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MEDIA RELEASE

New look for WestVic Dairy Board

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WestVic Dairy has a new-look and expanded Board after the appointment today of four new members and election of a new chairman.

Farmers Lisa Dwyer, of Hawkesdale, David Byrd, of Byaduk, David Parkinson, of Kirkstall, and Timboon-based vet and corporate farm director Tom Walsh have joined the Board, replacing outgoing chairman Roma Britnell, Ron Page and Kay Antony.

Mrs Britnell said the Board had taken up the option of expanding to eight members as a reflection of the increase in workload as the Boards stays across more than 30 projects managed by WestVic Dairy.

Mrs Britnell, who has been chairman for the past six years, has been replaced in the top position by Naringal dairy farmer John Dalton.

She said she was leaving the role at a time when the dairy industry was in good shape and the local development agency well placed to continue advancing the industry.

After six years as chairman and eight years on the Board, the Woolsthorpe dairy farmer said it was time for a new perspective. "We have fresh people on the Board and it is an appropriate time to let someone else take the reins."

Mrs Britnell, who was named Australian Rural Woman of the Year during her tenure as chairman, said she had joined WestVic Dairy to make sure the dairy industry levy was invested wisely and to help improve understanding of the industry in the broader community.

"I think we have been able to raise the profile of the industry and help the community understand dairy's direct link to our regional economy," she said.

"However, we haven't been able to convince all farmers of the value of the levy and the importance of research, development and education to the future of the industry. Many farmers understand the benefits of developing this knowledge but we haven't been able to get that message across to some.

"From my perspective there is no question that the levy is vital to the industry and that we can achieve much more by a collective approach."

Mrs Britnell said she would continue to encourage all farmers to get involved in the work of WestVic Dairy to have greater influence on how the service levy is invested.

"I am convinced if we actively search out and take up new information, invest our levy in generating that information and continue working collectively, the future for dairy is even more positive than many predict."

Mr Dalton said he was keen to continue WestVic Dairy's role in the development of people in the industry. "I'd like to keep promoting better access to education on farms and through programs like Focus Farms and the Growing the Next Wave or Rural Leaders," he said.

“We want to engage with the industry and encourage people to tell us where they would like us to invest their levy on their behalf.”

Mr Dalton, who has been a farmer at Naringal since 1993 and a member of the WestVic Board for the past two years, said it was an exciting time for the new-look Board. “We will have a fresh perspective but there won’t be radical changes. We will continue to listen to what farmers want and help them grasp opportunities and meet challenges.”

More than 100 people attended today’s AGM and cow fertility workshop ‘High In Calf Rate – Is It Conceivable?’.

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