

Ex-Agric Employees Association Newsletter

No. 30 – March 2023

Editorial

If you have any snippets of information about Ex-Agric Association members for future editions, please let me have details at ashleymercy0@gmail.com



Coming Events

The Herdsman Lunch will be on Wednesday 29 March 2023 at 12.30

Venue: Herdsman Tavern, Wembley

RSVP to Sec ex.ag.assoc@gmail.com by 26 March 2023 if you are attending.

AGM October 2022

The AGM was held once again at the RAAF Club in Bullcreek. Many thanks to Clive Robartson and Jan Walters for arranging the venue and lunch. Club President Ross George welcomed 34 members to the AGM and thanked retiring committee members **Pat Kirwan** who had served as President and Treasurer over 8 years and **George Olney** who had served as Secretary for the past 6 years. Ross also welcomed **Jan Walters** as a new committee member.

The following Office Bearers were elected:

PRESIDENT:	Ross George
VICE PRESIDENT:	Neville Burton
SECRETARY:	Peter Morcombe
TREASURER:	Dick Taylor
COMMITTEE MEMBER:	Janet Walters
PAST PRESIDENT:	Ashley Mercy (ex officio)

President's Report - Ross George

The AGM held last October at the RAAF Club was very successful. We welcome a new committee member, Jan Walters, who will, among other things, help represent the admin side of our membership. See more about Jan later in the newsletter.

Presentation to Members at the AGM

Dr Ben Biddulph, Chief Scientist in the Primary Industry Division (PID) of DPIRD gave a presentation on the WA Agricultural Research Collaboration initiative and the role the

Association might play in its implementation. The Collaboration is a recent state government initiative to invest \$25 million over 3 years in strengthening the agricultural research and development capacity of PID and connect with potential collaborators in WA. These include the Grower Group Alliance (GGA), CSIRO and the WA, Edith Cowan, Curtin and Murdoch Universities and potentially this Association. It is anticipated that around 60 new scientists will be recruited via the Collaboration over the next two years.

Six priorities have been identified including a capability building project that will include development and mentoring of new and early-career people to ensure PID have enough qualified scientists to take the lead and maintain their research on a par with peers here and globally. Ben invited Association members to consider participating in a formal mentoring program he is developing, characterised by him as, “scientists learning from scientists”. A lively and supportive (with reservations) discussion followed in a Q&A session following Ben’s presentation.

Subsequently the Committee agreed to pursue the invitation, which it sees as a great opportunity for members, especially those concerned about the decline in R&D, to do something positive to enhance the department’s capability in that space. It will also benefit the Association’s relevance and standing with DPIRD following a fairly long period of disconnection and consequential low recruitment of members.

Progress since the AGM

A small Mentoring Working Group of Association members, Bill Ryan, Mike Ewing, Alec Holm, Peter Morcombe and myself has been formed to facilitate whatever is needed to make our contribution effective. We’ve shared with Ben a draft list of members that may be willing and able to impart a legacy of industry experience and expertise and corporate knowledge to PID’s new and emerging scientists.

Bill Ryan, Mike Ewing and I recently met with Ben and grains director Kerry Regan to discuss the mentoring program’s progress, the Association’s role and how the program will be managed. A gradual build-up of activity is proposed with 20 mentees identified and linked with a mentor in the next 12 months and another 20 in the following year. We anticipate at this stage that mentees needs will be identified and mentors that fit those needs will be identified and approached.

Recruitment of new members

I’m pleased to welcome three new members to the Association since the AGM: Mike Ewing (pasture research), Peter Curry (pastoral lands management) and Andrew Watson (Soil Conservation Commissioner).

The Association has recently obtained a list of 350 terminations and retirements since 2016 of former Department of Agriculture and Food employees. The Committee is sorting through the list and trying to establish the contact details so they can be invited to join. Current members may like to assist. If they know friends or associates who have left the Department recently or even some time ago, please pass on their details to the Secretary (ex.ag.assoc@gmail.com) so we can send them a Membership Application form.

New DPIRD Headquarters at Murdoch - Ash Mercy

In December the Government announced \$320 funding for a new Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development headquarters facility based at the Murdoch University campus delivering critical biosecurity, primary industries research and development functions – see proposed layout above.



The new metropolitan facility is expected to be complete in 2027 and will, feature modern laboratory and technical workspaces for about 350 staff. It will replace outdated and interim laboratory facilities in use at South Perth - many of which date back to the 1950s - with the new permanent facility. The Premier said the decision supports Government's efforts to reinvigorate agricultural research and development in the State and deliver strong biosecurity to respond to heightened global pest and disease threats.

Many will identify with the Countryman's caption to its story on the move to Murdoch – “It took eight Ministers and 30 Years”.

Janet Walters - adapted by Ash Mercy

Jan joined the committee just prior to the 2022 AGM. Many members may be aware of Jan's Department of Agriculture career and work elsewhere, but others may not.

Jan joined the Department of Agriculture in 1978, fancying a change from the Government Chemical laboratories where she had worked for 12 years. Her good friend **Jill Maughan** had also moved over from the Chemical Laboratories having taken on the job of Librarian.

Jan's first job was in the Records Department which she remembers as being the most boring job she had ever had. This did not last long and she moved on to Animal health. In 1979, Jan was offered a secondment to the University of Western Australia to be the State Government's contribution to the Indian Ocean Arts Festival. Eighteen months of frantic activity working with over 400 artists from 32 countries of the Indian Ocean, followed. On her return to South Perth ear tags and sheep brands greeted her. A short stint with **Alistair Robertson**, Registrar of Animal Preparations and Animal Feeding Stuffs Act was followed by three years with Export Inspection and Quarantine. In 1983, Jan was specifically head hunted by Sir Frank Callaway to work on the second Indian Ocean Festival at the University of WA. Another frantic 18 months working with artists and governments of most countries on the Indian Ocean edge ensued.



It was back to the coal face in 1985, when she took the challenge of taking on the role of Trusts Funds Secretary, dealing with the WA fruit and vegetable growers. You might have noticed that Jan liked a change so five years on it was time to move and a six year stint at the Community Catchment Centre in Pinjarra beckoned. Country service was an eye

opener, and it was a great place to work. BUT, time to move on again and Jan moved back to South Perth and became Executive Assistant to the director of Grain Research and Development followed by a brief stint of job sharing as EA to the Director of Biosecurity. Jan retired in 2008 and joined the Ex Ag Officers Association. She feels it was a good \$25 investment and a great way to keep in touch with colleagues, many of whom she counts as good friends.

Fred Wilkinson – Ash Mercy

Fred's career in the Department of Agriculture and his enormous contribution to WA's livestock industry will be well-known to his colleagues. However, many of us would be unaware of his incredibly interesting life outside his veterinary work.

Fred spent his early years on his parent's farms at Beacon and later at Aldersyde (20 km east of Brookton) His first introduction to preventative veterinary medicine was helping his father vaccinate their sheep for pulpy kidney – well before the vaccine was widely adopted by WA farmers and no doubt kindling his interest in veterinary science.

Fred's family moved to Perth and he completed his secondary education at Modern School. He was good at sport and excelled at cricket where he met a friend of his brothers at the Subiaco Cricket club. The friend was none other than one **Bob Hawke**. In fact, the former Prime Minister gave Fred a lift to cricket training one day on the back of his motorbike. Not many of us could equal that!



Fred showing Sir Charles Court and Dick Old sheep lice research at an Open Day in the 1980's

Speaking of rare feats, Fred became a very good grade level player for Subiaco. One of Fred's little-known highlights in the cricket world was playing in a charity match against a team from the Press. One of the Press players was **Richie Benaud**, former Australian Captain, champion spin bowler and good with the bat. The WA team was having trouble getting Benaud out, so they brought Fred on to bowl. Fred removed Richie Benaud's middle stump first ball!

Fred's major contributions to agriculture were developing and extending mastitis control methods in dairy herds, changing mulesing methods to prevent rear-end cancer in sheep, showing dipping of sheep was a major predisposing cause of lumpy wool in sheep (which led to the removal of the legal requirement to dip sheep after shearing), assessing the economic impacts of lice infestations in sheep and identifying the spread of footrot infection from cattle to sheep. Fred was also involved in establishing the Sheep Lice Eradication Program. As well as Fred's research and management roles, he was a great mentor to many young Vets in in the Department. Before retirement as Principal Veterinary Officer in 1989 Fred spent 1981-82 in Nepal establishing a livestock development project.

After retirement Fred undertook research into increasing the fecundity of Merino sheep by introducing Finn sheep genes and twice year shearing versus the normal practice of once-a-year shearing. This was done in conjunction with Department of Agriculture officers with the results made available to the sheep industry with a paper at a national conference.

Very few Department of Agriculture officers have continued to do research in a private capacity after retirement and publish the results.

In the 35 years since retiring Fred and his late wife Margo maintained their egg- laying farm at Forrestfield for several years. He also worked farms at Beacon and Brookton as well as developing orchards at Mundaring and Pickering Brook with sons Mark and Ian. At 89 years of age Fred still works most days at the Pickering brook orchard.