you actually could do that easily and the minister could lead it and it would open up such a change. But you need partnerships with Australian women in Ag to sort of build a representative body to help that happen.

00:47:51:12 - 00:48:11:03

Unknown

Government just can't do it by itself and Agrifutures can't do it and cotton can't do it. But we could do it with horticulture. Australia working really closely with the Minister to get the data, get the research done, get the data, and then actually have a strategic approach to change like it's possible. And just even telling them the story that Sally told us that,

00:48:11:09 - 00:48:33:13

Unknown

the woman who has a grown cotton, but can bring those other, insights to the table is trying to get the boards to understand that. And I don't know how you do that. I want to to to talk about, the importance of diversity. And, Doctor Harjeet you've had, you bring a scientist perspective, a migrant perspective.

00:48:33:15 - 00:48:59:21

Unknown

How can we reframe our approach to diversity on board so that we do have more voices participating around the table? Well, what do you see from your experience on those organisations that make it stick? Yeah. I think number one, thing is one needs to understand what diversity means. Diversity is not about having a different talking face on the table.

00:48:59:23 - 00:49:35:24

Unknown

It's about different voices, different perspectives, and being comfortable with different. And I think that change, it's okay. I know we need changes at the government level, understanding level, board levels, but, change or this starts here. And that change needs to start with our children is the way we raise our sons and daughters is the way we help them understand what diversity means and what equality means, because these are the people who are going to be our future board members.

00:49:36:01 - 00:50:00:08

Unknown

They are the people who are going to be on panels and boards and in the governments, if they learn the new normal is equal and by equal I am not saying the pink and blue kind of equal. There are shades of everything. So that next people who are coming in the future, it's not just about women in agriculture is about all of the diverse people in agriculture.

00:50:00:10 - 00:50:22:17

Unknown

It's about their voices, the way they understand the problems. I know a lot of immigrants, first generation, second generation immigrants who are not farming are in agribusinesses. They do not have the networks that other people have who have had family farms here. So their problems are actually different. What about their voices? Who is going to bring their problems up here?

00:50:22:19 - 00:50:46:18

Unknown

And especially coming from R&D, what I have noticed is when we are trying to work on innovations that are related to farms, I have slowly learned that you have to be gender sensitive because there are a lot of innovations that you need to do that are gender sensitive innovations, innovations that help, female workers, female farmers, female agri business people do things differently.

00:50:46:20 - 00:51:15:23

Unknown

So diversity needs to be about thinking about the needs of diverse people coming from different backgrounds, different genders, different classes, different colours, whatever you want to call diversity about. It's all those voices coming onto the table and hard and respected, not just seen. So diversity to me is not about looks. It's about the voices and the respect for those voices.

00:51:16:00 - 00:51:57:17

Unknown

Sally, how does that resonate with you? I completely agree with that. Yeah, that really does resonate with me, particularly about it's not about the different faces. It's the different voices that you hear, and the different perspectives that I think make the real difference. You know, Doctor Harjeet made a point to me about confidence. Now, often we think about the confidence of the applicants, but the level of confidence of the incumbents, and how that locks out difference very often because they're not comfortable or confident that, any, any one have any insights on how you manage that, go around that, navigate that.

00:51:57:19 - 00:52:24:03

Unknown

How I would say often, I think the role of the chair on the board can't be underestimated in terms of how they, how they develop a culture in a board, how they, encourage diversity, encourage different perspectives, and ensure that everybody does have a voice. And so, yeah, I think, you know, a conversation around the role of the chair, how chairs are appointed on boards is an interesting conversation as well.

00:52:24:05 - 00:52:48:14

Unknown

And I think that has a big influence. Cathy how do you do it? In just being Cathy. Okay. I know it's, well, I'm wanting to answer in a different sort of way, but I want to actually talk about the courage it takes to employ not only, but let's just leave the board there for sake, because that's true.

00:52:48:16 - 00:53:13:07

Unknown

But the courage it takes to employ people of diversity in agriculture. So, I'm really sad Beth Woods can't be here because those of you who know it, she's just a senior bureaucrat. She's head up organisations. And she's now the chair of Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

00:53:13:09 - 00:53:38:03

Unknown

They're exceptional women. And then if you look at the, like I'm the chair of an agricultural research and development corporation. So that's agri futures. And then there's cotton and then there's sugar and there's meat and livestock Australia. And then there's Grains Research and Development Corporation and there's Horticulture Australia. So there's 15 of those research and development corporations which are appointed out of DAFF.

00:53:38:05 - 00:54:00:06

Unknown

The board is appointed by DAFF. And the teams are appointed by the minister. So I'm a ministerial appointment. So that sort of helps us get there's good numbers on that. But then if you look at the CEOs, we have a that the terms of the aid Regional Development Corporation CRDC, we have a twice a year that chairs and the CEOs get together.

00:54:00:08 - 00:54:28:15

Unknown

So, thank you very much, Minister Watt and Minister Collins much better balance and woman like me. There's me and Beth who are chairs. But the CEOs with the exception of Margot from pork, are blokes and there's no there's no career path. I mean, the career path to become a CEO within the RDC’s is within the RDC’s. And they have proved themselves to the managers.

00:54:28:15 - 00:54:52:07

Unknown

And they do all of that. And it's sort of like that's there's a huge lack of a pipeline there, because if you actually want to become an agricultural, a chair like agricultural board, it really helps if you've been on the board. Alternatively, if you've worked with cotton, cotton and you've been the managing director of the investment procedure, you know, you've had a finance career in know, then you can move on to a board.

00:54:52:09 - 00:55:17:08

Unknown

But the pipelines are not there. And also, it takes a little less courage for a CEO to appoint a senior manager who is not deeply embedded in agricultural research. So and they're not many that we've got that much courage because they've all got KPIs, they've got a mate. And if they don't get their KPIs, they don't get paid.

00:55:17:10 - 00:55:39:16

Unknown

So there's no big incentive to create a pipeline for sea, for women to come through the research and development corporation into Ag. So people come from outside the sector and that's cool, but we actually need it within the sector. We need people who actually understand agricultural research and its complexities to be the CEOs. And then and then on the board.

00:55:39:18 - 00:56:13:01

Unknown

That's another ongoing conversation. Now I'm conscious of time and I'd like to get some some further questions Thank you, Linda Thorburn from fisheries R&D Corporation board. I'd just like to point out, I guess, and ask a question about the roles of committees because when being focusing on the board. But in fact, there are other ways into boards by getting experience on committees and advisory groups.

00:56:13:03 - 00:56:34:08

Unknown

And, and you can quite often and I actually haven't checked the product recently to see if it's possible, but there may be avenues into the for organisations that are under the PIRD Act by appointing, women on to the Finance and Audit Committee or the HR committee, whatever it is you have. So I would just like some comment from the panel on that particular question.

00:56:34:11 - 00:57:00:07

Unknown

Thanks. Great question. Tess, any thoughts on that? Thank you for that question. It was something that I was, trying to, to draw out today is exactly that point that today is to highlight the many boards, but also the range of forum that DAFF is a very dynamic portfolio.

00:57:00:08 - 00:57:29:01

Unknown

So we, we play a large role like Justine has 3000 staff, I think, across Australia. Tina also services a very large trade, group. And so, it is a really, really dynamic organisation. And we do have a range of committees. And, and a range of staff are here today from our policy group as well.

00:57:29:01 - 00:58:02:07

Unknown

We've got Mel Brown. So I really do encourage, people to network to meet because it is a good way to hear about what is happening at DAFF. There is a really broad agenda on foot. And we do have the registration portal. And it is not just for boards, it is for others to use that as an information source to see, who is there, who's interested in participating, in our very diverse and dynamic portfolio, you know, in a range of forums.

00:58:02:07 - 00:58:22:21

Unknown

So, yeah, I just encourage you to, to look at the portal, but also to meet, the Daff staff who are here today to share information we can see. Yeah. So if you're a, DAFF person, please raise your hand. Thank you very much.

00:58:22:23 - 00:58:40:18

Unknown

We're running out of time. I had lots of questions, like how, that pipeline piece is really important. You're building your, incidental skills on the way through. Like, I want to know how much you get paid, how much time it takes. How do you how do you navigate, your own career and your CV and so forth?

00:58:40:20 - 00:59:05:24

Unknown

But I, I'm being stared down by timeout. Just let to finish finally with, have you got 1 or 2 pitfalls, high points of your involvement to date from the panelists. So, Doctor Harjeet? Yeah. I think for me joining the Agrifutrues Australia board was, it wasn't something that I had planned.

00:59:06:01 - 00:59:27:10

Unknown

I was working on Agrifutures Australia advisory panels. I was working on three of the industry advisory panels and just working on this advisory panels gave me so much of insight into how Active Australia work, and I, I really started liking the organization and for me, it was like that liking that actually took me to the next step.

00:59:27:10 - 00:59:56:05

Unknown

And when I joined the board, I hadn't thought about boards before that at all. I that's lovely. That's such a great starting point. Sally? I would say one of the things that I've really enjoyed the most is, I guess, getting that sense that you're actually getting to do something and make a difference. So doing things like talking about setting carbon reduction, efficiency targets and things like that, you do get a real sense that you are having an impact, getting my head around corporate governance has been a learning curve, being quite new to boards.

00:59:56:05 - 01:00:24:07

Unknown

But, you know, it's a challenge and I've enjoyed it. Tess? I think that the biggest thing for me is, we all like, there is a diversity of skill sets that we bring and skills based boards and understanding that is really important. So, I think don't be ashamed to, speak up and say what, you do and don't know.

01:00:24:07 - 01:00:44:05

Unknown

And, and I know, being on the exec board that, you know, I'm regularly asking my colleagues for advice and guidance, and I think that, on a board that's equally as important as well to to be able to feel that you can do that. Yeah. That's a really good point.

01:00:44:05 - 01:01:05:15

Unknown

Truly to think, you know, the phone call “would I come?” Like it's such an honor, isn't it? So thank you. But the opportunity that I see of us being together. So a platform for me to say to all of us, and then I'm just going finish with my little add about Australian women in Ag.

01:01:05:17 - 01:01:29:03

Unknown

So they're going to have a project to support people who are women who are interested in being on boards to build that pipeline, to create the network, to link with mentors and to help you navigate and then build a partnership with that. So if you haven't already signed up, I really urge you to to do that because that will be the place to go where you find your tribe.

01:01:29:05 - 01:01:46:16

Unknown

And because the second thing is it's sort of like once you're there, that's good. And then you get a sense of, I'm going to say the opportunity and bring in the tent rather than trying to elbow your way in all the way through out. So I was so exhausting. So it's lovely. And I'm just going to finish off with a little ad for agri futures.

01:01:46:18 - 01:02:26:00

Unknown

So we've got I'm going to say 85% of our staff and we are women. We're based in Wagga. And currently there's eight of our staff on maternity leave. And we are a really good, solid organization. So, I want to say that for, and so I'm going to say that avocado is it. And I want to say for the other agricultural issues because when you, when you look at who we are in Ag, you actually see who we are, which is this vital, dynamic, exciting, interested group of people who know stuff and have got quite career paths ahead of them.

01:02:26:02 - 01:02:48:12

Unknown

So yeah, I'm, I'm incredibly proud to be here and to be the chair and I want to say thanks to Daff because I wasn't the most likely person to get that job. So I'm very, very grateful to have it. So thank you. Wow. Please put your hands together and thank our amazing panel. That's a great point to leave - that the promise, the opportunity.

01:02:48:12 - 01:03:09:07

Unknown

And it does require us, stepping up and being strategic. I'm on I'm on board to help this, no pun intended. It's such an important, shift in our economy, and we just got to make it stick. So thank you for coming along today. If you're not on the portal, join it already and come and have some morning tea.

01:03:09:07 - 01:03:28:16

Unknown

And there'll be some people with some cameras and microphones participate or not. But it'd be great if you did and look forward to having further conversations. And let's build the energy because we can do this. Thank you.

[Video ends]

[End of transcript.]

**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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