

Jeanette White, beef farmer, Mirboo North

Women are great agents of change in their communities. Whether acting alone or as a collective, women have an enormous ability to drive change in their household, on the farm, in their business and in the broader community.

Women make many business and purchasing decisions within a family and influence energy and resource use and behaviors both on the farm and in the home. Women make about 70% of consumer decisions that affect the household carbon footprint. Women are natural networkers and locally-based community action is a key to changing society.

"Women are important actors in ensuring their communities' ability to cope with and adapt to climate change. They can be effective agents of change and are often the ones turned to in times of need and can play a role in crisis situations."

—The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat⁽¹⁾

Since 2007, women have been coming together through the Victorian State Government Women, Drought and Climate Change and Rural Women Leading Change programs to learn more about climate change and how it is impacting and will impact on them and their families, and develop strategies to become more environmentally sustainable in all areas of their lives. They are utilising their networks and connections to share information and influence change.

In 2008 more than 300 women gathered in the Gippsland region at "Circles of Influence" gatherings which culminated in women pledging to make real changes to reduce their carbon footprint through recycling, renewable energy use, sustainable farming and living practices and a multitude of other strategies.

Women from Gippsland gathered in Melbourne with other women from across the state to develop collective understandings and responses to climate change and issues of sustainability and presented these at the forum to Government and other agencies.

Currently women leaders across Gippsland are gathering to develop strategies to strengthen the capacity of rural women to participate in and lead change in their communities. Social isolation and the changing face of communities, lack of self confidence and skills, unclear pathways for re-entry to education and work and the challenge of work/life balance are all issues hindering women's ability to participate fully in civic life in the region.