

**2023 WA AGRIFUTURES RURAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR — MICHELLE MORIARTY**

*Statement*

**HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West — Minister for Agriculture and Food)** [6.20 pm]: I would like to welcome Michelle Moriarty from Eaton, who is in the President's gallery with her local member, the member for Collie–Preston. A couple of months ago, in March, I was delighted to announce that Michelle was a 2023 WA AgriFutures Rural Woman of the Year. The AgriFutures Rural Women's award is Australia's leading award empowering and celebrating inclusive and courageous leadership of women involved in Australia's rural and emerging industries, businesses and communities now and in the future.

Michelle won the 2023 award for her commitment to supporting widowed people across regional WA. Michelle Moriarty graduated from Edith Cowan University with a Bachelor of Social Work in 2005 and is a registered member of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Michelle has worked in social work and counselling professions in the UK, across the wheatbelt and now in the south west of WA. When she unexpectedly became a widow at the age of 38, Michelle created a safe and supportive space where widowed people, both men and women, could connect with each other and feel they were not alone in their challenges of grief. Michelle has worked tirelessly to reduce social isolation for widowed women and men by providing support groups that offer a safe space for honest discussions about the harsh realities of losing a partner. Michelle set up a young widows Facebook group, which now has over 300 members. In 2022, when Michelle's father died suddenly, she set up another Facebook group, this time for widows over 55 years of age, in recognition of what her mother was going through. Her organisation, Grief Connect, is dedicated to providing support and counselling throughout the south west of WA.

I have met Michelle and I spoke to her at the award ceremony, and I know that she is passionate about helping people navigate their challenges with living with grief. In addition to creating these peer support groups, she also provides grief and bereavement counselling.

I am delighted that as part of the Rural Women's Award, Michelle will receive a \$15 000 bursary to further support her project, as well as an opportunity to do some professional development of her choosing. Michelle will go to Canberra in September to represent WA in the national awards, and we wish her much luck when she goes there in a few months' time.

I want to read part of Michelle's acceptance speech, which I was there to hear. Michelle said —

There are over 1 million widows across Australia and winning the WA award has given me the opportunity to open public conversations about our widowed community, increase our visibility, raise awareness around death related grief and assist moving forward to ensure our regional communities continue to thrive.

I also want to take the opportunity to recognise the other two finalists in this year's award, Kate Mitchell and Joy Sherlock, whom I also met at the awards in March. They, too, have made an outstanding contribution to regional communities in WA. The judging panel praised the calibre of all three finalists, who are already making a difference in WA and continue to grow as community leaders. I am delighted that all three finalists now join a 300-strong alumni of Rural Women's Award winners and finalists. It is a fabulous network of women who support each other through future endeavours.

I close by congratulating Michelle for her dedication and on the win. I wish her the best of luck in Canberra in September.