



Women as changemakers in conservation: An Australasian perspective

Cecilia Riebl, [Trust for Nature \(Vic\) Australia](#) and ILCN Regional Representative for Australasia
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It is increasingly recognised that ‘what’s good for women is good for the environment’. The more women are involved in decision-making around resource use and management, the [better the outcomes](#) for conservation and resource governance.

Conservation Director for Melanesia at The Nature Conservancy, Robyn James, has [observed](#): “The women in communities that I work with are often more forward-thinking than many of the men... they think about their kids and the community as a whole. On the other hand, the men often think more about the immediate cash benefits, not the long-term consequences of selling their resources. That is why women need to be included in decisions.”

This thinking has led to a new initiative in [Papua New Guinea](#), where women have created [Mangoro Market Meri](#) (meaning Mangrove Market Women). This initiative allows local women to manage their mangroves sustainably, addressing pressing local problems of over-fishing and over harvesting of mangrove timber, while at the same time improving financial benefits that flow directly to women, their families and the wider PNG community.

Speaking at the [Women in Conservation breakfast](#) in Melbourne, pioneering Bidjara woman Keelen Mailman OAM became the first Aboriginal woman to run a commercial cattle station when she took over Mt Tabor (Goorathuntha), in western Queensland, at age 30. Keelen has now managed the station for over 20 years. She emphasises the resilience she’s developed, making her mark in a male dominated industry and bringing her values of care for family, her tribe, and the wider community into all she does: “we care for mother earth and she provides for us”.

Another woman making her mark in the farming sector is Clare Cannon of [Woomargama Station](#) in Southern New South Wales. Her property contains remnant grassy box woodland, which is protected by a permanent conservation covenant (easement) through the [Biodiversity Conservation Trust](#). It is the “[jewel in the crown](#)” of the property, she says. Clare thinks that “women have often been the change agents in private land conservation. Traditionally, it has been the sons that have worked with their fathers for years before they take over the family farm. The women have not often taken on this role. This allows them to come to farming with a new set of eyes. I found in agriculture that so many of the advisors in all fields were young women (their brothers having taken on the family business). It is brilliant to see!”

Clare is bringing this new perspective to her own farming: “For my part, I knew that if I took on the family farm, I would have to change the way it was run. What is great about having young adult children is that they pull you up on all sorts of areas they don’t agree with which keeps you on your toes. My [Earthwatch](#) background ensured sustainability and scientific research were going to be key pillars of the business. I also knew that if I was just a beef and wool producer, I would be the last in my family to run the farm. I had to ‘sexy’ it up so that the next generation would be interested. Ethical and humane farming and sustainability were key pillars of this”.

Clare is also trailblazing in her decision to enter into a permanent [conservation covenant](#) on her property – an unpopular decision among male family members. They were concerned that the covenant would reduce the value of the property, and they were right: the covenant knocked A\$150,000 off the farm’s value according to traditional real estate valuation methods. But that paper loss has since been outstripped by the gains made in strategic branding – particularly her wool, which is accredited through [ZQ Merino](#) to go to companies like [VF Corp](#) which owns Icebreaker and North Face. “It is so satisfying as a producer to know where your wool is going”, she says. And provenance is also clearly meaningful to consumers, who are paying a premium for products that tell a meaningful story.

“Private land conservation is critical to the future of our planet. ... With a quarter of the world’s soils degraded or desert, we need to start getting ground cover back on this land. By bringing carbon back down into the soils, we can go from moving towards carbon neutral to start the great [Drawdown](#) of carbon as well as regenerating soils and ground cover.” By thinking outside the box, Clare, and so many other women blazing a trail in conservation and integrated land management, show that the future is promising.

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