

25 YEARS

Primaries

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PRIMARIES - THE GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM FOR WEST AUSTRALIAN WOOL

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS MARK 25 YEARS FOR PRIMARIES

Des Sheedy attributes his term at a British business college to developing the highly personalised, professional approach to business that has characterised Primaries of WA since its formation 25 years ago.

It was entrepreneur Brian Coppin, who after successfully completing the reverse take-over of Dalgety Australia for Western Livestock in 1974, and appointing Des as Wool Manager, enrolled his manager for a four month course at the Henley Staff College.

"Their strongest teaching was that for any business to succeed, it had to be based on sound people and professional attitudes," Des said.

"These principles were to be tested more than I could ever have realised, as Primaries went on to weather one of the most challenging eras in the history of the wool industry."

Deep industry regard for Des, and his colleagues from Western Livestock, Jim Craig and Simon Joel, resulted in strong early support for the company not only from

space in their sheepskin premises at Coogee," Des said.

"Bill was also involved as an owner of Cantabilling Springs and Joanna Plains, and Primaries was favoured with the wool clips from these substantial properties in our early days."

The Countryman reported Primaries first wool sale on July 30, 1981 with the quote: "Mr Sheedy stressed that the emphasis of Primaries at all times would be on marketing wool - not just selling a product - as well as personalised service at an extremely competitive cost."

Some of the farming names to appear in the report of the first Primaries sale included C. & I.M. King, Piawaning, C & O, Page of Pingelly, Benara Farms, Mandurah, E.M. Browne & Son, Calingiri, J.D. & E.J. Milner, New Norcia, J. & J. Doncon Chittering and Trevac, Pingelly.

Des's 'personalised marketing' message brought an impressive increase in farmer clientele and it was not long before the partners were looking for extra storage space.

"We bought the old Wilcox Moflin store in South Terrace Fremantle at an auction the day after the America's Cup, and salvaged and sold enough timber whilst modifying the building to pay for the renovations," Des said.

"Primaries later leased extra space from the then Australian Wool Commission and from the AWTA in South Terrace, Fremantle before purchasing the present site in Wellard Road and completing a 20,000 square metre woolstore in 1989."

The collapse of the Reserve Price scheme for wool and the stockpile decade that followed kept the company, its clients and customers under pressure for all of the 1990's.

Des joined WA wool leaders in criticising management of the wool stockpile - attacking in particular the process of 'forward discounting' stockpile wool.

"Instead of metering stockpile wool into the auction system in quantities that the market could handle, Wool International was offering it on a private, forward basis at a discount to the spot market, keeping grower prices depressed," he said.

However it was during wool's darkest days that Des began working with WA's woolgrowers on a range of marketing strategies to improve the quality image of WA wool.

Cranmore Park principal and Chairman of Rural Traders, Peter Lefroy set the trend by working with Des to prove that it was possible for a woolgrower to produce tops in Europe from his own wool.

About 20,000 bales of wool from different areas of WA and from different bloodlines was despatched by Primaries into various stages of the wool pipeline to a range of selected processors.

"We found that whereas growers can process their wool direct, there were quite a few risks involved and often only a marginal benefit. Dealing direct with processors did serve to demonstrate the quality of our wools and we still enjoy strong relationships with some of those processors, especially in Italy and the UK."

Spinoffs from these experiences led Primaries to introduce an OFDA flock testing service, various risk management schemes to assist growers to market their wool including a successful 'wool loans' facility in partnership with Chargeurs, and better recording systems.

Primaries later became the first woolbroker in partnership with Roberts Ltd., and Quality Wool, South Australia, to develop WoolTrade as Australia's first successful electronic wool marketing system. Des retains the chairmanship of WoolTrade which recently welcomed Elders and Landmark as active major users.

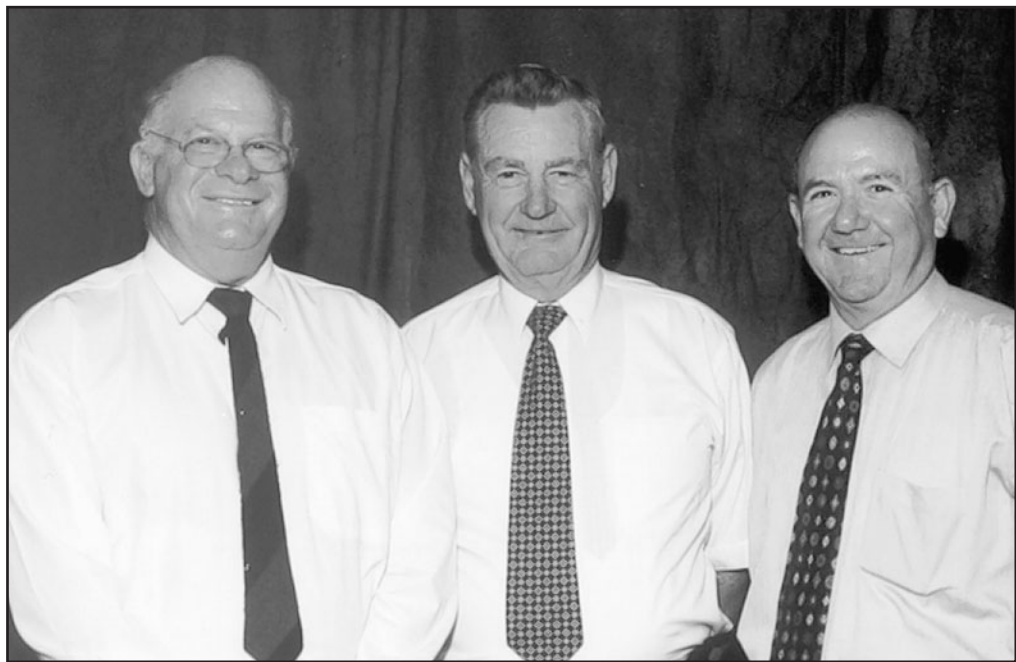
His faith in the rural industry was confirmed in 1998 with the purchase of Cargill Woolbrokers in WA, in a move that saw Primaries double its wool storage capacity, and enter the livestock marketing business for the first time with livestock representatives Peter Sheridan, Graham Densley and Ian Hunter joining the team. A 50 percent equity share was sold to Roberts Ltd., of Tasmania at the same time.

In 2001, Primaries again asserted its independence by setting up its own auction selling facilities at Spearwood. The move followed a refusal to accept higher rates imposed by the Australian wool exchange.

The recent merger of Roberts Ltd., with Ruralco further widens the scope for Primaries to grow within WA.

Ruralco is responsible for the network of CRT branches and agencies throughout WA, and already in centres like Esperance, synergies between CRT and Primaries have been formalised and are working well.

"Primaries has continued to grow, but one of the saddest aspects of the wool industry today is the few woolbuyers remaining in contrast to the many Japanese and European firms operating in Fremantle during the 1980's.



Primaries of WA Pty Ltd was established by Des Sheedy (right) and Jim Craig (centre) as a small Woolbroking / Handling facility in Fremantle, Western Australia. Simon Joel (left) joined the team soon after.



Bill Rigg, Des Shedy and Trevor Fedler with Primaries first wool sale catalogue

farmers, but also from wool buyers and people in many other facets of the wool trade.

Carl Poingdestre was the company's first staff appointment in 1981, followed by Graham Volich as southern area representative and later Primaries' agent at Esperance. Trevor Pedler, Tim Chapman, store foreman, Jim Earney and secretary Maz Waller, and others were hand-picked to join the team as the company continued to grow.

One of the first people to step forward to support Des in the very formative days of Primaries, was prominent meat industry leader Bill Rigg of WA Meat Exports.

"Bill and his partner Des Turpin offered us our first ---

THE NEXT 25 YEARS

The three P's - Primaries and professional personalised service - will continue to serve WA farmers through the next 25 years, according to Des Sheedy.

"We have continued to maintain the independence and innovation that has enabled Primaries to grow over the past 25 years and we have also secured a strong local management component to ensure we stay close to our staff, clients and customers."

Des said Managing Director Trevor Pedler and Marketing manager Matt Pedersen had acquitted themselves well as directors of Primaries and in the day to day management of the WA firm.

"As directors they will ensure Primaries continues as a staunchly independent West Australian service company, building on new national links with Ruralco-CRT, Wooltrade and other rural innovators.

"Our wool and livestock staff are the most competent in WA and we continue to recruit some of the most promising young men into the industry to ensure that our high service standards are maintained," Des said.

TRIED AND TESTED



Colin, Bevan, Justin and Malcolm King

WA's magical formula of grain, pasture and merinos continues to work well for the King family of Piawaning, one of the oldest and most successful wool clients of Primaries.

The 1981 wool clip from Colin King's Spreadalong property at Piawaning was the biggest to be offered in Primaries' inaugural wool auction.

The clip comprised around 300 bales, with the top fleece line selling at a very respectable price at the time.

"There were a few of us in the area at the time who were financially independent, who chose to support Des Sheedy in his new venture," Colin said.

The reliance on sheep and the bond with Primaries still underpins a family farming enterprise built by Colin and his wife Rene that includes sons Malcolm, Bevan and Russell and their families on extensive individual holdings at Piawaning and Calingiri.

With one of the worst seasonal openings Colin can remember, the Kings are drawing on all of their individual and collective skills to cope with a record dry.

Successfully meeting a range of similar challenges since Colin moved from Goomalling with 200 sheep to take up virgin land at Piawaning in 1949, has been a feature of family history.

An early practice after clearing new country was to seed it with Dwalganup clover, one of the original WA varieties used in ley clover farming.

"This variety of clover was later found to hamper lambing and we quickly changed to Merino wethers. You could shear them for four or five years, and they would still make good money as shippers," Colin said.

The enterprise remained wether and cropping based until the 1970's when new low-oestrogen clovers encouraged Colin to start breeding again, mainly using Merino genetics from the Glen Byre stud of Ben Edmonds.

Bigger, bolder Merinos cutting plenty of 21-23 micron wool set an early standard and they are still part of the successful King family formula, especially with some of the bigger Merino ewes being mated for prime lambs.

Like his father Malcolm, Justin King started in the sheep business at the age of 18, working in a variety of roles around Australia, as a qualified woolclasser before returning to the family base at Piawaning.

"The Merino industry shakes your faith at times, but sheep will always be part of the program here," he said.



Des Shedy with Colin and Rene King a few years ago