

MEDIA RELEASE



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AGRICULTURE SCHOLARS ARE THE KEY TO OUR FUTURE FOOD SUPPLY

Leading agriculture scholars have met in the Darwin to share innovations and research as part of the Nuffield Australia National Conference. The 2017 conference, hosted at the Darwin Convention Centre, brought together over 300 primary producers, investors and industry experts from a wide cross section of sectors and regions from Australia and overseas.

“Nuffield scholarships provide unique opportunities to the new pioneers of agriculture to investigate technological advances around the world. The scholarship in itself is a once-in-a-lifetime experience but the benefits continue beyond the tour with a shift in the approach to learning, sharing and leading for the broader development of the industry” said Jodie Dean, CEO of Nuffield Australia.

In addition to the two days of sharing knowledge, conference delegates spent time on regional tours seeing first hand primary production in Northern Australia. There was an opportunity to visit beef, barramundi, tropical fruit and crocodile farming.

The theme of the conference ‘New Horizons’ set the scene for the discussions and presentations lead by guest speaker Gina Rinehart, Executive Chairman of the Hancock Prospecting Group and S. Kidman and Co. Rinehart spoke of the need for new research and integration of new technologies to the industry to continually improve efficiencies, safety and cost competitiveness.

The Hancock Group is implementing technologies from mining and other sectors to their agriculture businesses. Examples include the development of walkover weighing stations that support self-mustering and direct livestock to either further feed or to yards if they are ready to be sold. This reduces human resources and the stress on the livestock. Drones are being used to monitor dams, fences, troughs and stock. They are also being tested to carry tools, medical equipment and emergency supplies to far reaching areas of stations. The implementation of these technologies is helping the business become more cost efficient and produce higher quality produce, therefore meeting the needs of their market.

Dan Richards, General Manager of Humpty Doo Barramundi, was a 2016 Nuffield Scholar. Dan’s tour took him to over 20 countries where he explored the large scale production of salmon in Norway, barramundi farming in Saudi Arabia, industry driven research in the USA just to name a few.

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Richards said “Since returning, Humpty Doo Barramundi has been able to adopt and adapt a wide range of technologies and innovations from across the globe to enable our operation to grow to become the largest producer of barramundi in Australia. We have now doubled the capacity of our farm and are launching a world first barramundi sashimi product into the Australian premium seafood market.”

The importance of the development of the agriculture industry and the work of the Nuffield scholars is critical when considering the rise of the global population. By 2040, the world’s population is predicted to rise to nine billion. That means two billion more mouths to feed. More efficient and sustainable food production is crucial to meeting the needs of the human race.

Australia is in a position to be a key player in the food supply chain for the global population, especially in the fast growing economies in China and India. Australia is considered a premium supplier with a reputation of clean water and air, quality products and strong biosecurity measures. But we can’t rest on our laurels.

2017 was the first time the Nuffield Australia National Conference has been held in the Northern Territory. The significance of the Territory in leading Australia’s agriculture exports into Asia is being recognised by businesses, investors and government but there is long way to go to realise the potential of the north.

Luke Bowen, General Manager of Northern Australia Development and Trade, said “Darwin is the capital of the north of Australia and has a strategic role to play in the expansion of our export industry into the fast growing Asian economies. Investment and development in the north are fundamental to the prosperity of Australia with over 50% of Australian exports coming from the region.”

The potential importance of the north for the agriculture industry is being safeguarded by a new \$8 million biosecurity hub being built in Darwin to protect against foreign pests and diseases, a joint project by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. Also the Northern Territory Government recently funded a project to map soil and water of potentially productive land to identify key areas for agricultural development and changes to the Pastoral Land Act in 2014 now allow leaseholders and investors to develop land for non-pastoral use such as horticulture and aquaculture.

To meet the needs of the growing global population and to grow the Australian economy, the agriculture industry needs to implement new processes, technologies and innovations to be more sustainable, more efficient and more competitive. The research being undertaken by Nuffield scholars is important in developing agriculture in Australia and expanding markets for producers beyond our shores.

Darwin Convention Centre General Manager, Janet Hamilton said the importance of sharing knowledge and supporting innovative thinking are key outcomes we want all conferences to be able to achieve “To host the Nuffield Australia National Conference in Darwin recognises the prospects of the north and the opportunity to further develop the agriculture industry.”

Image: Dan Richards, Humpty Doo Barramundi





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