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AWDT announces new chair and board members

Leading primary sector women's development organisation, Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT), has announced a new interim chair and three new trustees, following its annual general meeting this week.

Jenni Vernon MNZM, Damian Buckley and Jessica Smith were appointed to the board through a national recruitment process in late 2017. They replace outgoing chair, Charmaine O'Shea, and trustees Hinerangi Edwards and Ross Verry who have each served five years on the AWDT board.

AWDT patron Mavis Mullins has stepped into the role of interim chair to help guide the organisation that has delivered leadership, governance and business development to more than 2,500 primary sector women through its next stage of growth.

"AWDT is well-positioned for the future with established industry partnerships, strong culture, reputation and governance," Mrs Mullins said. "Operationally, we have expanded our team to respond to the growing demand for development of people in the primary sector."

In 2017 AWDT delivered development and support to 56 percent more women than in 2016, breaking new ground with fresh research, two new pilot programmes and new industry and government investment, while building its own capability to sustain the organisation into the future.

The three new faces on the board join existing AWDT trustees Dr Scott Champion, Fi Dalgety, Murray Donald and Lindy Nelson.

Mrs Mullins said the board changes were part of a wider leadership succession plan that included a transition of trust founder and executive director, Lindy Nelson, out of day-to-day operations and into strategic and programme development roles, while remaining as a trustee.

Jenni Vernon farms a dry stock property in Waikato in partnership with her husband. She sits on the NZ Geographic Board and the board of the NZ National Fieldays Society. Previously, she has served as chair of Waikato Regional Council, deputy chair of the Open Polytechnic, and on the Waikato River Authority and NZ Nuffield Farming Trust boards.

Involved in the UK and New Zealand primary sectors for his whole life, Damian Buckley is experienced in business development for the food production, rural media and software sectors. He has recently returned from a Voluntary Service Abroad assignment in Samoa, where he developed the leadership team within a coconut growers association.

With a background that includes agriculture, horticulture, tourism and fisheries, Jessica Smith is a business relationship manager with Te Tumu Paeroa. She holds an MBA from Victoria University, was the 2017 Zespri scholarship recipient for the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme and was one of the early graduates of AWDT's Wāhine Māia, Wāhine Whenua programme for Māori women in agribusiness.

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