



Scholar Reflections from...

Northern Territory

2019 Crawford Fund Annual Conference



Two Northern Territory scholars attended the 2019 Crawford Fund conference supported by our NT Committee.

Our competitive Conference **Scholarships** are offered to young people with a genuine interest in international agricultural research and development to attend the conference and participate in a special set of activities that we have developed since the program commenced in 2010.

Once again, we would like to thank our wonderful mentors, mentioned alongside the scholar they supported, who volunteer their time and offer valuable guidance, support and insights to the scholars throughout the conference.

NT COMMITTEE SPONSORED SCHOLARS

Paul Armstrong, *NT Government*

Mentor: Tania Paul, *Crawford Fund NT Committee*

My first Crawford Fund conference was a great experience and being part of the Crawford Fund scholar program was a great opportunity that exceeded my expectations. The conference and scholar program were organised in a way to encourage people to meet others from different backgrounds and have great discussions. The conversations I had with my mentor from the scholar program, Tania Paul were really interesting and such a great part of the scholar program. She was able to share with me about her experiences of coordinating research projects overseas and some advice about developing a career in this space. Having been involved in the Crawford Fund for many years Tania was able to introduce me to some other people at the conference with overlapping interests which was really helpful. I think providing a great platform for positive discussion about the future of agriculture and related areas is one of the greatest strengths of the Crawford Fund conference and one that makes it particularly beneficial to all attendees especially to students and those early in their careers. I was also really interested in hearing the talks about the bigger picture assessments of the future of food production and the changes needed to address the climate change, water, and energy challenges of this century.

A highlight of the conference for me was the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address by Professor Ross Garnaut. It was great to hear from someone with great expertise in economics and a great understanding of development, agriculture and climate change. His message was particularly positive and inspiring because he shared about actions, which Australia and the world can undertake to address the challenges that we are facing. I found his address was also fantastic because of Ross's working relationship with Sir John Crawford, which provided me a better understanding of the history and mission of the Crawford Fund and also insights into the life of Sir John Crawford and his passion for agricultural research in Australia and neighbouring developing countries.

Many of the presentations highlighted how important the role of agricultural extension is in effecting change but also how important effective extension is as often there is only a small take up of beneficial farming methods and technologies in the agricultural sector. Included in these talks were examples of successful tools and methods for extension that can be applied to the aquaculture extension that we are doing with tropical rock oysters in remote Aboriginal communities of the NT. Another important take home message for me that came through in many presentations and conversations during the conference and the scholar program was the importance of building trust in relationships with those you are working with to be effective in delivering research, development and extension.

While the many of talks focused on the challenges facing agricultural food production, including climate change and resource limitations. I found myself asking how this applied to the production of food in the ocean from an aquaculture perspective. While shifting agricultural land use was identified as a key strategy in taking up and storing carbon on land during the conference, there is large potential in aquaculture food production to mitigate climate change and address the water and energy constraints ahead. One of the advantages of food production in the ocean is that it has relatively low requirement for direct freshwater inputs in many cases and the scale of ocean food production has the potential to be incredibly large. With the fast growth of aquaculture food production globally, now is the time to apply what we have learned from our agricultural history to the way we produce food in our oceans. In light of the climate change challenges and resource constraints we face, it would be great to see a focus on aquaculture that produces food more effectively with low water and energy use and aids in the protection of biodiversity in our oceans.



Meg Humphrys, *NT Government*

Mentor: John Dalton, *Crawford Fund NSW Committee*

It was a great honour to win a scholarship to attend the Crawford Fund Conference.

The venue for the for the annual conference the Great Hall in Parliament House, was a grand location and I think is a reflection of the high level of importance the aspirations of the Crawford Fund are to Australia and the world. The painting in the background was also very remarkable.

The event was an amazing chance to meet other young people with similar interests and passions. The mentor program was fantastic for exchanging knowledge from experts and the youth. It is such a rare opportunity for young people to speak to people that have had incredible careers and have a wealth of knowledge in a space where they can share some of that knowledge. My mentor John Dalton was a wonderful match for me. He had a broad amount of knowledge and his career had mirror one much like what I would aspire for myself.

It was fantastic to discover pathways to working and having a career in agriculture for international development. The networking dinner and the way it was facilitated was spot on. There was such a diversity of people at the conference and that was reflected by ending it with Sarah Barker's talk. Sarah was a perfect way to end the day and I think asking her to speak is a credit to the organisers for showing the complexity of the theme of the conference.

Some of the key messages I went away with were that a flexitarian diet is actually better. I already thought this working in the rangelands. The concern for the planet is not just about increased carbon and human induced climate change it is also water and a vegan diet takes more water.

Reiterating the fact that food security and climate change are issues of global concern. The world, and its environmental and human (food, economic, social, etc) systems are all connected. What we do on part of the planet will affect others and how climate change affects some areas will ultimately affect others. For example, if rice yields are low in south-east Asian it will raise the price of rice around the globe and while it may not affect people buying rice from the supermarkets in Australia it will affect people in developing countries that rely on rice as their main food.

These issues need to be tackled at national and international government levels through effective, strategic and **consistent** policy level but also at a grass roots, community level working on how to deal with these issues locally for people that are on the front line. The example of the climate smart communities was fantastic for that.

A combined top down and bottom up strategy is needed so the people in the middle have to fall in-line. As Sarah said, ultimately money will drive people. However, it will be negligent if large businesses such as insurance companies don't factor in climate change because it will have a bottom line affect for them. The lead for dealing with climate change and water issues may ultimately fall in the hands of private business as governments will not have the resources and internal mechanisms to adapt enough or have the ability to leadership due the political environment of today so instead will need to react to solutions as they arise.

One of the stats that stuck with me from the conference was, in a way an answer to the age-old discussion... "How are we going to feed the world? We need more mechanised, genetically modified plants to do this!" There are 800 million people in the world that don't have enough food to eat, meanwhile we have 2.1 billion people overweight! If people are overweight or obese doesn't mean they are not malnourished. To me another take home message for the conference was that world-wide adoption of a diet meeting nutritional guidelines in 2050 would reduce food-system associated greenhouse gas emissions from 51% to 7%. There is no silver-bullet but healthy, conscious eating would surely help the plight of our beautiful planet on many levels for physical and mental health, environmentally, economically and ultimately socially.