



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA NORTHERN RIVERS

Media release

Northern Rivers Business Leaders Invest Time and Knowledge into the Region's Future Workforce.

May 2026

Young women from five local schools across the Ballina-Lismore area are being given a unique opportunity to connect with some of the region's accomplished female leaders through the inaugural EmpowerHER Northern Rivers mentor program, an innovative initiative designed to build confidence, expand career aspirations and demonstrate female leadership within our region.

Delivered by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Northern Rivers in partnership with the Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) program, EmpowerHER connects students to influential women from business, media, agriculture, finance, the creative industries and local government. Another key component of the EmpowerHER program is the collaboration with Awake Academy, founded by seven-time world surf champion and motivational speaker Layne Beachley, and personal development coach Tess Brouwer.

RDA Northern Rivers Director of Regional Development, Anthony Schreenan, said the program reflects the region's depth of talent.

"The Northern Rivers is home to extraordinary women who are leaders in their fields. Through EmpowerHER, we're creating opportunities to mentor the next generation of regional leaders."

Through workshops that include virtual presentations by Layne and Tess, interactive sessions, and one-on-one mentoring time, the students are encouraged to develop self-awareness, confidence and insights into a wide variety of career paths. Beyond the workshops, the students also receive ongoing access to the Own Your Truth learning portal and structured workplace experiences with their assigned mentor.

Byron Bay International Film Festival Director, J'aimee Skippon-Volke, believes mentorship can play a critical role in shaping future leaders.

"EmpowerHER will provide meaningful opportunities to help bright and inspired girls in our community forge their path into becoming young women who understand themselves, where they want to go and how they might get there."

For participant Keely, a high school student from Alstonville, the impact of the first workshop was immediate.

“I would recommend it because it’s very good for learning about yourself and believing in yourself.”

Following the successful inaugural workshop in April, the students and mentors will reconnect at two more workshops in June and August.

With growing national attention on youth confidence, workplace participation and regional development, EmpowerHER is showcasing how local communities can support the next generation of female leaders while strengthening the region’s future workforce.

Media Invitation:

Media representatives are invited to contact the team for opportunities to attend and interview organisers, mentors and students at future EmpowerHER Workshops.

Date: 16th June & 18th August

Location: Ballina

Media Enquiries:

Anthony Schreenan
Director of Regional Development
Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers
E: director@rdanorthernrivers.org.au
P: 0407 724 110