

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **WAKOOL INNOVATION FUND WINNERS**

#### **The \$25,000 Wakool Innovation Fund winners have been announced.**

The \$25,000 Wakool Innovation Fund is for a project/projects that contribute to an increase of on-farm efficiencies and demonstrate diversification of value adding potential or implement a new innovative technology. The fund was a huge success with 7 quality applications from across the Wakool Footprint.

The funding was assessed on four key selection criteria based on the below:

1. Increase in on-farm efficiencies
2. Diversification or value adding potential
3. Implementation of innovative on-farm technology
4. Broader positive impact of the project/activity on other businesses and farmers in the Wakool Irrigation District including the ability for the project/activity to be replicated

After much discussion the panel of three Western Murray Land Improvement Group Board Members shortlisted three applicants to present their innovation. Each applicant had an hour to present and answer questions. All three finalists managed to impress the panel with their passion and innovation and all three were rewarded with a share of the allocated funding.

The successful applicants and their ideas, in no particular order are:

#### **Winner: Richard Gibson**

**A drone detection device that can detect ewes that our down when lambing**, without disturbing the mob of sheep. There is also the possibility of extending this to detecting blowouts in crops and dam levels and more. Frequently ewes are cast with an obstructed lamb. These difficult births have been attributed to 21% of the total lamb deaths during lambing. Currently the solution is manually monitoring the flock and attending to the ewe where required. Patrolling the mob can contribute to mis-mothering by stressing and moving the mob.

This innovation will utilise Amazon web services technology to build a custom model that can detect down ewes using photography provided by a drone. Only once the model has detected a ewe in distress does the farmer need to



intervene. Farmers can also use the drone to detect stock on large properties and detect water trough levels. Other ideas are to check dam levels, ewes stuck in mud, patrol and scare ducks from crops.

**Winner: Marc Brooke**

**A seeding machine that will be adapted to suit the heavy soils in our region**, allowing more planting of native species which will have not only environmental benefits but also assist production. This will also assist in supporting our populations of flora and fauna. One example of supporting flora and fauna is revegetating areas for *Litoria Raniformis*, our beloved southern bell frog. Farmers are increasingly planting shelter belts for sheltering stock, helping to increase populations.

**Winner: Peter McDonald**

**A robust solar powered automatic lamb feed system** that is manufactured locally and can be replicated and converted for other stock as well. Research has revealed that there are existing lamb finishing systems that are solar powered that you can set and forget, they work by having a solar powered auger connected to a silo that can be programmed to come on as often as they are needed to fill a grain trough, however, to date they are not robust enough. The plan is to build a stronger unit using local manufacturers to create a more robust and reliable product, thus eliminating the problems of the current systems on the market.

WMLIG proudly support these local innovations that have emerged from our local area by these creative and resourceful winners and look forward to seeing them in action.

The project is part of the Wakool Agri-Innovation Program funded by the Australian Government's Murray-Darling Basin Economic Development Program.

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