

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

meet the COVER WOMEN

Meet our cover stars **Michelle McKenry, Cindy McRae and Tina Englanders, with a diverse array of skills and business interests between them. They're all also equally passionate about the land and our natural environment...**



MICHELLE MCKENRY
MELALEUCA ENTERPRISES ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES.

What businesses are you involved with?

I'm the founder and Director of Melaleuca Enterprises Environmental Consultancy Services. I undertake ecological assessments, write reports and books, develop environmental education packages, and deliver natural and cultural resource management projects. Some of my clients include CSIRO, private landholders, other consultants, Aboriginal communities, universities and local state and federal government departments.

I'm passionate about my career; I've been doing this type of work since I was 18, and I'd like to keep doing it for the rest of my life.

I'm also Co-Director (with my husband, David) of Mckerny Fry Ltd Agribusiness. We have a 2,080 acre farm east of Guyra, where we produce wool, cross-bred lambs and beef cattle. We manage the business together, developing budgets, work plans and long-term strategies and visions; then mckernyfray.com.au www.facebook.com/mckernyfray

What do you love most about working on the land?

I love being in the bush. I'm currently undertaking my PhD at the University of New England, and I'm lucky to spend a lot of time out at my study site, Watchdog Indigenous Protected Area and Warr National Park. Here in the New England Tablelands, as well as in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

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When I'm working alone in the bush, I can really tune in to what is going on - I've been calling in winter, end-of-rain waddling around, wildflowers blossoming and the changing seasons. I also love going "out on Country" with Aboriginal Elders and listening to their stories and wisdom accumulated over thousands of years.

We're so lucky to live on a farm. I have a lot of respect for my husband, who is our there every day, taking care of our animals and our land - it is a privilege to live on the land - our boys have points to ride, we have pet chooks and dogs. We have freedom and space. Having our own little patch of earth means that we can try to practice what we preach - we are trying to do our best to use sustainable agricultural practices.

What have been some of your biggest challenges throughout 2018/2019 - and how have you overcome them?

Work-life balance is my eternal challenge! I have two young boys, and living on a farm is hard work. On top of that, I manage my own business, and I'm studying!

I think last year may have been the busiest year of my life - we moved house from our tiny farm cottage into the family homestead with extensive gardens, and my involvement in our agricultural business intensified. I had

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TINA SKIPPER
OLLERA STATION

What businesses are you involved with?

With a background in communications, last year I started my own business, "My Rural Retreat", which runs Creative Arts and Health and Wellbeing Workshops in our garden. We also offer self-contained accommodation on our property. My first workshop was in May, and since then I have had over 220 people attend various days. The support I've received has been extraordinary, and I'm excited about the future and bringing some dynamic experiences to our region from all over Australia.

I'm also involved in our commercial grazing business, Ollera Station and Cedarhill. My husband runs the dip to day affairs; I help out when needed. I manage the accounts and bookwork and am basically his daily sounding board!

What do you love most about working on the land?

I love Mother Nature, although she is giving us a run for our money at the moment. I love being connected to nature, and I'm definitely an outdoors person. I love the people who live on the land, for their genuine, honest, practical ways, caring nature and unwavering work ethic. I think if you have an affinity with your animals and love for what you do, then it's not really work. One of the greatest things I love is seeing my children grow up with so much freedom. They ride motorbikes, fish in the creek, help mucker stock, and have a real connection to where they live.

What have been some of your biggest challenges throughout 2018/2019 - and how have you overcome them?

Managing through drought. We believe one of the vital keys is to make decisions early and stick with them. We'd like to think that we can remain a successful and prosperous business, operating for generations to come. That's our motivation.

What are your interests/hobbies when you're not working?

I love gardening and have spent years creating the space we enjoy today. I find swimming meditative, I love painting, and I love cooking and spending time with my family and friends. I love a good laugh too and when you're reliant on the elements, it's pretty important to maintain your sense of humour!

I completed a degree in Anthropology from the University of QLD, which culminated my love of human cultures and their intricate relationship with the land.

Most people would recognise me from my tourism business West Kurudrang Recreational Retreat, on the Murrumbidgee River. Two hours' drive one the eastern escarpment from Armidale, which has been in operation now for 23 years.

From very humble beginnings, starting with one campsite at the Cedar trees with no amenities, it has evolved to now having ten private campsites, each with their own amenities. This privacy, along with access to the river, are the darwinisms of the Retreat, with a myriad of water activities - fishing, swimming, kayaking etc. to be enjoyed, as well as

How did you end up working on the land?

My father's advice when I completed secondary school was to continue my education both formally and with life experiences by doing what I was passionate about. I completed a degree in Anthropology from the University of QLD, which combined my love of human cultures and their intricate relationship with the land. Following this pursuit, I have worked intermittently throughout my career in consulting, initially returning home in the 1990s drought period to work with my father on the shearing industry and at home feeding livestock.

To work with my father, one had to immerse themselves in whatever he was doing, so a love and respect for the land, its vegetation, creatures and the people that worked within it was instilled in me from a very early age! Meeting a variety of people in these endeavours has been one of my fondest experiences in working on the land.

What have been some of your biggest challenges throughout 2018/2019 - and how have you overcome them?

The drought has definitely been challenging, with the lack of feed and water being ever present. I have been extremely fortunate to have secured agreement, offering my Angus cross bred and Merino sheep from "Bisson Park". In doing so, I could bring more cattle out of the gorge to relieve the pressure there and minimise the damage of no feed in the event of wildfires, which are becoming more prevalent. By diversifying into tourism and shearing off-farm income, these businesses enable the sharing of off-farm expenses required to operate on the land, especially in such a remote environment as "West Kurudrang".

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However, it could not have gained the experience to overcome these challenges without the support and advice of the myriad of people who have worked with me and who have given me the opportunity to live and work on the land. I am deeply indebted to all these individuals from my past, present and future. I look forward to continuing these associations working on the land!



CINDY MCRAE
WEST KURUDRANG RECREATIONAL RETREAT

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