

Beef rising champ takes on WWF sustainability role

By James Nason, Beef Central, 18 Apr 2012



2011 Beef Industry Rising
Champ Ian McConnell.

The World Wildlife Fund has completed its search for a sustainable beef project coordinator, with confirmation this week that Queensland Government beef extension officer and 2011 Beef Industry Rising Champion Ian McConnell has accepted the role.

Mr McConnell brings impeccable beef industry credentials and knowledge to the position.

In his current role as a Beef Extension Officer with DEEDI, Mr McConnell delivers grazing training and extension to cattle producers in South East Queensland.

Last year he was named the 2011 Queensland Rural Ambassador, following in the footsteps of his twin brother Bruce who won the same award and the national title in 2008. Ian will also contest the national finals at the Darwin Show this July.

Mr McConnell is also the reigning Cattle Council of Australia Beef Industry Rising Champion, selected from five other state finalists at the CCA annual general meeting in Longreach last year. His presentation for the judging process outlined the South East Queensland Producer Network that he has been working to build.

In announcing him as the winner, Cattle Council members said they were impressed by the knowledge Mr McConnell demonstrated when explaining why he believed that producers in the region needed a vehicle to better engage with industry, Government and each other. As Australia's 'Rising Champion' he will represent Australian beef producers at the Five Nations Beef Alliance Conference in Vancouver, Canada, in September.

Mr McConnell grew up at the historic Mt Brisbane property near Esk where his family still operate the Mt Brisbane Droughtmaster Stud. From a young age he prepared and paraded stud cattle at shows and has won multiple young stud cattle and commercial beef judging competitions at royal shows across the country.

His latest move is likely to be his biggest challenge yet, as he dives headlong into the turbulent waters surrounding the World Wildlife Fund's involvement in the development of a sustainable beef program for Australia's beef industry through the Australian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (ARSB).

WWF's history in campaigning for strong controls over agricultural operations in the area of vegetation management and reef management has made it a source of distrust among producers, particularly in Queensland.

In advertising for the position in February the World Wildlife Fund said it was seeking a skilled project coordinator to help reduce the ecological impacts of beef production.

The purpose of the role was to develop and manage relationships with a range of stakeholders within Australia and globally, including the recently established ARSB. The role works to establish higher environmental standards and promote Best Management Practices in Australian beef production and markets, the advertisement said.

Mr McConnell told Beef Central today that he applied for the job after researching the role and talking to other members of the Roundtable.

"While there may be a perception issue, I believe the work that is going to be happening is very positive," Mr McConnell said.

"It is copping a bit of flack, but I know this is a positive model that they are going forward with about creating value for sustainable beef

"It's far removed from some of their previous work in terms of pushing for legislation.

"All I can say is that I took on the role because I have a genuine passion for the industry, having grown up in it, my family is still in it, and the reason I am taking on the job is because there is positive work to be done here."

Mr McConnell said many producers were already achieving the best practice standards that the sustainability program sought to promote.

"The industry is already on the way to achieving exactly the same goals that WWF is bringing forward with this, and a lot of this work will be in endorsing what industry is doing."

Cattle Council of Australia believes the appointment means producer issues will be well understood at WWF level.

"Ian was a worthy winner as Cattle Council's second Beef Industry Rising Champion at our Longreach AGM in November last year," CCA chief executive officer David Inall said.

"One of the primary reasons that Cattle Council is engaged in the Roundtable for Sustainable Beef Australia is to ensure that the producers' voice is heard in this debate, and I have no doubt that Ian will provide a critically important, beef cattle producer perspective in his upcoming role with the WWF." Cattle Council of Australia believes the appointment means producer issues will be well understood at WWF level.

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