

Reflections

from our
Crawford Fund Conference Scholars



2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

WITH CRAWFORD FUND SUPPORT...

ACT Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 1**

Diksh Preet Kaur Raina, Australian National University/CSIRO
Nicola Roysmith, Australian National University

NSW Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 4**

Bethany Ellis, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Annalise Magill, University of Sydney
Elizabeth Markie, University of Sydney
Maximus Pollard, University of Sydney
Sophia Thach, Applied Horticultural Research

NT Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 9**

Jyothi Bhandari, Charles Darwin University (RINA)
Danielle White, Charles Darwin University

QLD Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 12**

Francesca Earp, James Cook University
Lucy Southworth, James Cook University

SA Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 14**

Zane Marks, University of Adelaide
Trang Nguyen, University of Adelaide
Shreya Nidumolu, University of Adelaide
Mahsa Rahmani Dizgah, University of Adelaide

TAS Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 18**

Ava Christie, University of Tasmania
Emi Benic, University of Tasmania
Sarah Fulton, University of Tasmania
Usman Ijaz, University of Tasmania
Fahad Khan, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, University of Tasmania
Shilpa Koirala, University of Tasmania
Finlay Walton, University of Tasmania

VIC Committee ([web blog](#)) **Page 24**

Brandon Conway-Rusk, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Ellie Maeve Gerhardy, Deakin University
Sneha Rajackal Senthil Vel, The University of Melbourne
Gracia Sie, The University of Melbourne



WA Committee ([web blog](#))

Rutwik Barmukh, Murdoch University
Stephanie Boyce, CSU/DPIRD WA
William Mutton, University of Western Australia
Luke Pilmer, Murdoch University/DPIRD WA
Sneha Sharma, DPIRD WA

Page 28

WITH EXTERNAL SUPPORT...

AARES ([web blog](#))

Md. Monirul Islam, CSIRO

Page 32

Gardiner Foundation ([web blog](#))

Monique Berkhout, LaTrobe University/Agriculture Victoria
Ian Hodge, University of Melbourne

Page 34



ACT COMMITTEE



Our 2025 ACT scholars Diksh Preet Kaur Raina (third from left) and Nicola Roysmith (second from right) pictured with David Shearer, ACT Committee Coordinator, Wendy Craik, ACT Committee Chair, Mikayla Hyland-Wood, ACT Committee RAID representative and Joseph Vile, ACT Committee Member.

Nicola Roysmith,

Mentor: David Shearer

My experience at the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference as an ACT scholar was an extremely inspiring one where I felt supported and encouraged by every person I met and had the opportunity to learn from and connect with lots of amazing people. I am very grateful to Cathy Reade and the Crawford Fund for granting me this scholarship to attend the conference, to my mentor David Shearer, the ACT Committee and to the RAID Network for supporting me as a scholar.

I have always had a passion for food security and the environment and feel driven to apply my education in Environmental Science, and Development Studies to the challenge of feeding the globe whilst addressing the challenge of climate change. The Crawford Fund was able to grant me a significant opportunity and a foot in the door to be able to pursue the career that I have been passionate about since graduating high school.

As an undergraduate student nearing the end of my degree, I feel nervous surrounding my lack of a clear path moving forward, unsure of where I want to go, and whether I want to pursue a career in policy, research or work in the private industry – I feel as though this opportunity was a big first step out of my degree. With support from my mentor David and the scholar activities, I was able to meet a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds, which has given me insight into what a career could look like in this space.

I was able to speak to people from CSIRO Agriculture & Food surrounding advice on how to get involved with project work and met researchers from CSIRO's soil team that I had applied for a studentship with a week prior. Speaking with ACIAR employees gave me insight into what a graduate officer role at ACIAR entails and how projects are run, and chatting with researchers from the ACT,

NT and QLD inspired me to investigate doing an honours project next year. Each conversation I had provided me with a new insight, some advice or an opportunity to follow up on.

The speakers on the conference day were sensational, and each one had inspiring, thought-provoking work. I found it exciting to see so many disciplines being applied to food security and international agricultural development and as an environmental science/development studies student I felt encouraged to enter this interdisciplinary field. Hearing from the speakers and the RAID Network during the scholar days highlighted the diverse career paths that all the speakers had and how they got to where they are today.

The main lessons that I learnt from my experience was the importance of listening, getting your boots on the ground, saying yes to opportunities, and working with communities to learn and develop solutions together. Themes of keeping an open mind, connecting with people, and asking questions were repeated throughout speeches and conversations, and I will certainly bring all these lessons with me into the future.

In conclusion, I am extremely grateful to have been selected for this scholarship, I feel that being able to participate in this conference has widened my horizons, given me clarity about the opportunities available to me as a graduate, inspired me to take any opportunity, and allowed me to make meaningful connections with likeminded people. The Crawford Fund and RAID's support of Next Gen Students through scholarships and other opportunities is incredible, and I feel very privileged to have been selected as a scholar.

I am so honoured to be a part of this community and can't wait to see where I go in the next steps of my career journey.

Diksh Preet Kaur Raina

Mentor: Tony Fischer

Attending the Crawford Fund Annual Conference 2025 and participating in the Scholars' Day program was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of the global challenges and opportunities in food security, agricultural research, and international development. The program not only provided a platform to engage with leaders in the field but also fostered connections with peers, mentors, and practitioners who are shaping the future of sustainable agriculture.

The Scholars' Day preceding the main conference was especially valuable. Through interactive sessions led by RAID Network members and experienced mentors, I gained insights into the diverse pathways that early- and mid-career researchers can pursue in agriculture and international development. I appreciated the openness with which speakers shared their career journeys, challenges, and lessons learned, from navigating international collaborations to building capacity in local communities. My mentor, Dr Tony Fischer, was especially generous with his time and advice. He encouraged me to think about the broader impact of my research, emphasising the importance of aligning scientific inquiry with practical outcomes for farming systems. His reflections on the evolution of agricultural science over decades, and the enduring importance of rigorous fieldwork, provided both perspective and inspiration.

The main conference itself was a remarkable gathering of policymakers, scientists, farmers, and students united by a commitment to ending hunger while protecting the planet. A particular highlight for me was the keynote address by Professor Glenn Denning, whose book "Universal Food Security" and decades of experience offered a compelling vision for how to build resilient food systems in the face of climate change and population growth. His message that global hunger is not inevitable, but a challenge solvable through integrated policy, investment, and science, left a lasting impression.

Equally inspiring were contributions from researchers such as Dr Alison Bentley, who spoke about harnessing genetics and breeding innovations to improve wheat productivity and resilience. Coming from a background in plant sciences, I found her perspective especially relevant to my own work, as it demonstrated how fundamental discoveries can be translated into tangible benefits for farmers worldwide. Dr Aditi Mukherji's reflections on climate governance and adaptation for smallholder farmers also reinforced the urgency of ensuring that agricultural innovations are accessible, equitable, and socially inclusive.

Another highlight was hearing from early-career scholars and RAID members who shared their experiences working with communities across Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. For example, stories of capacity building and farmer engagement in Vietnam, Nepal, and the Cook Islands reminded me that research must be grounded in local realities to be impactful. These examples highlighted the importance of participatory approaches and the co-creation of knowledge, values that I aim to embed in my own professional practice.

Overall, the Crawford Fund Conference and Scholars' Day left me inspired and motivated to contribute to solutions for global food security. The combination of exposure to world-leading experts, the opportunity to interact directly with peers and mentors, and the emphasis on both technical excellence and community engagement has strengthened my resolve to pursue a career that bridges science and practice.

I am grateful to the Crawford Fund for supporting my participation and for investing in the next generation of researchers dedicated to addressing hunger, malnutrition, and environmental challenges. This experience has broadened my perspective and reinforced my belief that collaborative, innovative, and inclusive approaches are essential to shaping a more food-secure future.



NSW COMMITTEE



Our 2025 NSW scholars (left to right) Bethany Ellis, NSW Crawford Fund Committee Chair and Board Member Dr Richard Sheldrake, NSW Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Dr Helen Scott Orr, Annalise Magill, Sophia Thach, Elizabeth Markie and Maximus Pollard.

Bethany Ellis, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Mentor: Joseph Vile

The 2025 Crawford Fund Conference was a powerful platform for connecting with global leaders and offering deep insights into food security and climate resilience, as well as the importance of agricultural research for development. The theme, “Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners”, resonated deeply with me as it touches on topics of my own research. The conference featured a broad range of experts presenting issues from across the field of climate-resilient agrifood systems, but also brought together a diverse array of attendees, united by a commitment to climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable development.

Climate-resilient agrifood systems face a significant challenge as they evolve to produce enough food for a growing population under the threats of a changing climate, while not compromising the planet’s health or increasing their carbon emissions. It was fascinating to hear insights from a wide range of Asian countries, African Nations, and Pacific Islands, including Vanuatu, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Cambodia, Fiji, and the Cook Islands. Not only were the studies geographically distributed, but a wide range of sectors were also included, from livestock, dairy, silvopastoral systems, cocoa production, rice cultivation and marine fisheries. The interdisciplinary nature of the discussions highlighted the complexity of agrifood systems and the need for integrated solutions.

The conference also highlighted the importance of inclusive, community-led research and the value of traditional knowledge systems. A key takeaway from the conference was the emphasis on moving away from western-centric models of agricultural research and adaptation. Instead, the conference speakers promoted co-designed projects that integrate local knowledge and leadership to ensure relevance and ongoing sustainability of research. This approach is key for building climate-resilient agrifood systems through transdisciplinary research and to foster long-term impact.

Another key takeaway was capacity building with speakers stressing the need to empower local farmers, researchers, and institutions. The speakers advocated for two-way learning, where knowledge is exchanged between researchers rather than imposed, leading to stronger outcomes and ensuring that research benefits are sustained over time.

The scholar activities surrounding the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference provided an enriching experience, offering valuable learning, networking, and inspiration. Conversations with mentors, conference speakers and attendees helped clarify potential pathways in research, policy, and diplomacy. These interactions highlighted the evolving nature of careers and the importance of staying open to new opportunities. The exposure to diverse perspectives and innovative approaches has inspired me to think more critically about the role of collaboration in shaping future climate-resilient agrifood systems.

Overall, the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference expanded my view of agricultural research for development, with an emphasis on the challenges and opportunities in building climate-resilient agrifood systems across the globe. It reinforced the importance of inclusive dialogue, evidence-based policy, and the transformative power of research in addressing global food and climate challenges.

Annalise Magill, University of Sydney

Mentor: Helen Scott-Orr

As a first-year student in Agricultural Science at the University of Sydney, majoring in Environmental, Resource and Agricultural Economics, my exposure to the industry has so far been limited. The 2025 Crawford Fund Conference was an excellent opportunity to gain insight into how agriculture connects to global challenges and to see the wide range of career pathways that exist within the sector.

The Scholar Program was a key highlight. It supported my travel to Canberra and created opportunities to meet a group of motivated young professionals with diverse interests in agriculture and food security. Engaging with other scholars was valuable in understanding the many directions a career in agriculture can take, from policy and economics to on-farm research and international development. The mentoring program was another strength of the experience. Speaking with professionals who have established careers across different areas of the sector helped me consider the skills I will need to build and the possible pathways available. The smaller group setting made conversations easier and encouraged practical discussions about career development.

The conference itself provided exposure to leaders in food security, agricultural research, and international development. Sessions highlighted the importance of climate-resilient agriculture in addressing food insecurity and adapting to environmental change. This message was consistent across many speakers and reinforced how research and innovation are central to agriculture's future.

Several presentations stood out to me. A session on Silvopastoral agriculture showed how integrating trees and livestock can provide environmental and economic benefits, improving sustainability while supporting farmers' productivity. Another discussion examined the role of the legal profession in agriculture and food security, which broadened my understanding of opportunities in the sector beyond farming and traditional research roles. These sessions emphasised that addressing food security requires collaboration across many disciplines.

The conference also underlined two key areas for future progress in agriculture. The first is the role of government policy in conservation, particularly how effective policy can support long-term sustainability. The second is the need to improve support for women in agriculture. Barriers to women's participation remain, and hearing from speakers on this topic highlighted the importance of creating more inclusive opportunities across the sector.



Overall, the conference was an insightful and motivating experience. It allowed me to expand my understanding of agriculture's role in global issues, develop networks with other scholars and mentors, and gain a clearer picture of the skills and knowledge needed to contribute to the sector. I am grateful to the Crawford Fund for the opportunity to attend and for investing in the development of young people interested in agriculture and food security.

Elizabeth Markie, University of Sydney

Mentor: Allen Wen

The opportunity to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference and Scholar program couldn't have come at a better time in my academic career. As I finish up my undergraduate and honours year, the thought of "what comes next" has been taking up considerable space in my brain. With a strong passion for research, I know that whatever I do next, I want it to be meaningful, both self-fulfilling and beneficial to wider society. This conference was a perfect way to frame a career in research from a wider agricultural lens.

As someone young in their academic career, the pre- and post-conference scholar activities were instrumental in helping me to feel more prepared for what the future may hold. Hearing from those further along in their careers about the paths they took and the places their research led them has me excited for what my future may hold. Learning about the RAID network and the supportive nature of working as a collective to encourage young researchers like myself to grasp once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to be involved in life-changing projects was inspiring and exciting. Having recently started looking into PhD programs, being able to discuss PhD life, research topics, industry involvement, work/life balance, and many other aspects with both my mentor and other mentors in the program has helped me to feel more prepared for the journey.

Attending the conference at Parliament House was an amazing experience; the location spoke to the significance of the work that the Crawford Fund supports. Having the opportunity to talk to attendees from overseas was a first-time experience for me. I particularly enjoyed conversing with a group of researchers from Timor-Leste, hearing about their area of expertise, the issues their country faces in terms of agricultural production and food security, and also learning more about their culture through discussing national dishes and activities.

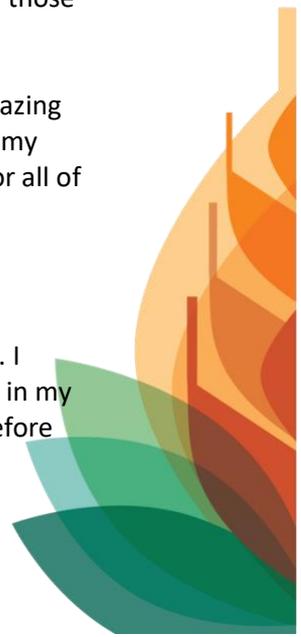
My key takeaway from the conference was the importance of researchers, farmers and policymakers, both within their sectors, but most importantly in the collaborative space. Hearing about projects that were not successfully implemented due to cultural incompatibilities or lack of government support highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary work to facilitate meaningful and impactful research. Such examples of this included savvy technological tools that serve no purpose to a community that doesn't have the internet access or infrastructure to implement. However, there were stories of great advancements, too. In particular, learning about the barriers women face in the agricultural sector overseas, it was encouraging to hear about how we are working to bridge those gaps, and in turn increasing food security for those at greatest risk.

In summary, attending the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference and Scholar Program was an amazing opportunity that I would strongly encourage any young researchers to pursue. It broadened my perspective on how agricultural research may be conducted, and gave me an appreciation for all of the different disciplines and how they come together to produce successful outcomes.

Maximus Pollard, University of Sydney

Mentor: Wendy Craik

The 2025 Crawford fund was my first conference in Agriculture and my first ever conference. I thoroughly enjoyed the three days I spent in Canberra as a scholar. I am a university student in my undergraduate degree of agricultural science majoring in Economics at Sydney university. Before



attending the conference, I didn't even know about ACIAR or RAID or many other acronyms. The conference has widened my scope of agriculture and certainly continued to push me into that direction.

Something which was so incredibly valuable at the conference as a scholar was having a mentor. My mentor Wendy Craik, who as a board member of the Crawford Fund and many other prestigious boards was crucial in helping me network and understand who's who in the agriculture sphere. As an undergraduate who is only 19, I was quite nervous when first attending the conference and certainly had imposter syndrome. However, one of the first activities we did was a mini roundtable discussion between mentors and mentees which was most valuable. Through this we discussed different aspects of our lives, work and research.

Though I didn't have much to add I did have much to listen too, which is always vital. At the end of this discussion one member of the group was nominated to speak and tell the rest of the scholars what they heard. Dr Deirdre Lemerle looked at me and pointed, I simply said sure thing, not entirely realising that I had signed up to speak first in front of a crowd of 50 odd people. However, I must thank Deirdre for this greatly as she gave me the confidence and trust in the Crawford family to be able to get up and speak. From there I felt comfortable speaking to more people and asking questions through the conference itself directly to the speakers.

The entire experience I believe has made me committed to agriculture and its development within the world. Coming into the conference I had no real interest in international work or agricultural research. Listening to the amazing stories from many speakers however really opened my eyes into the world of international agriculture which is now something I want to pursue. More so is my new commitment to pushing food security and equitability for all, something in which I will urge industry, people and government to do more in and hopefully one day work in that space.

Personally, my favourite part of the conference was the dinner address given by Joel Fitzgibbon and introduced by John Anderson AC. Both speakers really resonated with me and mobilised me as a young person to do more. Not to be an activist with my words but to be an activist with my actions. Speaking to them over the dinner was a wonderful experience and helped guide me towards strong principles and just actions.

Overall, the conference was an incredibly rewarding and insightful experience. Hearing from past politicians, lawyers, farmers, researchers and other students really has widened my horizons and reminded me of the common goals we should all work for, that we are all humans on this ONE planet and food, will always bring us together.

Sophia Thach, Applied Horticultural Research

Mentor: Martin Blumenthal

Firstly, I would like to thank the Crawford Fund and the RAID Network for providing this memorable and career-shaping opportunity to attend the conference and scholar activities. I am also grateful to my organisation, Applied Horticultural Research, for their ongoing support, and to my mentor, Martin Blumenthal, for his openness, kindness, and guidance both in the lead up to and during the conference. I leave this experience with new knowledge, greater confidence, and many lasting connections with fellow scholars and professionals from leading research institutions and organisations around the world.

One of the key highlights for me was gaining a deeper understanding of the breadth of opportunities in agriculture for development. Hearing from experts and leaders in the field opened my eyes to the wide-ranging career pathways that exist, from on-ground project delivery to international policy.



The sessions emphasised the importance of a whole-systems perspective and the value of research in exploring alternative approaches to long-standing challenges. I particularly appreciated hearing about projects from the perspective of developing countries, which highlighted the need for context-specific and bottom-up solutions that can create meaningful and lasting impact.

The conference also shifted my view of agriculture in a global context. I was struck by the framing of agricultural development as not only an avenue for improved livelihoods, but also as a form of soft power and through ACIAR, an important element of national security. It reinforced to me the urgency of strengthening food systems given the intersecting pressures of climate change, resource scarcity, and population growth. At the same time, I was challenged by discussions around declining investment in agricultural research and development. For a country like Australia, with both expertise and a responsibility to lead in this space, the message was clear: advocacy for research funding is critical if we are to address the pressing issues of food security and climate resilience.

My interactions throughout the scholar program and conference had a strong influence on how I think about my own career. Speaking with mentors, researchers, and practitioners expanded my vision beyond the boundaries of my current work, encouraging me to consider agriculture as a global issue and to explore new avenues for collaboration. The scholar activities also offered practical lessons: the importance of saying “yes” to opportunities, being humble and patient, recognising the value of networks, and remembering that imposter syndrome is a common experience even among highly accomplished people. There were many golden nuggets of information and advice sprinkled throughout the activities.

Looking ahead, I am motivated to apply these insights in my own work. I intend to provide input into projects with a stronger emphasis on local perspectives, ensuring that solutions are co-developed rather than imposed from the top down. I am also committed to continue using my role to help translate research into practical outcomes for growers and communities – important in Australia and developing countries. Most importantly, I see my responsibility as not only building capacity in others but also being open to having my own capacity built through mutual learning.

The theme of “progress and prospects for climate-resilient agrifood systems” has reinforced the importance of listening, engaging across cultures, and linking my work more directly to food security outcomes. This experience has strengthened my resolve to approach my research and career as a global citizen, contributing to sustainable agriculture and resilient food systems both in Australia and beyond.



NT COMMITTEE



Our 2025 NT scholars Jyothi Bhandari (left) and Danielle White (right) pictured with NT Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Tania Paul and NT Crawford Fund Committee Chair Em Prof Helen Garnett.

Jyothi Bhandari, Charles Darwin University

Mentor: Tania Paul

Attending the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference in Canberra from August 11–13 was an incredibly enriching experience, both professionally and personally. As a mid-career researcher and PhD student, it was a valuable opportunity to deepen my understanding of global agricultural challenges, engage with leading scientists and policymakers, and connect with fellow scholars from across Australia.

The Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon, Crawford Fund Board Member and former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, delivered the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address. His talk, *“Trade-offs and Tough Choices: Lessons in Leadership from the Frontlines of Policy,”* was deeply insightful, highlighting the real-world complexities of agricultural leadership.

That evening’s dinner at Parliament House was a true highlight. It celebrated collaboration across generations and sectors—scientists, policymakers, and young researchers all engaging in informal conversations that underscored the importance of shared vision and partnership in agricultural development.

The conference opened with The Hon. John Anderson AC, FTSE, Chair of the Crawford Fund, followed by a keynote by Professor Glenn Denning titled *“Achieving Universal Food Security in an Adversely Changing Climate.”* His focus on systemic reform, long-term government collaboration, and inclusive, gender-sensitive approaches to agriculture resonated deeply with my own research interests.

Session 2 addressed the complex challenge of feeding the world while reaching net zero emissions. Experts including Professor Richard Eckard and Dr. Leanne Webb discussed non-CO₂ mitigation

strategies, anti-methanogenic solutions, and carbon sequestration opportunities through integrated systems like solar-pasture technologies—topics I found particularly engaging.

Session 3, *Achieving a Pathway to Climate Resilience*, showcased compelling case studies from Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Dr. Aditi Mukherji’s research on the cascading impacts of climate change on small island nations was powerful. I was especially inspired by community resilience strategies in Fiji and water management innovations for cocoa and coffee farmers.

Session 4 focused on *Resilience Through Equity, Inclusion and Community Participation*. Dr. Purnima Menon and others addressed gender dynamics in climate resilience, highlighting initiatives like co-managed fisheries and livelihood diversification. These practical approaches reinforced the need to integrate women meaningfully into agricultural systems.

The final panel in Session 5 offered policy recommendations, underscoring the need for gender-responsive strategies, capacity-building, and stronger integration of R&D in climate-smart agriculture.

The RAID Network’s trivia night closed the day with warmth and connection, offering a relaxed space for scholars to bond and build professional relationships.

Scholars’ Day focused on science communication and professional development—equipping us with strategies to increase the impact of our work. A standout feature of the conference was the scholar-mentor pairing. I was fortunate to be paired with Tania Paul, whose guidance and support were invaluable throughout the event. My sincere thanks also go to the other dedicated mentors who generously shared their insights.

I am deeply grateful to the Crawford Fund for the scholarship opportunity and to the RAID Network and organisers for creating such a meaningful, well-structured experience. I return home inspired, better connected, and motivated to contribute to positive change in agricultural research.

Danielle White, Charles Darwin University

Mentor: Tania Paul

Reflecting on the richness of the sessions at the 2025 Crawford Fund Annual Conference, what stood out was the powerful synergy between advanced scientific research and deep community knowledge. The presentations by Professor Graham Sem, Ms Selane Tairea, and Mr Acacio Sarmento da Silva exemplified how actionable, impactful responses to climate and food security challenges emerge from mutual respect between science and society.

Science communication was a key theme throughout the conference, with particular focus on the importance of clear and effective communication across all levels – not just among specialists and researchers. The discussions highlighted how tailoring messages for policymakers, practitioners, and communities alike is essential for bridging gaps between research and real-world application, whether it involves crafting resilient agrifood policies, designing targeted adaptation programs, or upgrading value chains.

The voices of local communities were ever-present, ensuring that proposed solutions are grounded, inclusive, and truly responsive to lived realities. Ms Tairea’s emphasis on participatory approaches – “if you want to do research in the Cook Islands but you do not work with the community, you are not going to get far” – was echoed in collaborative models discussed by other speakers. This dynamic not only produced richer data and sharper analysis but also boosted the legitimacy and uptake of recommendations among those who depend on the land and sea for their livelihoods.



A key lesson I am taking forward as I embark on my Bachelor of Science Honours in the Indo-Pacific is the absolute necessity of co-design. Science does not progress in isolation; it excels when it is translated, tested, and co-developed alongside those with local expertise and cultural insight. The presentations strongly affirmed how community-engaged science leads to interventions that are feasible, relevant, and sustainable.

Finally, the conference highlighted the critical need for gender inclusion and equity, especially in sectors like fisheries and agriculture. Mr Sarmento's research demonstrated the fundamental, yet underacknowledged, role of women in resource management – a perspective that must be included in any research to ensure solutions meet the needs of all members of the community.

Attending the Crawford Fund Annual Conference has strengthened my resolve and equipped me with real-world strategies to ensure my research is both technically robust and socially meaningful. It has shown that the path to true climate resilience lies not just in new technologies but in building trust, amplifying local voices, and fostering ongoing dialogue between researchers, communities, and policymakers.

The Scholar Days, expertly facilitated by the RAID Network and driven by the dedication of Mikayla Hyland-Wood, offered an invaluable dimension to the conference experience. These sessions illuminated the countless opportunities available to emerging scientists, while fostering effective networking skills and practical guidance from seasoned professionals. Through real-world advice and candid discussions, the Scholar Days empowered me with concrete steps to contribute positively to climate-resilient agrifood systems, forging connections and inspiration for lasting impact.

I am deeply grateful to The Crawford Fund for providing this remarkable opportunity to learn, engage, and be inspired by leaders and communities working towards climate-resilient food systems. Special thanks to Cathy Reade for her outstanding work in creating this amazing opportunity. The experience has enriched my perspective and strengthened my commitment to impactful research. Thank you for fostering an environment of collaboration and innovation that empowers the next generation of scientists.



QLD COMMITTEE



Lucy Southworth and Francesca Earp were our 2025 QLD scholars, pictured here with QLD Committee Chair Kaye Basford and Coordinator Bob Lawn.

Francesca Earp, James Cook University

Mentor: Madaline Healey

Earlier this month I attended the 2025 Crawford Conference as a Queensland scholar following my receipt of a Queensland student award in 2024. I am especially privileged as this marks my second time as a Crawford conference scholar. My first attendance was in 2019 as a New South Wales scholar. Being privileged to experience the scholar program twice has offered me a distinctive perspective, where I have been able to compare my journey from when I first entered agricultural development as a researcher with a focus on animal health to my current position as an early to mid-career researcher with a background in agriculture, development, and gender. This experience was particularly special because I consider my attendance at the 2019 Crawford conference as one of the key elements that inspired me to pursue studies in development and gender.

During the 2025 conference I realised the importance of community. This year I was fortunate to be paired with a wonderful mentor, Madaline Healey, an academic and practitioner who I have admired throughout my career. As part of my scholar experience Madaline generously invested time and energy into having deep and meaningful conversations with me both during and after the conference. Additionally, I had the privilege of meeting other scholars and mentors. A key reflection from this conference, evidenced both during the scholar days and the conference program, was the importance of collaboration. The presenters demonstrated the need for experts from many diverse backgrounds, cultures, and sectors to work together to address the holistic nature of development.

As well as providing a space for networking, the 2025 conference offered an opportunity for collective thinking and action. The 2025 conference theme 'Global Food Security in a Riskier World: Diversification for Resilient Food and Nutrition Systems' evoked a range of interesting and insightful presentations. I enjoyed both listening to and reflecting on session four: 'Resilience through equity, inclusion and community participation'. In more recent years I have noted that there can sometimes

be a disconnect between gender, development, and agriculture. It was great to see that there was a focus on the integration of gender and development in the food security conversation throughout the conference, and I look forward to seeing how participatory approaches will continue to be utilised by various actors and programs within the sector. I also enjoyed the focus on the experiences from practitioners working closely with target communities. In particular I was grateful for the honest reflections delivered by Ms Selane Tairea, a Research Officer from the Cook Islands Centre for Research. In the future I would love to see even more presentations delivered by practitioners and community members involved in agricultural development programs.

Overall, the conference and scholar program were a wonderful experience that fostered new relationships and important conversations. I am extremely grateful to the Queensland Committee of the Crawford Fund for the opportunity to attend this year's conference. I am also grateful to the Crawford fund for their ongoing investment in next generation activities. Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Cathy Reade and Larissa Mullot for everything they do for the Crawford Fund and the scholars program.

Lucy Southworth, James Cook University

Mentor: Bill Lewis



SA COMMITTEE



Our 2025 scholars from South Australia (left to right) Mahsa Rahmani Dizgah, Shreya Nidumolu, Trang Thi Thu Nguyen and Zane Marks pictured with SA Committee Chair, Kym Anderson and SA Committee Coordinator, Kathy Ophel-Keller.

Zane Marks, University of Adelaide

Mentor: Kathy Ophel-Keller

My name is Zane Marks, a third year PhD candidate with the University of Adelaide. I had the pleasure in 2025 of being selected to represent my university and become a Crawford Scholar. This involved attending the respective Crawford Conference entitled “Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Recommendations for Policy Makers and Practitioners”.

A large believer in the scientific community’s ability to identify key issues the world is facing, and develop potential solutions to said issues, I applied to the conference to see how some of this research gets implemented long term into our nations policy. My experience with the Crawford fund not only helped elucidate the impact that our research can make locally, but also internationally. As a person with almost a purely agricultural background, I found that the focus on the long-term impacts of agricultural efficiency on food security enlightening, as well as the impact that the climate can have in other countries; in that regard Professor Glenn Dennings talk on Achieving Universal Food security stood out.

I was also pleasantly surprised to see a lot of community-based projects, where there was a lot of interactions with groups and stakeholders in the country that the research was based, with an emphasis of working with people and not just coming in with unfounded beliefs and expectations. We also were able to talk about research and the advocacy from a legal perspective, with Caitlin McConnel providing insight as a lawyer in the field of agriculture. I personally learnt from that talk that sometimes the way forward for progress must be through legal challenges, as sometimes advocacy and recommendations can fall drastically short of what is expected.

As a scholar, there were an additional two days of activities that I participated in which, added a great deal of both context and content around the experience. Firstly, I was paired with a mentor from my own state, who had served on the Crawford funds committee for several years. She provided me insights into her experiences as a strategic leader of the South Australian Research and Development Institute, with insight into crop science relating to biosecurity and industry partnerships. There was large discussion with several mentors about the future of research both locally and overseas and how some of the us may be able to make a difference long term. We also had the chance to talk to a journalist as one of our scholar activities, which lead to an important discussion around how science is presented to the public through media, in addition what makes for a good story and how to communicate effectively with an audience.

Reflecting on the experience, there was a profound amount of optimism for the future, not only with the mentors and the academics in the room but also with the other scholars from around Australia. The Crawford fund remains committed to providing people with opportunities to explore the best of what we can do for the future and with the world being in a continuously perilous state, their continued effort has inspired me in that pursuit as well.

Trang Thi Thu Nguyen, The University of Adelaide

Mentor: Ha Duong-Nam

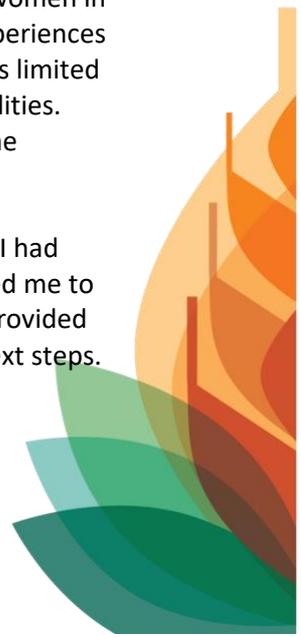
Participating in the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference and Scholar Program was an incredibly enriching experience that broadened my understanding of international agricultural research for development. The opportunity to engage with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world allowed me to see the diversity of projects being undertaken across different countries — from food security and climate resilience to gender equity and innovation.

One of the major highlights for me was the chance to network with professionals working in international agricultural research. I was impressed by the range of contexts and countries represented, and it was inspiring to hear about the challenges and successes of their work. These conversations deepened my appreciation for the complexity of global agri-food systems and the importance of locally grounded and culturally appropriate approaches. I was also especially pleased to meet many early-career researchers, including members of the RAID Network and ACIAR staff, who are actively contributing to agricultural research and development across different regions.

Throughout the scholar activities, I also gained valuable insights on best practices — and common pitfalls — when collaborating with partner countries and local communities. Presenters and mentors shared practical advice drawn from years of experience in the field. This included guidance on setting clear expectations, maintaining flexibility, and investing in long-term relationships built on trust and mutual respect.

A recurring theme across both days in my conversation with several people was the role of women in agriculture, which particularly resonated with me. Many speakers reflected on their own experiences as women working in international development and highlighted systemic challenges such as limited leadership opportunities, time constraints due to travel, and balancing caregiving responsibilities. These honest conversations were both affirming and thought-provoking, reminding me of the importance of inclusive policy and project design.

The mentor-mentee model was also a significant part of my learning. I truly valued the time I had with my assigned mentor, Dr Ha Duong, who offered thoughtful career advice and introduced me to others working in my field of interest. Thank you, Ha! Several mentors across the program provided guidance on navigating early-career pathways, and I now feel better equipped to plan my next steps.



Lastly, I was particularly intrigued by a session exploring the feasibility of achieving net zero emissions in agriculture, especially the talk presented by Prof. Richard Eckard from the Zero Net Emissions Agriculture CRC. It was inspiring to hear from a leading research group tackling these challenges with scientifically grounded and actionable solutions for Australia and case studies for other countries. The session encouraged me to think more critically about the science, trade-offs, and policy implications behind emissions reduction in agriculture, and how these strategies can be meaningfully integrated into food systems while ensuring global food security.

Overall, the conference and scholar program provided me not only with technical knowledge and career advice, but also with a sense of community and shared purpose. I leave the experience feeling more connected, inspired, and committed to contributing to inclusive, sustainable agri-food systems through my research and future work.

Shreya Nidumolu, University of Adelaide

Mentor: Rosemary Deininger

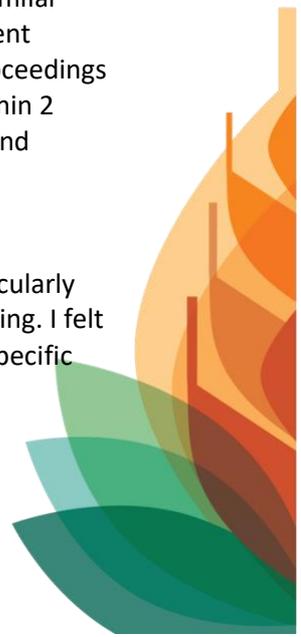
Having the opportunity to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference as a scholar has been a formative and enriching opportunity at the intersection of completing my undergraduate degree and starting my career. This conference served as a platform to listen to the key issues in agriculture, where the message instilled in us was that food security is a matter of human security. Connecting with professionals in the field, whose backgrounds were varied yet served the same purpose, was inspiring. I am very grateful for this chance to attend the conference, by the support of the Crawford Fund and SA Committee.

As an undergraduate student in a field not directly related to agriculture, I initially felt nervous about entering this space. However, the conference presentations consistently emphasised the importance of agricultural policy as an interdisciplinary field where everyone can contribute. I was particularly interested in discussions highlighting Australia's potential to be a regional leader in this area, alongside the careful consideration needed when supporting our neighbours by respecting their existing methodologies and perspectives. Additionally, connecting food security to challenges such as climate change, global conflict, and political instability was a key issue brought up by the presenters.

This year's conference theme 'Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners' was especially engaging for me, as an economics student who is interested in international development and public policy. While the day's presentations focused on food security through different lenses, contexts, and case studies, the final connection to policy recommendations incited an invaluable real-world connection.

Connecting with my mentor, Rosemary Deininger, showed me how her vast experience across sectors can provide valuable guidance for approaching challenges and policymaking in agriculture. Her support gave me a lot of confidence and has helped me consider future pathways in a similar field. Another highlight for me was connecting with the other young scholars. Despite different educational backgrounds, our passion for agriculture and enthusiasm for the conference proceedings meant that we all clicked instantly. Seeing how comfortable we became with each other within 2 days was very special to me. I now have a network of 33 young professionals in agriculture and development whom I can reach out to for support and advice.

The scholar sessions were a very special experience, as we could listen to the speakers in an interactive environment. I enjoyed listening to the career pathways of all the speakers, particularly those of Glen Denning and Alison Bentley, whose international experiences were truly inspiring. I felt that the scholar activities helped build our confidence in networking and allowed us to ask specific questions.



This conference has given me the kickstart to build a career shaped by a commitment to agricultural issues. I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Crawford Fund and RAID. Particularly, I'd like to extend my thanks to Cathy Reade and Larissa Mullet. The dedication and effort they put into making this conference so inspiring, inclusive, and thought-provoking is truly appreciated by all of us.

Mahsa Rahmani Dizgah, University of Adelaide

Mentor: Deirdre Lemerle

I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Annual Conference as a Scholar. As a PhD student at the University of Adelaide researching gender disparities in agriculture, the conference was an eye-opening experience that connected my academic interests with pressing global challenges. It was inspiring to be part of a community of scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who are all dedicated to improving food and nutrition security and building stronger agricultural systems worldwide.

The Scholar Days provided a dynamic start to the week. From the opening sessions at the Eastlake Football Club to the small-group discussions and practical workshops, I felt engaged and encouraged to think more broadly about career pathways in international agricultural research. Meeting other scholars from across Australia with diverse backgrounds reminded me of the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. The mentor introductions were particularly valuable, as they allowed me to start building supportive professional relationships. The activities were well structured to give us both technical knowledge and the chance to reflect on personal development, which I found motivating.

The main conference at Parliament House was the highlight of the week. The Sir John Crawford Memorial Address and the Networking Dinner were memorable, both for the content and for the chance to connect with senior figures in agricultural development. Sitting in the Great Hall and listening to international speakers share their experiences of tackling food insecurity, climate change, and agricultural innovation gave me fresh perspectives that go beyond the Australian context.

I was particularly interested in the sessions that highlighted the intersection between climate change and smallholder livelihoods, as this aligns with my research on gendered vulnerabilities in agriculture. Hearing about case studies from around the world also helped me see how lessons from developing countries can inform my work in Australia and vice versa. The energy in the room, especially with scholars contributing questions and reflections, was a reminder of how important it is to engage young researchers in shaping future agendas.

This experience has already had a strong influence on my research and career direction. The conversations I had with my mentor and with other scholars reassured me about the relevance of my research and gave me ideas for possible collaborations. It was also encouraging to learn about opportunities through ACIAR and RAID for further involvement in international agricultural research. The event helped me think more strategically about how my PhD can contribute not only to academic debates but also to real-world development outcomes.

Networking with peers who share similar passions has motivated me to remain actively engaged with RAID, as I can see the value of staying connected to a network that continues beyond the conference.

Overall, the Crawford Fund Annual Conference was a transformative experience. It reinforced the importance of bridging research and practice in agriculture, while also providing a supportive environment for young scholars to grow. I would like to sincerely thank the Crawford Fund, my state committee, and my mentor for this invaluable opportunity. I look forward to staying engaged in future activities.



TAS COMMITTEE



Our 2025 Tasmanian scholars (left to right) Shilpa Koirala, Sarah Fulton, Emi Benic, Finlay Walton, Ava Christie, Fahad Khan and Usman Ijaz pictured with Nam Ha Duong, Neville Mendham, TAS Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator, Richard Warner, TAS Crawford Fund Committee Chair and Stephen Ives, TAS Crawford Fund Committee Member.

Emi Benic, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Jen Bond

The 2025 Crawford Fund Conference was an incredible experience which shone light on agricultural research, food security and sustainability. The 2025 central theme of *'Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners'* felt both timely and urgent, addressing the complex challenge of secure food production and net-zero emission goals. Over the course of the conference, a range of sessions were thoughtfully structured around key themes. Session 1 featured Professor Glenn Denning and was exceptionally engaging, exploring the realistic challenges of achieving universal food security amid climate adversity.

His insights were a reminder that technical solutions must be paired with social and political movements in order to truly be impactful. The second session explored the question of whether humanity and planet earth can *'feed the world with net-zero emissions'*. As such, a range of speakers covered cutting-edge developments like carbon farming, low-emission rice cultivation, climate services, and silvopastoral systems. I found this session particularly engaging as it provided solid insight into current cutting edge projects and technological agricultural advancements. These early sessions particularly highlighted that innovation must adapt to the realities of farming, especially in diverse ecosystems.

The third session was again of particular interest, where speakers from Asia, Africa, and the Pacific offered lessons drawn directly from these regions. The shared message was clear - locally grounded adaptation strategies are essential for genuine and effective resilience. Session 4 addressed themes of equity, inclusion, and community participation, where case studies underscored the role of women and marginalised groups in shaping more resilient

systems. Stories ranged from Cambodia to Timor-Leste, the Cook Islands and Indonesia, revealing both the progress and the gaps in empowering communities at the frontline of climate change. The final session, session 5, brought these threads together in a multi-stakeholder conversation, where Caitlin McConnel - Australian Farmer and Lawyer - was a strong and captivating speaker, shining a light on the urgent need to bridge the gap between on ground farming practices and legal frameworks.

Beyond content, the conference shone in its inclusive atmosphere and networking opportunities, largely thanks to the professional team of young leaders from the RAID Network that was led by Mikayla Hyland-Wood. The intergenerational scholar-mentor program was a touching addition that helped early career research scientists like myself feel connected to and supported by the industry. These connections and conversations provided many opportunities and ensured that scholars felt well supported throughout the conference. Having an experienced cohort of experts to offer advice and facilitate professional connections was invaluable to the scholars and is something that I am truly grateful for.

Two key takeaways from the conference: 1) although global food security is a challenging problem, there are viable solutions only IF collaboration occurs across nutritional, technological, sustainability and agricultural disciplines and 2) scholars, leaders, practitioners and everyday people must work TOGETHER to shape a future where food security and sustainability walk hand in hand.

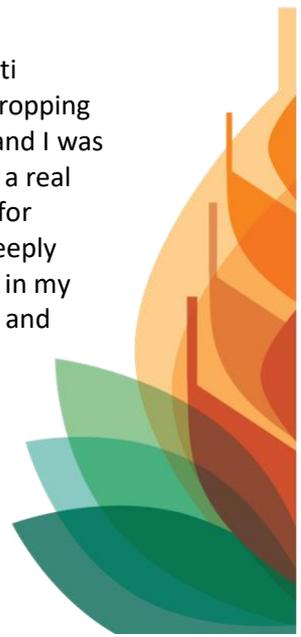
Ava Christie, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Richard Warner

The 2025 Crawford Fund Conference provided a remarkable opportunity to be exposed to high-order exchange of knowledge and experiences from across a breadth of nations, industries and projects. The theme, *Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners*, highlighted the global discourse between efficient food production and emissions-conscious goals for agricultural systems, as well as the pressing requirement for effective translation of research into practice with deep social and cultural consideration. For me as an undergraduate student still early in my degree, this was an incredibly insightful and an invaluable event that I am so grateful to have been able to attend.

This conference was exceedingly successful in taking both a broad perspective on the theme, whilst also narrow in on notable cases of research, change and potential pertaining to the interplay between climate and food. I came away from this event with a sense of urgency for food system change that coupled with an understanding that a 'ground up' approach to such change is required. Such a multifaceted undertaking seemed vastly overwhelming at the beginning of the day. However, as we heard from Glenn Denning in his keynote address, partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region in particular have great potential to further climate-resilient food security in regional communities, with an outlook to an associated cumulative effect on universal food security.

Of the case studies of the day, highlights for me were delivered by Dr Tyron Venn and Dr Aditi Mukherji. Not only did Dr Mukherji detail the devastation of climate change on animal and cropping systems in Africa and Asia, she provided clear and encouraging solutions to such pressures, and I was left with a awareness that, with effective application of research and associated technology, a real difference could be made in affected nations. Similarly, Dr Venn's summary of the potential for silvopastoral systems, a very new concept to me, was exceptionally inspiring. As someone deeply passionate about both human and planetary health (and likely quite impressionable so early in my exposure to international agriculture), I found the inclusion of such a broad range of experts and practitioners so enriching.



I was struck by the networking aspect of this conference, and particularly by how passionate and eager to engage a number of the mentors were across the broader three days. Richard Warner was an unbelievable mentor for me, and I cannot thank him enough for the learning, conversation and connection he facilitated for me. I was incredibly lucky in that number of other mentors also stepped in and ‘took me under their wing’ over the event, including Joseph Vile, Neville Mendham, Sam Coggins and the wider RAID team.

With an upcoming trip to Vietnam with the incredible Henzell Award, I went into this conference with the goal of preparing as much as I could for my first taste of international agriculture. A key takeaway was the immeasurable merit in listening to local communities and prioritising this perspective in policymaking. I predict this approach will be evident in our visit to Vietnam!

This experience has had a lasting impact on not only my professional aspirations, but on my view of climate change, international agriculture and food security, and I couldn’t be more grateful to the Crawford Fund for such a marvellous event.

Sarah Fulton, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Tim Reeves

The 2025 Crawford Conference, together with the scholar activities, was an inspiring and unforgettable experience. As Agricultural Science Honours student undertaking research in Fiji, it resonated deeply with me and reaffirmed the vital importance of Australia’s work in this field for advancing global food security.

Professor Glenn Denning spoke both at the conference and to the scholar cohort, delivering captivating presentations. His work on universal food security was both passionate and grounded, emphasizing that achieving a world without hunger or malnutrition requires transforming how food is grown, managed, and distributed through sustainable, equitable systems. He also stressed that a step-up in action and investment by Australia in agricultural research and development would be welcomed across the Indo-Pacific, as the nation’s expertise and strong partnership models could play a vital role in advancing food security and supporting regional peace and prosperity. For the scholar cohort, he also shared valuable advice on building a career in international agricultural development. His words of wisdom have stayed with me— “if in doubt, say yes,” the importance of gaining real “boots on the ground” experience, and the reminder that while you may need to be a jack of all trades in this field, you should also strive to be a master of one.

A consistent message throughout the three days was the importance of genuine community engagement and consultation. Rather than arriving with pre-determined solutions, the focus needs to be on asking people what they need, want, and value, and involving them in shaping the way forward. Without this, even the most well-intentioned interventions risk missing the mark; with it, solutions are far more likely to be meaningful, sustainable, and embraced by the communities they are designed to serve. This strongly resonated with me and encouraged me to think more critically about how I approach my own research.

Another highlight was networking with attendees and hearing the diverse pathways that professionals had taken into international agricultural research for development. Some stumbled into the field by accidentally attending the “wrong” lecture, while others began their journeys through volunteering in developing countries and being offered opportunities that shaped their careers. Networking with the other scholars was equally rewarding, as we were able to share our research, compare experiences, and build connections that I know will be valuable well beyond the conference. This reminded me that there is no single “right” path into this space—there are many ways to find your place in this field of work.



I am incredibly honoured to have been a part of the 2025 Crawford Fund Scholars Program. I would like to sincerely thank the Crawford Fund for coordinating such a meaningful event, the TAS Committee for sponsoring my attendance, and the RAID volunteers for their tireless contributions. A special thank you also goes to my mentor, Tim Reves, for his guidance throughout the program and for opening my eyes to future pathways and opportunities. As I return to complete my Honours project, I do so with a renewed sense of purpose and excitement.

Usman Ijaz, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Daniel Tan

Attending the Crawford Conference was a really inspiring experience. It gave me the chance to learn from leading experts and meet people who are passionate about agriculture and food security. I enjoyed the open discussions and the chance to share ideas with others who are facing similar challenges in their work.

I was especially grateful to attend with my mentor, Professor Daniel Tan. His guidance made the experience even more valuable, as he encouraged me to engage in conversations, ask questions, and think about how the topics discussed connect to my own research. Having his support throughout the conference gave me more confidence and helped me take away practical lessons for my growth. Overall, the conference not only expanded my knowledge but also motivated me to apply what I learned to both my research and my professional journey moving forward.

Fahad Khan, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA), University of Tasmania

Mentor: Kaye Basford

Attending the Crawford Fund Conference 2025 on *Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems* was an invaluable experience that has deeply influenced my professional outlook and commitment to impactful research. While the sessions covered a remarkable breadth of topics; from net zero emissions and technological innovations to social equity in adaptation; the greatest value for me came from the practical insights, peer connections, and renewed sense of purpose that the event furthered.

The program featured distinguished speakers discussing pathways to net zero food systems, the importance of localized solutions, and the role of advocacy in enabling transformative change. Sessions offered impactful examples from Australia, Asia, and the Pacific, each demonstrating that progress in climate resilience is collaborative, context-driven, and rooted in partnerships between science and community. However, for me, the true highlights emerged not just from the formal presentations, but from the conversations that happened around them, organized meetings with mentors, dialogues with early-career researchers, and shared reflections with practitioners who are driving change at grassroots level.

What I found most rewarding was the spirit of inclusion and open exchange. Panellists repeatedly stressed that building climate-resilient agrifood systems demands more than research excellence; it requires humility, listening to local voices, and a willingness to co-design solutions. I was inspired by stories from Pacific Island nations and Southeast Asia that highlighted the powerful impact of locally led adaptation and the central role of women and marginalized communities in leading responses to climate change. These stories challenged me to consider how I can ensure equity and collaboration in my own research practice.

Networking proved especially valuable, the conference connected me to a diverse community of peers, mentors, and future potential collaborators. Exchanging ideas, challenges, and solutions with others who share a drive for sustainability left me energized and more hopeful about our collective capacity for change.



The importance placed on actionable recommendations and real-world impact was a strong message: science and policy must go hand-in-hand, and our work must always be responsive to the needs of the communities we aim to serve.

Key takeaways I am bringing forward: transformation is a collective enterprise; diversity and participation are essential to resilience; and ultimately, resilient food systems depend on partnerships that blend evidence, innovation, and empathy. I leave the conference inspired, better equipped, and committed to translating these lessons into action, both in my current research and in future scientific endeavours.

TOGETHER, WE WILL MAKE THIS WORLD, A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN!

Shilpa Koirala, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Sally Norton

Attending the 2025 Crawford Fund Annual Conference “Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners” was not just another event for me but a truly inspiring and transformative experience that combined learning, networking, and personal growth. The event brought together a vibrant mix of scholars, experts, and practitioners, all working toward the shared goal of creating a food-secure world. From the very beginning, the scholar–mentor pairing made a strong impact, providing both guidance and encouragement to the Scholars throughout the conference. I am especially grateful to my mentor, Dr. Sally Norton, whose support made it easier to engage fully in the sessions and network with other participants. The speed meet facilitated by RAID, offered a space to share stories, exchange perspectives, and build meaningful connections. Likewise, the Scholar Day activities broadened my awareness of the opportunities available globally in areas of International agriculture research.

The conference, addressed some of the most urgent challenges of our time: climate change, food security, and the need for more effective policies and practices. The discussions emphasized the importance of systemic transformation, collaborative approaches, and knowledge sharing to drive real change. A key lesson I took away was the critical role of food systems in strengthening resilience. The emphasis on adaptation alongside mitigation was particularly relevant and shifted my perspective on how to approach climate challenges in agriculture. Professor Glenn Denning’s session on achieving universal food security in an adversely changing climate was a highlight, as he stressed that while food security is achievable, it requires cross-sectoral, multi-level strategies, reformed institutions, and greater investment in research and development. Equally valuable were the regional case studies, which showcased innovative approaches to climate resilience from Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. These provided concrete examples of how different regions are responding to shared challenges while reinforcing the importance of context-specific solutions. The panel discussion featuring Dr Sonia Akter, Mr Acacio Sarmiento da Silva, Ms Selane Tairea, and Ms Vyta Hanifah was insightful, offering diverse perspectives and practical insights on how to move forward collectively.

Overall, I returned from the conference with a wealth of knowledge and many meaningful connections. Each interaction offered new perspectives and reinforced my appreciation for the importance of global cooperation. The experience has opened my eyes to future opportunities and left me motivated to contribute meaningfully as a global citizen in building climate-resilient agrifood systems. It has also strengthened my commitment to pursuing impactful and collaborative research in sustainable agriculture development.

Finlay Walton, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Neville Mendham

I would like to begin by thanking the Crawford Fund for providing the opportunity to attend this year’s fund. The foundation of productive agricultural research and development is established



through the meaningful collaboration and connection of scientists, and the Crawford Fund's 2025 conference facilitated this very well. This year's event focused on the current progress of climate adaptation in food systems, providing policymakers with actionable and tailored recommendations to build resilience in the industry. Paired with the scholars' activities before and after the conference, the three days spent in Canberra were full of networking, insightful conversations with professionals and incredible presentations detailing the current state of our industry. It truly was a career highlight unfolding right in front of our eyes.

The conference has enhanced my understanding of global food security challenges and equipped me with new ideas and approaches to contribute to this field. The event's highlights, including the focus on sustainability, have inspired me to pursue research and collaborate in international agricultural development. I am now more committed than ever to contributing to efforts that ensure everyone has access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food.

One main highlight of the conference for me was the captivating keynote speech by Dr Glenn Denning, the Professor of Professional Practice at Columbia University in the US with a storied past in international agricultural development. His address on achieving universal food security in an increasingly changing climate was both thought-provoking and inspiring. By outlining the broader areas of financial and development investment for increasing food security and sustainability within our food systems, he laid the perfect foundation for the more targeted case study presentations later in the day. These affirmed the teachings from Glenn and provided science-backed evidence for recommendations moving forward. It is important to note how diverse the studies were, with professionals from many different sectors within science (social, modelling, plant, animal, etc) and even legal representatives bridging the much-needed gap across disciplines. By addressing the divide between professionals across disciplines, the global community can unlock the full potential of agricultural innovation and ensure more equitable development outcomes.

The scholar activities pre- and post-conference provided both context and a platform to foster collaboration amongst the young scientific community interested in international development. I was particularly engaged by the two panels on breaking in and working in research in a different country. The discussions offered valuable practical insights from leaders in the space, allowing us to make more informed decisions about our future. The key throughline of the need to take advantage of any salient opportunities became very clear. Considering I am heading into my honour's year at the University of Tasmania, I felt that this content was incredibly important for considering my next steps after I graduate. Needless to say, I believe the word "yes" will be highly employed in my future career!

A final note on the importance of the mentorship program. I have to thank the Crawford Fund for supplying each scholar with a mentor, as I am very lucky to have met Neville Mendham. His wealth of knowledge in the industry and his passion for facilitating collaboration were apparent as soon as I met him, and I am sure I will stay connected with him for some time. It was only because of the networking insight gained through the meaningful discussions I had with him over the 3 days that I was able to build a generous portfolio of connections with professionals also attending the event. Without his guidance and careful encouragement, I am certain the week would not have been the success it was. Thank you Neville.



VIC COMMITTEE



Our 2025 VIC scholars (left to right) Brandon Conway-Rusk, Ellie Maeve Gerhardy, Sneha Rajackal Senthil Vel, Gracia Sie, Monique Berkhout and Ian Hodge pictured with VIC Crawford Fund Committee Member Brendan Rodoni and VIC Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Bill Lewis.

Brandon Conway-Rusk, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Mentor: Kym Anderson

The Crawford Fund's 2025 conference was an amazing opportunity to gain insight into the agriculture for development field, and to connect with influential researchers, program designers, and scholars in the field. I am grateful to have attended as a scholar, as it allowed me the opportunity to not only learn from leaders, but also from other scholars in similar positions to me.

As a graduate working for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, I was drawn to this year's theme '*Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners*'. The conference helped me to realise that food security has greater sociological impacts than simply meeting one's caloric needs. Food security plays a part in overall health, community resilience, economic stability, and even national security. It was particularly valuable to hear how different regions are approaching resilience in ways that balance productivity, sustainability, and equity.

In particular, Glen Denning's discussion on achieving universal food security in an adversely changing climate helped place Australia's role in global food security into perspective. Dr Purnima's talk and subsequent panel discussion also reminded me that climate change isn't felt equally, and that there needs to remain a focus on equitable solutions to food security and resilience. Another key theme that stood out was the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration – recognising that climate resilience is not only a matter of agricultural science, but also of economics, sociology, and policy.

I also found the informal conversations between sessions to be just as insightful as the panels themselves, as they gave me a sense of the diversity of pathways young professionals are taking in this field. The emphasis on youth engagement and capacity building resonated strongly with me, as I see the role of early-career professionals as crucial to sustaining momentum in agrifood

development. These peer-to-peer connections were invaluable, and I look forward to keeping in touch with my fellow scholars as we grow in our respective careers.

While still in my infancy as a public servant, the conference has given me invaluable insights and connections in the agricultural development space that I am excited to carry forward. It also reminded me of the importance of strong partnerships between Australia and our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in sharing knowledge and strengthening regional food systems.

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the Victorian Crawford Fund Committee for the opportunity to attend the conference as a scholar, and to Kym Anderson for his mentorship throughout the program. It was a wonderful experience that I cannot wait to share with friends and colleagues. I look forward to keeping up with both the Crawford Fund and the Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID) network, and I feel motivated to continue contributing to the development of climate-resilient agrifood systems in my work.

Ellie Maeve Gerhardy, *Deakin University*

Mentor: Cathy O'Mullan

As a Nutrition Science student, my journey into the agriculture sector has been somewhat indirect. However, nutrition security is a deep passion of mine and an area I hope to work in after completing my Master of Dietetics. Attending the Crawford Fund Conference in 2025 'Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners' was an exciting and enlightening experience. Being my first ever conference, it gave me valuable insights into food insecurity and agriculture for development, but also the opportunity to connect and collaborate with other scholars and established professionals in the sector. It was inspiring to be in a room filled with people who are passionate about creating sustainable and inclusive food systems.

I currently work with a social enterprise that tackles food insecurity across Greater Geelong through food rescue, nutrition and employment education. One of my biggest takeaways from the conference was the importance of truly listening to communities, rather than arriving with preconceived ideas of what they need. The concept of a "boots on the ground" approach really resonated with me, and I will carry this forward in my own work; particularly as I aim to continue my studies in remote Australian communities.

I particularly enjoyed the sessions focused on gender equity and inclusion, and the impact these issues have on food insecurity worldwide. Talks by Dr Sonia Akter and Dr Purnima Menon were especially impactful. I found their research and experiences highlighted just how vital inclusivity is when designing food and agriculture programs that are effective and sustainable.

A true highlight of the conference was the brilliant conversations I had with my fellow scholars. It was a unique and special experience to meet students and early-career professionals who are equally passionate about the future of food security. These discussions challenged and inspired me, and I left feeling energised and hopeful. Another special part of my experience was being mentored by Cathy O'Mullan, who generously shared her career journey and research insights with me. Learning from someone whose work continues to shape the field was both inspiring and motivating.

Overall, the conference was a fabulous and enriching experience that gave me the confidence to build networks and friendships with like-minded peers. It also helped me better understand the real-world challenges that lie ahead for us as future researchers and practitioners working in global food and nutrition security. A big thank you to the Crawford Fund for this incredible opportunity and for investing in the next generation of professionals in agriculture, development and food security.



Sneha Rajackal Senthil Vel, *University of Melbourne*

Mentor: Brendan Rodoni

I was privileged to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Annual Conference as a Crawford Fund Scholar. This year's conference theme was *"Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners"*, and I was privileged to listen to interesting discussions on how science and policy intersect to address the challenges of food security in a changing climate.

The three-day experience involved various Scholar activities, the main conference, and many networking opportunities. These sessions presented opportunities for me to learn from experts in agricultural research, development, and policy. I am grateful for this experience, which expanded my knowledge and understanding of the policy dimensions of agrifood systems. It also emphasised the role of governance, economics, and international collaboration in creating meaningful change. Cross-sectional collaboration is vital to making equitable food systems, and addressing underlying barriers to food security.

The *"Can We Feed the World with Net Zero Emissions?"* symposium was the most interesting for me. The session opened with an overview by Professor Richard Eckard, followed by case studies from Dr Ando Radanielson, Ms Caitlin, Dr Leanne, and Dr Tyron Venn. The presentations were diverse, each with unique policy recommendations, which was insightful for me to learn. The speakers also explored the complex trade-offs between agricultural productivity and environmental impact, noting that current political infrastructure is not adequate to ensure equitable and secure agrifood systems. Cross-sector policy frameworks, market incentives, and community-driven solutions will need to work together if we are to achieve net-zero food systems without compromising livelihoods or food access.

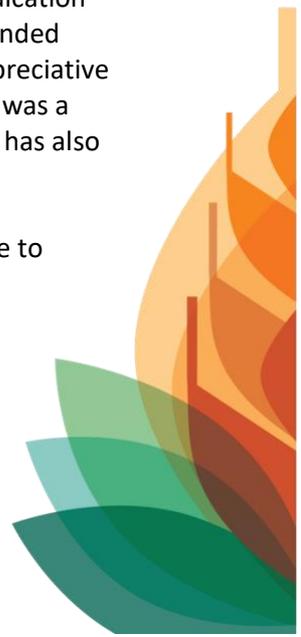
There were sessions run by DFAT and ACIAR, which made me appreciate the role of international collaboration, especially because regulations, trade agreements, and international cooperation will ultimately shape how fair systems can be implemented.

Finally, the highlight of the Scholar Program was meeting all the other scholars, a diverse group of emerging researchers and scientists from various disciplines, all brought together by their commitment to solving food insecurity. It was lovely to meet and collaborate with these people, and the friendships we made were the most enriching aspect of the program.

As a Master of Biotechnology student, I have often focused on the research and innovation side of sustainable agriculture. However, after the symposium, it became clear that science and policy must operate together to develop more equitable and secure food systems.

I am deeply grateful to the Crawford Fund for awarding me this scholarship and for their dedication to supporting the next generation of agricultural scientists. This well-structured program blended knowledge-sharing, networking, and mentorship, which was invaluable for me. I am also appreciative of the RAID network for helping facilitate this program and for their hard work in ensuring it was a rewarding experience. This opportunity has not only expanded my professional network but has also strengthened my sense of purpose in bridging the gap between research and policy.

The conference taught me that food security is world security. I am determined to contribute to agricultural systems that are productive, sustainable, equitable, and resilient.



Gracia Sie, University of Melbourne

Mentor: John Dalton

August 2025 marked my sixth month in Australia and in Melbourne as I embarked on my journey as a graduate research student at the University of Melbourne. I am honoured and grateful to have been awarded the Crawford Fund Scholarship, which allowed me to attend the Crawford Fund Annual Conference 2025. This wonderful opportunity had truly been a highlight of my academic experience. As a part of one of my firsts as an international student, attending this conference as one of the conference scholars was one of the most exhilarating experiences I have ever had so far.

I remember when I first met my mentor, John Dalton, who had a rich experience in development projects across the world. Both of us clicked instantly in our conversation in our first meeting at the Day 1 kick-off on August 11. We passionately discussed the state of development projects, how some faced failure despite the well-meant objectives, and what can be done better. I am keen to have him as my mentor along my research and possible career journey in livelihood development projects for the longest run.

Having only finished my MPhil candidature confirmation seminar less than two weeks before, attending this conference not only strengthened my determination to pursue a career in environmental consultancy, sustainable livelihoods, and ecosystem restoration, but also greatly helped build my confidence and networking skills. I remember my mentor introduced me to Helen Scott-Orr, with whom I also had long conversations. Through her I learned how to build my confidence and connect with people in these events and subsequently exercised it.

I attended the conference day on Tuesday, 12 August, with my research in mind—exploring representations of Dayak Ngaju indigenous women and men in land use and livelihood interventions in Central Kalimantan. Session 4 on Resilience Through Equity, Inclusion, and Community Participation resonated well with my work and enabled me to understand the gendered lens of maintaining resilience in achieving sustainable livelihoods and food security. In addition, Selane Tairea provided an interesting perspective on balance in community participation in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, which ideally should be implemented elsewhere.

Recognising the complex dynamics of current global predicaments and their effects on the climate, environment, and the people within, I remember Alison Bentley's quote on the reality that we cannot change the world instantly, which keeps me on my toes. Nevertheless, this conference reminded me of why I chose this path in the first place—to contribute in my own way to building more sustainable and equitable livelihoods. I left Canberra feeling both humbled and energised: humbled by the scale of the challenges ahead, yet energised by the people I met, the stories I heard, and the possibilities that lie ahead. I carried not only notes and connections as I returned to Melbourne, but also a renewed sense of purpose and a quiet confidence that my work can, and will, make a difference.



WA COMMITTEE



Our 2025 scholars from WA (left to right) Stephanie Boyce, Will Mutton, Sneya Sharma, Rutwik Barmukh and Luke Pilmer pictured with WA Committee Chair, Mark Sweetingham and WA Committee Coordinator, Lyn Abbott.

Rutwik Barmukh, Murdoch University

Mentor: Dr Ben Biddulph

Being selected by the Crawford Fund WA Committee to attend the 2025 Annual Conference and the Scholar Program was a rewarding and transformative experience. The event brought together leaders from science, policy, development, and industry to discuss how agrifood systems can adapt to climate change. For me, as a researcher in genetics and crop breeding, the combination of the conference and Scholar Program provided not only new knowledge but also the chance to reflect on how my own research can contribute to the broader challenge of building climate-resilient agriculture.

The Scholar Program provided a strong foundation for engaging with the event. The orientation and networking activities gave me the opportunity to connect with fellow scholars from across Australia, each bringing unique perspectives and research interests. Group discussions encouraged us to think broadly about our role in international agricultural development, while mentoring sessions offered tailored advice on career pathways and leadership. My mentor, Dr. Ben Biddulph, provided valuable insights into linking research with practical impact, particularly around farming systems and enterprise resilience. The Scholar Program's focus on communication skills and translating research into policy language was especially beneficial, as it underscored that research innovations only have impact when they are understood and adopted by farmers, advisors, and decision-makers.

The Annual Conference itself was a highlight. The keynote sessions and panels reinforced the urgent need to accelerate climate-smart agriculture. Presentations on low-emission innovations, silvopastoral systems, climate services, and crop diversification were particularly thought-provoking. Equally striking were the regional perspectives, which emphasized that climate change impacts are unevenly distributed and that adaptation strategies must be context specific. Hearing from speakers

on gender and equity issues also made me reflect on how future efforts should be designed to ensure that women farmers and smallholder communities' benefit.

Beyond the sessions, the real value of the experience lay in the people I met and the conversations I had. I had the opportunity to exchange ideas with my mentor, Dr. Ben Biddulph, WA Committee Chair Prof. Mark Sweetingham, WA Committee Coordinator Prof. Lynette Abbott, Crawford Fund Director of Special Projects Dr. Cathy Reade, Communications Manager Ms. Larissa Mullet, and many others. They generously introduced me to other scholars and experts, helping me expand my professional network in meaningful ways. The opportunity to establish new connections is invaluable, and the conference provided an ideal environment for fostering these relationships.

Reflecting on the entire experience, I benefitted in three major ways: I gained a clearer understanding of the global policy context around climate-resilient agriculture; I strengthened my communication and networking skills through the Scholar Program activities; and I connected my research more directly to the real-world needs of farmers, policymakers, and practitioners. The conference has left me inspired to ensure that my research work contributes not just to scientific knowledge, but also to practical solutions for food security and climate adaptation.

Stephanie Boyce

Mentor: Lyn Abbott

I am incredibly honoured to have been selected to represent WA as a scholar to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund conference, held at Parliament House in Canberra. As a 2025 Scholar, this experience has been invaluable, offering insights and connections that have directly benefited my current work in Western Australia.

My reason for applying was a recommendation from a colleague and former scholar who spoke highly of the experience. Before this, I had no idea of the work The Crawford Fund does. Alongside this, the strong alignment between this year's conference theme and my professional work motivated me to apply. I currently work on the Western Australian Farming Systems (WAFS) Project, where our goal is to improve the resilience and profitability of local farming systems. This involves identifying break crop options that improve returns while managing risk, analysing the implications of changing seeding times, and evaluating management strategies that support profitability under low greenhouse gas emission scenarios. Attending this conference was a timely opportunity to engage with global experts addressing these very challenges, balancing food production, environmental sustainability, and climate adaptation.

During my university studies, I had intended to undertake an international agriculture subject to gain experience with global food systems, but unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic made that impossible. This conference offered a meaningful alternative by providing exposure to international perspectives on agrifood systems and a deeper understanding of Australia's role within them.

I was particularly interested in the conference sessions discussing the trade-offs between food production and net-zero emissions targets. From a practical perspective, I see value in focusing on low-emission strategies that are both realistic and impactful. It was encouraging to see scientists and practitioners engaging in discussions about how to move forward in ways that are environmentally responsible, economically viable, and considerate of social impacts. These conversations closely reflected the complexities we face in Western Australia and provided new insights.

The Scholars' Day and RAID Network activities were a highlight. These sessions allowed us to engage meaningfully with our mentors and peers, and I gained practical advice and new contacts. I was fortunate to be paired with a supportive mentor who helped guide me through the event and connected me with relevant experts in my area of interest.



One of the key takeaways from the conference was a better understanding of how much Australia's agricultural sector depends on national security. Things like reliable supply chains, access to inputs, and protection from biosecurity threats are essential for keeping the sector running and supporting food production. The importance of reducing agricultural emissions, while maintaining food security and economic stability, was clearly framed as a national and global priority.

The conference has deepened my understanding, expanded my network, and strengthened my commitment to improving the long-term sustainability of agriculture in Western Australia and beyond.

William Mutton, University of Western Australia

Mentor: Sam Coggins

Heading into the 2025 Crawford Fund's annual conference for international food security I was not sure what to expect. What I found was a diverse community of people eager to make a difference in the world through agricultural research and development.

The main theme of the 2025 conference was: "Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners." Throughout the main conference day, speakers emphasised the continuing need for research and development, perhaps emphasising the need for policy makers to allow the extension of the research into the 'real world'.

Two of the biggest messages of the day that I found were as follows:

- The need for synergy between farmers, policy makers and researchers.
- The need for continual funding in this sector especially considering the USAID cuts.

Clear communication is vital for all operations that involve multiple parties and stakeholders, and it is no different for agriculture. Professor Glen Denning finished his keynote address with a quote from Professor M.S. Swaminathan saying that "if synergy can be created among scientific know-how, political do-how and farmer participation, it should be possible to achieve the goal of overcoming chronic and hidden hunger..." This quote highlights the need for clear communication and collaboration between the key agencies involved in global food security.

Crawford Fund board member, Professor Tim Reeves, added to this idea by stating that the biggest agricultural innovation in recent times has been the change in the approach to research from top-down to bottom-up. He highlights the importance of listening to the needs of the farmers to inform how and what we research. This idea of the value of listening to the needs of the everyday farmer was a key message repeated various times throughout the conference. From working with rice growers in Sri Lanka to working with horticultural workers in the Cook Islands, synergy with researchers and farmers was shown to be a must.

The other big message that I took away from the day was the need for continual funding and global recognition of the importance of the sector. In a way this stems from the first point in that if synergy between the three parties is achieved the policy makers will be happy to fund the researchers. It was mentioned at the conference that agriculture is disappearing of the political agenda and farmers and researchers are losing their voice. One of the aims of this conference was to build public awareness for the Crawford Fund and its agenda. Considering the recent USAID funding cuts affecting global humanitarian efforts, the conference speakers urged Australian leaders to take the global lead, at least for our region, in our funding for international aid specifically relating to agricultural research and development.



I would like to thank the WA committee for selecting me, and Crawford Fund board, as well as all the mentors and industry representatives who are committed to this key area of international development.

Luke Pilmer, Murdoch University/DPIRD WA

Mentor: Geoff Allan

Attending the Crawford Fund Annual Conference as a scholar was an incredibly valuable and eye-opening experience. Before the event, I had little understanding of what ACIAR was or the breadth of its work. Over the course of the program, I came to see how its projects connect science, policy, and on-the-ground action to create tangible change in people's lives across the globe.

The highlight for me was the mentor program. I was paired with a mentor whose experience and insights aligned perfectly with my interests and career stage. Our discussions were both practical and inspiring, giving me a clearer sense of how to navigate development-focused research, build meaningful partnerships, and position my skills where they can make the most difference.

I also valued the connections I made with other scholars and professionals. Meeting someone currently leading an ACIAR-funded project has already led to conversations about how I might contribute my aquaculture expertise to their work. This was an unexpected and exciting outcome, showing me, how quickly new opportunities can emerge when you step into the right networks.

More broadly, the experience has made me re-evaluate the impact I can have as a researcher. It has encouraged me to think beyond the technical aspects of my work and consider how my research can directly improve the lives of others, whether in Australia or overseas. I now see greater potential for my role to contribute to food security, sustainable livelihoods, and community resilience.

I am grateful to the Crawford Fund and the Western Australian Committee for supporting my participation. The program has not only expanded my understanding of international agricultural research but also inspired me to actively explore how I can make a real and lasting impact through my work.

Sneha Sharma, DPIRD WA

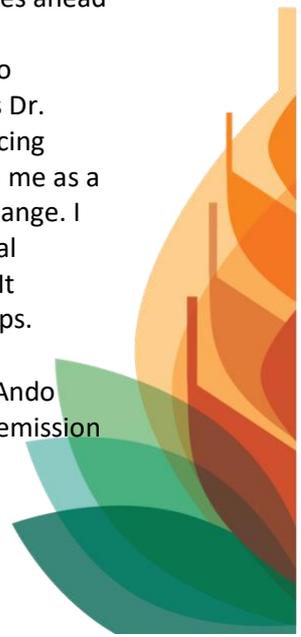
Mentor: Alison Bentley

It was an exceptional opportunity to attend the Crawford Scholarship Conference 2025 as one of the scholar representatives from Western Australia. I am sincerely grateful to the Crawford Fund for providing this platform to learn, engage, and connect with global experts, policymakers, and fellow professionals working on sustainable agriculture and international development.

This year's theme, Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems, felt particularly relevant to my research interests. The sessions highlighted not only the scale of the challenges ahead but also the innovative pathways being developed worldwide.

On the first day, one of the most valuable aspects for me was learning about opportunities to contribute to international research through ACIAR and CGIAR. Hearing from leaders such as Dr. Suzie Newman and Dr. Alison Bentley was especially motivating, as they spoke about embracing challenges and creating space for women in agricultural science. Their words resonated with me as a young researcher, reinforcing the idea that persistence and courage can drive meaningful change. I also enjoyed the panel discussion, including Ms. Selane Tairea, who shared inspiring, practical insights about working directly with farmers and adapting to cultural and language barriers. It reminded me that resilience is not just about systems, but also about people and relationships.

The case studies throughout the conference provided many thought-provoking lessons. Dr. Ando Radanielson's presentation on low-emission rice systems was a standout, showing that low-emission



systems can balance rising demand for rice with climate goals, mainly the target of net-zero emissions. Similarly, Dr. Tyron Venn's discussion of silvopastoral systems in Fiji and Queensland presented concrete examples of how integrated approaches can support both productivity and environmental sustainability. These talks encouraged me to think more critically about how similar methods could be adapted in the Australian and regional context.

Equally powerful were the sessions focusing on climate resilience in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. Dr. Aditi Mukherji outlined five key pathways towards climate resilience in agri-food systems, which gave me a structured framework for thinking about my research. Hearing from Professor Graham Sem about the challenges and emerging solutions in Papua New Guinea also reminded me of the importance of regional collaboration and context-specific policy support.

The conference also prompted me to reflect deeply on gender and community-driven adaptation. Presentations by Dr. Sonia Akter on feminisation in Cambodian agriculture and Mr. Acacio Sarmento da Silva on women's voices in Timor Leste emphasised the crucial role of inclusivity. Coming from one of the least developed countries, Nepal, this session truly reflected the radical opportunity for women in the agriculture sector.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Alison Bentley, for facilitating valuable connections and guiding me throughout the conference. Also, thanks to the RAID network and ACIAR for the networking activities, which provided a unique opportunity to connect with scholars across Australia. Overall, attending this conference was a rewarding experience. It expanded my knowledge and inspired me to consider how my research can help build climate-resilient food systems and get involved in international research and development.

AARES



Md Monirul Islam, CSIRO, Adelaide
Mentor: Dong Wang, University of Queensland

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Annual Conference and Scholar Program in Canberra, which is widely recognised as Australia’s premier food security event. This year’s theme, “Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners”, set the stage for a rich exchange of ideas among an extraordinary mix of delegates from research, policy, industry, and development sectors across Australia and internationally.

The Scholar Program began with an orientation that encouraged us to view agriculture for development from a whole-systems perspective, considering alternative outlooks and diverse contexts, particularly from developing countries. This broadened my vision and reinforced the expansive opportunities available in agricultural research and development. I especially valued the platform to meet mentors and potential collaborators, which helped me reconsider my career prospects and explore new directions.

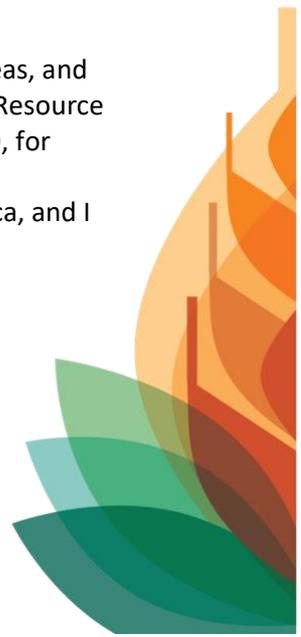
Throughout the conference, keynote presentations, case studies, and panel discussions underscored the urgency of building climate-resilient agrifood systems. Highlights included learning about low-emission solutions for rice production, climate services for agriculture in the Pacific, and inclusive approaches to climate adaptation. The sessions made clear that achieving sustainable food systems requires integrated, interdisciplinary approaches and genuine inclusion of women, youth, and underrepresented voices.

Networking was a standout feature of my experience. I had the opportunity to connect with agricultural economists and researchers from the University of New England, the University of Queensland, the University of Western Australia, the University of Tasmania, and La Trobe University. Conversations with my mentor were particularly valuable, helping me identify potential research collaborations as my current postdoctoral position at CSIRO comes to a close in early 2026. Through Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID) networking activities, I also engaged with numerous early-career researchers, strengthening my professional network and fostering a sense of community.

The scholar sessions reinforced the importance of being both vocal and inclusive, recognising agriculture as a truly global issue that demands bottom-up initiatives. I left inspired to advocate for sustainable agriculture and to translate research findings into practical, on-the-ground applications. Another important takeaway was the reminder to be humble and patient, to focus rather than attempt to be an expert in everything, and to embrace networking as a key professional asset.

From a personal perspective, the conference reignited my commitment to becoming a more active global citizen in agriculture for development. It encouraged me to think critically about advocacy, inclusivity, and the need for collaborative solutions that benefit both people and the planet.

Overall, attending the Crawford Fund Conference and Scholar Program was an outstanding professional and personal experience. It expanded my knowledge, inspired new research ideas, and opened doors to valuable collaborations. I sincerely thank the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) for funding my participation, and my current organisation, CSIRO, for enabling me to attend. This experience has left me motivated to contribute more actively to sustainable agricultural development in the Indo-Pacific, Southeast and South Asia, and Africa, and I look forward to continuing my engagement with the Crawford Fund in the years ahead.



GARDINER FOUNDATION



Our 2025 Gardiner Foundation scholars Monique Berkhout and Ian Hodge (fifth and sixth from the left) pictured with other Victorian scholars and VIC Crawford Fund Committee Member Brendan Rodoni and VIC Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Bill Lewis.

Monique Berkhout, La Trobe University and Agriculture Victoria

Mentor: David Magill

The 2025 Crawford Fund Scholar Program was an extremely valuable experience to which I had the privilege of participating in. This year's theme, "Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners", aligns closely with the research projects I am involved in as part of my employment and my PhD research. The conference itself provided valuable insights and perspectives that have helped me grow both as a person and a researcher. I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities around food security in a changing climate and contextualise my own contributions towards sustainable agricultural development at the global level.

Some key takeaways for me include:

- 1) there are challenges involved with sustainable intensification of agriculture and conflicts between the provision of global food security and achieving our commitment to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions,
- 2) there needs to be more focus on the 'net' of our net zero emissions goal by placing more focus on sequestration,
- 3) synergy between smallholder producers, agricultural researchers and policymakers, as well as addressing global inequality, is required to simultaneously achieve food security and resilience in the agri-food sector,
- 4) potential solutions exist to sustainably address the climate crisis, but they are not cost-effective and agricultural research is grossly underfunded, thus more investment is needed

into climate resilient technologies to help farmers transition to a low emissions system that is sustainable and cost-effective, and

- 5) shifting our mindsets around capacity building; rather, to engage in capacity exchange where both parties learn from each other.

Attending the Scholar Program gave me the opportunity to meet a diverse range of inspiring people who I hope to stay in touch with for life. From other scholars, to leading agricultural researchers and other industry professionals, to policymakers; I was able to connect with like-minded people who come from diverse backgrounds and are on a wide variety of different pathways. Scholars were encouraged to say yes to opportunities, promote and advocate for sustainable agricultural research, stay openminded, and listen more than talk. The Crawford Fund committee and the RAID Network created a safe and supportive space that empowered scholars to approach a new person, introduce themselves and engage in meaningful conversations. This experience has removed some of the fear around networking and equipped me with the confidence to engage in future opportunities. Additionally, mentors and mentees were strategically matched to suit both parties. I knew straight away that mine was the right fit for me. My mentor, David McGill, immediately made me feel at ease and supported me to step out of my comfort zone and get the most I could out of the program and the networking opportunities, and for that I am incredibly grateful. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the Crawford Fund Scholar Program to eligible peers, as both a personal and professional growth and development opportunity.

It was an honour to have been given the opportunity to attend the 2025 Crawford Fund Scholar Program. I look forward to continuing to work towards an agriculture sector that is resilient to the changing climate and remains socially, economically and environmentally viable into the future.

Ian Hodge, University of Melbourne

Mentor: Jonathan Rushton

Attending the 2025 Crawford Fund Conference as a scholar was a truly enriching and inspiring experience, offering a rare opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals passionate about agricultural research for development. Over the three days in Canberra, I was able to engage with mentors, peers, and leaders in the field, deepening my understanding of the challenges and opportunities in global agriculture, while also expanding my professional network.

Our program began on Monday with the first half-day of scholar activities and great advice from speakers at Eastlake Football Club. Listening to Kate Thwaites share practical advice for those interested in engaging in international agricultural research was particularly insightful. The introductory day provided a welcoming environment to meet my mentor and fellow scholars, participate in group sessions designed to spark conversation, share experiences, and gain insights into diverse perspectives on agricultural sustainability and strategies to address climate vulnerability. These discussions created a sense of camaraderie early on and laid the foundation for the networking to come.

That evening, we gathered at Parliament House for the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address and networking dinner in the Great Hall. Being in such a prestigious venue added a special significance to the evening, I found the atmosphere both energising and humbling. Networking over dinner was a highlight, it allowed me to engage with a diverse range of participants, from policy makers to researchers, all committed to making a difference.

Tuesday was the core of the conference, a full day in the Great Hall with plenary presentations, panel discussions, and Q&A sessions. The keynote address from Professor Glenn Denning was thought-provoking, providing technical advice for agricultural innovation while addressing global food security. The breadth of topics covered from issues confronting agriculture in emerging economies to



strengthening global partnerships broadened my perspective and challenged me to think critically about how my own work fits within the bigger picture. The event also reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in tackling agricultural and environmental challenges, a point effectively illustrated by Professor Richard Eckard through his discussion on questionable carbon offsets and the push to reduce livestock numbers in pursuit of climate targets. That evening's RAID (Researchers in Agriculture for International Development) networking event at the Kingston Hotel was an enjoyable and relaxed opportunity to connect with early-career researchers and exchange stories, ideas, and advice.

The final morning on Wednesday brought the second half-day of scholar activities. These sessions were practical and forward-looking, focusing on skills, strategies, and opportunities to continue contributing to agricultural development beyond the conference. The closing discussions left me feeling motivated and equipped to take the insights I had gained back into my own work.

Overall, the Crawford Fund Conference was an invaluable professional experience. It not only deepened my understanding of agricultural research in an international context but also strengthened my confidence in contributing to this space. The connections made, both personal and professional, are ones I hope to maintain and build upon in the years ahead. I am grateful to have been part of this program and for the generosity of the Gardiner Foundation for sponsoring my scholarship and those who shared their knowledge, time, and experiences so openly.

