

AGRIFUTURES 2022 RURAL WOMEN'S AWARD — LOUISE O'NEILL

Statement

HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West) [6.19 pm]: I rise tonight to welcome and acknowledge Louise O'Neill, AgriFutures 2022 Rural Women's Award winner, who, with your permission, President, is sitting in the President's gallery with her family. Louise is here today with her husband, Warren, her sons Hamish and Darcy and, of course, the member for Warren–Blackwood, Jane Kelsbie, who is Louise's local member. I understand that Hamish and Darcy had the opportunity to have time off school today to travel here from Denmark. I believe that Hamish might have even been counting off the days on his calendar before coming to Parliament. I am concerned that it might be a little underwhelming for him, but we will do our best!

As I mentioned, Louise O'Neill was named the WA 2022 Rural Women's Award winner at a ceremony in Perth on 5 May. I was very fortunate to attend the Rural Women's Award ceremony representing Minister MacTiernan. The AgriFutures Rural Women's Award is Australia's leading award that empowers and celebrates the leadership of women involved in rural industries. It is a high-profile award. I have a personal connection to the award, which has been running for some 21 years. The award not only recognises achievements to date; finalists are required to outline a project, business idea or program that enhances their rural community, supports collaboration or delivers a positive commercial outcome for a rural industry.

Louise O'Neill is a qualified sports therapist and the CEO of a business known as Farm Life Fitness, which partners with the agriculture industry to create healthy and thriving workplaces. Louise designs programs that are delivered online to rural clients so that they can access them no matter where they live. She also runs 30-minute live online group fitness classes a few times a week, which is really important for people living in rural and remote communities who, perhaps, cannot get to a gym because they live a long way from town, do not have a gym in their community or live a long way from a crèche or childcare centre. This type of online exercise is about not only physical health, but also mental health and building community connections.

I took the opportunity this afternoon to do a bit of googling. My research on Louise and her family is all via google so I hope it is accurate. Thanks to my google searches, I discovered that Louise, who is British, met her husband, Warren, when she was backpacking and he was farming in Northam. That is a common story these days.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Especially in Donnybrook.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: Indeed—everywhere! Once upon a time, farmers would wait for the nurse or teacher to come to town; now they wait for the new backpackers.

The couple lived and farmed in the Northam area. They ran a successful farm and were recognised as leading breeders of Poll Dorset sheep. In more recent times, they decided to relocate and move their farming operations to Denmark, which, for those of us on this side of the house, is known as Kelsbie country! They obviously left behind their farming business in Northam, but Louise also left her job delivering physio rehabilitation in Northam. Like many entrepreneurial rural women who move to a new location, she set about setting up her own business, Farm Life Fitness, with a mission to improve the health of regional families across the country.

At the announcement on 5 May, which I was lucky enough to attend, Louise spoke about the importance of mental health and emotional wellbeing in farming. I have a quote from Louise's speech on the night. I would also like to welcome my daughter Ashlee Jarvis, who has joined us in the President's gallery. Ashlee reminded me that although I have been a member of Parliament for 12 months, apparently this is the first time she has come to Parliament for dinner! To quote Louise as per the media report—I was there on the night—Louise said —

“It can be a tough place to be in farming but we do it for the love and I want to make sure we carry on doing it for the love,” ...

“I want to make sure we change these paradigms that it is 24 hours a day seven days a week — it doesn't have to be.

“Our mental health comes first, we have to take care of ourselves before we take care of others ...

Obviously, Louise is incredibly keen to promote the message that it is not just about fitness and working out. Providing farmers with the opportunity for movement works both as a mental and physical health strategy that helps farming families accommodate the rigors and stresses of farm life.

On 6 September, Louise will join the other state finalists at the national AgriFutures Rural Women's Award event in the Great Hall of Parliament in Canberra. I am excited to say that I will attend that event as a rural women's alumni. Another important feature of that event is that the master of ceremonies is traditionally the previous year's national winner. No national winner was announced in 2021 due to COVID so the 2020 winner was carried over as the national Rural Women's Award winner and had a two-year term. WA's own Cara Peek was the 2020 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award national winner. A lot of members would know of Cara. She is a Broome-based lawyer, social

entrepreneur and co-founder of Saltwater Country. Cara won the national award for her work in driving employment opportunities for First Nations people in remote Australia, particularly through the idea of Aboriginal stockmanship and the long tradition of working with animals in the rodeo scene and running events. I am incredibly excited to accompany Louise to that event in Canberra on 6 September.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the other two WA finalists. As someone who has lived and worked in agribusiness in regional WA for 20 years, there are not too many people I do not know. I have a strong connection to all the finalists in this year's WA awards. I want to acknowledge Debbie Dowden, who some people would know. I see Peter Foster nodding. She is a pastoralist from Mt Magnet. I also acknowledge Dr Bronwyn Blake, who is a hemp seed producer from the south west. She has done a lot to progress the idea of a body that deals with hemp seed for food. Debbie Dowden and Bronwyn Blake join Louise O'Neill as the WA finalists. I want to say congratulations to all the women and special congratulations to Louise.

Members: Hear, hear!

The PRESIDENT: Welcome to the Legislative Council, Louise and family. We hope you enjoy your time here. Congratulations on your award and good luck in Canberra.