



# Country Women's Association of NSW

*Incorporated in 1931 by an Act of NSW Parliament  
Constituent Society of the Associated Country Women of the World*

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Media Release

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## **CWA of NSW celebrates International Day of Rural Women with global leadership appointments**

As the United Nations (UN) International Day of Rural Women (15th October) draws near, the CWA of NSW is celebrating the appointment of two of its members to global and regional leadership roles, highlighting the breadth of talent of women in regional and rural Australia.

Dubbo's Ruth Shanks exemplifies how far a CWA of NSW membership can take you, having recently been re-elected as World President of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), of which CWA of NSW is a member.

"In my first term I travelled to seven of the nine ACWW areas globally, was Chair of the Board consisting of 16 members from around the world and, through an ACWW committee, had consultancy status to the UN," says Ruth, whose responsibilities will continue for another three years.

Ruth and fellow CWA of NSW member Gail Commens recently returned from the ACWW Triennial Conference in the UK, where Gail was elected as Area President South Pacific and Australia was announced as host of the next Triennial Conference, in 2019.

"My role is to work with South Pacific member groups like Tonga and Fiji to identify what's needed and oversee resulting projects," said Gail, who explains groups can access funding by submitting a project plan. Projects are assessed for feasibility and on-the-ground audits ensure funds are used appropriately. Projects include water infrastructure, sanitation, micro-finance schemes and income generating enterprises.

"Women in the Papua New Guinea (PNG) highlands are growing flowers and sending them to women in the cities to be sold. Other groups request money to buy pigs which they then raise. These projects improve the lives of the women and their families and have flow on effects for entire villages," explained Gail.

CWA of NSW President, Annette Turner explains Ruth and Gail's appointment to these influential, global leadership roles highlights not only the charitable efforts of the CWA in the South Pacific region, but also demonstrates that membership provides opportunities across a range of interest areas.

"We're delighted that our members' talents have been recognised through these international appointments. From improving facilities in local communities and lobbying for services at state level, right through to eradicating rural poverty amongst South Pacific neighbours and beyond, we are going from strength to strength," said Annette.

With the elections behind them, Gail and Ruth are looking forward to getting on with their jobs and education will be a big focus, with both citing it as the key to empowering rural women. The CWA of NSW has previously provided scholarships for PNG Women to learn valuable self-sufficiency skills that they can then teach others in their community. One of Gail's tasks in her new role is to investigate expanding this program by establishing a campus of the University of the South Pacific in PNG.

Gail is encouraging all women who are looking for meaningful ways to help communities in developing nations to consider joining the CWA of NSW.

"We have very few administrative costs so you can directly see where your efforts go. I think that's something the CWA of NSW can really stand alone on, that if branches donate money to a cause then they know it is going to that cause," said Gail.

According to Ruth, the efforts of the CWA of NSW, through their association with the ACWW, are unique.

"There is no other organisation devoted to physically assisting rural women. That's our niche market. Other organisations will help women in general but there needs to be that "rural" put into all of this," said Ruth, who is passionate about ensuring rural women are not left behind.

"We continually lobby the UN, particularly with respect to their Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure the word "rural" is not left out. At a recent triennial conference it was passed as a resolution that Governments around the world include the word rural in their policy documents so the people who grow the food – many of whom are women – are helped. If not, who is going to feed the millions in the cities?"

The 2019 ACWW Triennial Conference will be held in Melbourne and CWA of NSW members are eligible to attend. For membership information visit [www.cwaofnsw.org.au](http://www.cwaofnsw.org.au).

**Photo Caption:**

**Image 1:** CWA taking the lead at the Associated Country Women of the World conference in the United Kingdom. L-R CWA of NSW's Annette Turner and Ruth Shanks, CWA of Australia's Dorothy Coombe and CWA of NSW's Gail Commens.

**Ends**

**For further information and to arrange interviews with Ruth Shanks and/or Gail Commens contact:**

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Photo can be downloaded here:

[https://cwaofnsw.org.au/visageimages/CWA\\_Int\\_Day\\_of\\_Rural\\_Women.JPG](https://cwaofnsw.org.au/visageimages/CWA_Int_Day_of_Rural_Women.JPG)