

Heather Atkinson

A mixed pastoral and organic farmer, Heather has held various roles in her agricultural career, particularly in the organic sector. She began the Escalator programme knowing that to effect the positive changes she believed were needed in sustainable land use and improved environmental outcomes, she needed to build her skills.

During one of her coaching sessions Heather realised that in order to influence she needed to be more connected to 'mainstream agriculture'. She joined the Wairarapa Federated Farmers executive and proved her worth immediately by ensuring a regional strategy was developed, an approach since adopted in other regions. Heather leads a community biodiversity project, recognised regionally, which has seen her engage with a multiple stakeholders at the highest levels.

Heather's governance and leadership roles include:

- ❖ Co-initiator and President of the South Wairarapa Biodiversity Group Inc.
- ❖ Vice Chair of The BioGro Society, owner of BioGro NZ Ltd
- ❖ Council Member, Organic Dairy and Pastoral Group
- ❖ Wairarapa Food and Beverage Board Member
- ❖ Wairarapa Farmers Market Committee
- ❖ Kahutara School Trustee



"I have long-held an aspiration to foster a greater sense of guardianship for our land and water, and influence the way that agriculture makes its decisions and manages its resources.

Escalator proved to be the vehicle that has prepared me to better influence decision makers, be they on-farm, in industry or in government. I have a much better knowledge of my skills, my preferred leadership style and a clear understanding of what good governance looks

like and what I need to do to deliver it.

Escalator built on my understanding of effective communication and leadership, and challenged some of my own perceptions in this area. The programme's safe and supportive, yet exploratory environment built my confidence, supported my learning and gave me tools to better engage, collaborate and influence. Tools that I am putting to good use."

"It is a thrill and a privilege to now be working with AWDT as a First Steps programme facilitator, fostering other women on their learning journeys and building their confidence." – *Heather Atkinson*