

Media Release

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Merry Christmas to Rural Women...no local births and more fires expected as election season heats up

Great things come out of droughts, and the new political party “What Women Want (Australia)”, which sprang out of dry inland NSW, has a good appreciation of issues for rural women.

For party founder and NSW Senate Candidate Justine Caines residing 4 hours north-west of Sydney, and the Victorian Senate Candidate Madeleine Love residing in rural Victoria 2 hours north-east of Melbourne, World Rural Women’s Day was particularly significant with the two women joining in Melbourne last week to raise awareness of the issues that most affect rural women – births and the drought.

Ms Love and Ms Caines were joined by Victorian midwife Janie Nottingham, whom they supported last month on her drive for maternity reform to Australian Parliament House Canberra. Janie organised a rally of 300 women and midwives lobbying for the return of local birthing services for rural women.

“We are listening to rural women and they are telling us they want to bring birth back home to their local communities”, said Ms Caines. “Currently women of remote rural Australia must endure separation from their families and travel hundreds of kilometres to give birth in regional or tertiary units despite the evidence small rural maternity units confer better outcomes”¹, she added.

Ms Love spoke of her experiences of the drought. “It’s been a hard series of years in rural Victoria, with the 2006/7 bushfires, coming on top of the fires in the same regions as 2003. Many women in rural Victoria have been subjected to intense stress over the past few years”, said Ms Love. “My husband was away through most of December fighting fires. I think I bought 62 Christmas presents for our combined families with three young children in tow, somehow hiding the vital presents. Many women shared this experience with me. And then the next fire hit, at Tatong, and then he was off again for the next month. And after the smoke had cleared the salvage work began”, she added.

“When John Howard offered 1,000 farmers \$150,000 to leave the land, and everyone said ‘established farmers don’t leave the land’, my thoughts went straight to the women who have contributed in so many ways to keeping their farms and families together”, added Ms Love. The What Women Want party has a strong social policy platform and will continue to campaign for improvements in maternity services and drought support for the nation’s rural women.

(ends)

1. Tracy, SK, Dahlen H, Sullivan E, Black D, Wang YA, Tracy M (2006). Does size matter? A population based study of birth in lower volume maternity hospitals for low risk women. *BJOG*.

