



**Agribusiness
Australia**

A Short History

Serving Agribusiness in Australia for 30 Years

Overview

An industry which lacks a cohesive voice and approaches issues in a fragmented manner will always wear the consequence of not having an inclusive, non-political body advocating for the betterment of the industry. Agribusiness Australia has been operating as a like-minded, industry-focused body since its creation in 1988.

Agribusiness Australia's sole purpose is to bring together thought leaders and respected professionals from across the agriculture industry to contribute to collaborative, objective and evidence-based positions that drive change and influence the industry agenda. This mission has been at the core of Agribusiness Australia since the beginning and remains so in 2020.



The early years – 1988 to 1999

The 1980s were a transitional time for Australian agriculture and the Australian economy at large. 1983 saw Bob Hawke appointed as Prime Minister of Australia which in turn delivered a new legislative agenda and focus. Australian agriculture was increasing in value and production scale against the backdrop of changing domestic and global economic conditions. The increase in value of production was slow but the industry saw year on year growth. Economically, the 1980s attracted a legislative framework for deregulation and opening of markets, as well as the milestone floating of the Australian dollar in 1983. During this time, the Hawke Government put considerable focus on agribusiness policy, culminating in the 1990s with the introduction of RDCs to deliver greater capacity for research and development (R&D) and assist the industry to compete at a higher level on the global stage.

In 1988, Australia and the global economies were feeling the effects of the stock market crash of October 1987 and were beginning to rebuild. The Australian agricultural industry was similarly wounded. A fragmented approach to industry recovery was a serious issue, requiring leadership to ensure a return to the prosperity of the 1970s and early 1980s. From these conditions, a group of academics from several institutions including Massey University (New Zealand), Chisholm Institute of Technology (VIC – became Monash University after a merger), Curtin University (WA), Queensland Agricultural College (QLD – became part of the University of Queensland) came together to create the Agribusiness Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) – the predecessor to the Agribusiness Association of Australia, now Agribusiness Australia.

The inaugural president of the AAANZ was Ian Fairnie, of Curtin University at the time. Jack White, who had recently retired from his role at Austrade, also helped facilitate the creation of AAANZ and became the Association's first secretary. The group was comprised of other individuals with reputable commercial backgrounds and interests including David Campbell (Monsanto and later Linfox), Ron Storey (Australian Wheat Board), Tony Webster and David McKinna.

Just as the AAANZ was building momentum and defining how it was going to contribute to the advancement of the industry, a major recession hit Australia's economy in 1990. The recession was the culmination of many economic factors including extremely high interest rates, falling investments, mounting unemployment, and business failures.

These conditions hit the industry hard. In terms of raw output, agriculture had seen a steep decline in production by 1990, not seen since 1979. The value of the industry's production was also stagnant, with some commodities seeing negative growth. Agriculture needed representation and leadership to drive it forward.

Ian Fairnie stepped down as president in 1992 allowing David Campbell to become president. Under Campbell's stewardship the Association began working towards a more sustainable model, which diverted from the academic emphasis of the initial years toward greater commercial focus. To drive success of this model, the Association realised it needed to adjust the peak body membership to include the National Farmers' Federation, Australian Food and Grocery Manufacturers Association, Australian Supermarket Institute, and the Fertiliser Industry Federation. This would bring together all participants in the agribusiness supply chain, with varying experiences and a diversified interest in the agribusiness sector.

The decision to invest in a more sustainable model paid off in the following year when the Association's first AGM was held. This, combined with a successful conference in Queensland, saw strong numbers in attendance and a consequent spike in membership. The Association had held a number of conferences in Canberra and Melbourne from the late 1980s but this conference and subsequent events in the early 1990s enabled a solid base of membership to be built.

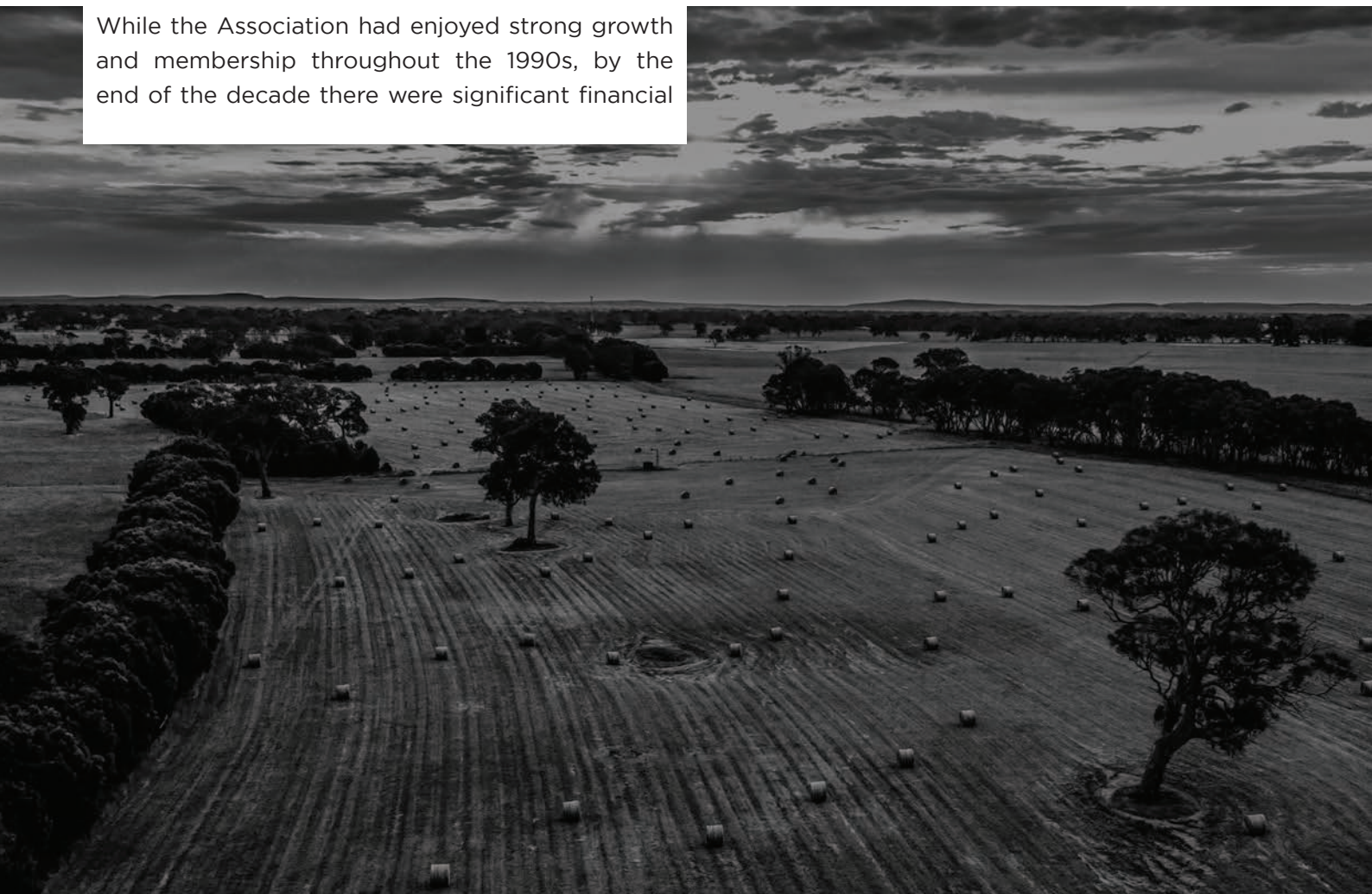
The AAANZ welcomed its third president in 1996 with the election of John Gunthorpe who had moved from Elders IXL, one of the original supporters

of the Association, to Goodman Fielder. During Gunthorpe's time as president, the Association's membership base remained relatively consistent, but shifted back toward the academic approach as they further developed the Association-created Agribusiness Review Journal. This was somewhat of an academic precursor to the newsletter provided today to members which aims to grow the knowledge base and discusses important industry issues and topics. The Agribusiness Review Journal was picked up by several key educational institutions as a source of industry specific information and knowledge, notably by Monash University. Monash University went further with this journal, broadening its scope and content later in the 1990s when the Journal lost some association with the AAANZ. Monash also developed its highly successful Graduate Diploma in Agribusiness, originally at Chisholm Institute in the mid-1980s, which flourished throughout the 1990s to become the predominant tertiary qualification in the field, encouraging other institutions to also introduce similar courses.

pressures and declining membership numbers. Following Gunthorpe's departure from presidency in 1998, David Ginns from the NSW Farmers Association stepped up as an overseeing caretaker, but on a shoestring budget. To Ginns' credit, he was able to continue to maintain a membership base and organise a some events during this period, spurring the Association on.

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While the Association had enjoyed strong growth and membership throughout the 1990s, by the end of the decade there were significant financial



A new millennium for Australian agribusiness

The turn of the new millennium marked a significant period of change for the association as it faced one of Australia's most significant droughts. While Ginns was attempting to maintain the association, two notable South Australians became involved, having long-term impacts. Future AAA president, John Crosby, and future life member, Geoff Lucas, stepped in to help restore the Association's voice and strength. Crosby had been involved with the Association in the 1990s through his role with the NFF and hence maintained this link which proved also to be important in the Association's later initiative. With their input, the newly renamed, Agribusiness Association of Australia, moved its base to Adelaide, South Australia, away from the east-coast base of the 1990s. It is here that the Association achieved a new lease on life. The millennium drought reshaped agriculture in Australia permanently.

The drought officially began in the late 1990s however the full force was felt in the first decade of the 2000s. The biggest area impacted by drought was the Murray-Darling Basin, where the effects are still being felt today. The drought caused, for the first time ever, irrigators to be allocated zero water. In the first few years of the new millennium the

Under the direction of John Crosby as president, the Association began to grow throughout the 2000s and saw an increase in membership numbers and a stronger financial position. With this strengthened foundation, the Association was able to grow its administrative capabilities and in 2009 the position of Executive Officer was created to streamline the Association's administration for membership, sponsorship, events and finance with the goal of increasing events from three to five per state each year.

Australian agribusiness, like all industries in Australia, had to endure the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression when the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) hit the world's economies in late 2008. The process for investment, and the risk mitigation and due diligence involved before investing capital in any business, has been largely influenced by the events and fallout of the GFC. The AAA continued to operate through the GFC as an advocate for agribusiness and the sustained membership during this time reinforced the valued role that the Association played.

In 2009, the Association and its members were asked by Government to make submissions for multiple industry related projects including the Austrade National Brand Project; an opportunity to improve Australia's brand export image and align across a fragmented industry. The Association also contributed to the Australia Water Association's Ozwater '10 publication on the future of Australian water usage. It is a credit to the Board that over the first decade of the new millennium the Association was able to develop its influence and prove an



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Agribusiness Council of Australia (ACA) was founded by Mark Allison, then CEO of Wesfarmers Landmark. This ran concurrently and was introduced alongside the Agribusiness Association of Australia. While the ACA aimed to provide credible representation for the agribusiness sector through policy development and communication, it was short-lived, with Agribusiness Association of Australia choosing to remain as just one association after a short period. Jack White, whose support was instrumental in the early years of the AAA and throughout the 1990s, was recognised in 2004 as the first Life Member of the Association.



important point of input for these projects. These opportunities allowed AAA to truly engage in the kinds of advocacy that it had always strived to achieve. Throughout this period, the Hon Caroline Schaefer was president of the Agribusiness Association of Australia and ensured that advances in the Association's influence and footprint grew.

By 2009, the millennium drought was starting to break with most parts of Australia receiving enough rain to return to normal production levels. It became crucial for the industry to implement a plan for the distribution of water rights, proving a significant opportunity for the AAA to shape the future of the industry. The millennium drought was the catalyst for the creation of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan which was legislated in 2012, around the time that the millennium drought was officially declared over. Theresa Craig became president of the Association in 2011 and looked to continue the work initiated under the previous leadership of the Hon Caroline Schaefer. As the AAA entered the second decade of the new millennium with a new president, Craig saw an opportunity to develop the brand and image of the Association. A website upgrade was designed for a world and industry becoming ever more digitised, increasing exposure into 2012 when the AAA was featured in the Qantas inflight magazine and entertainment programming.

Understanding the importance of bringing through a new generation of agribusiness professionals to continue the success of the industry and foster its academic origins, the Association brought in the Agribusiness Association of Australia Scholarship (changing to the Agribusiness Australia Scholarship). The inaugural recipient of the scholarship was Lochlan Lancaster in 2013.

Craig's presidency fostered a period of growth and greater influence in the industry during her tenure from 2011 until 2015. In 2015, a changing of the guard occurred with Mark Allison (Managing Director and CEO of Elders Limited) taking the reigns. Allison's heavy involvement in the Association and the wider industry for many years prior made the appointment a logical and well-received decision.

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Aerial imagery





Next Phase – Agribusiness Australia 2016-2020

With Allison as president, the Association undertook another major shift in 2016. The membership voted to make two significant changes; firstly, the rebranding of the Agribusiness Association of Australia to Agribusiness Australia – as it is now currently known, and secondly to change the constitution of the Association to reflect the direction that Agribusiness Australia was heading under the new president. The change in constitution was designed to strengthen the Association’s capabilities and increase relevance for members.

Reinvigorated, Agribusiness Australia took another step forward with the introduction of a new fulltime CEO, Tim Burrow in 2016 and quickly set about outlining its new strategic plan. As prescribed in the new constitution, the association set out to operate with increased relevance to its stakeholders, with focus on membership growth and a nationwide events agenda.

A weekly newsletter was established in 2017, providing an update from the CEO on issues facing the industry, success stories, or areas of interest for members. These communications draw similarities to the previous Agribusiness Australia publications from the 1990’s including the Agribusiness Review Journal. Received positively, these newsletters continued weekly until the start of 2019 when they became bi-monthly.

Throughout 2017, Agribusiness Australia saw greater collaboration throughout the industry. A major achievement for the sector was the introduction

of the new postgraduate degree at the University of Adelaide. The new Masters of Agribusiness highlighted the opportunity to set up future leaders of the industry with greater skills and knowledge to further advance agribusiness in Australia.

Further collaboration was evident when in 2018 a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between Agribusiness Australia and the National Farmers’ Federation. The MOU ensured that all stakeholders of the supply chain were looking to work collaboratively for the advancement of Australian agriculture. This has become particularly important to drive the industry-wide target of growing production to \$100 billion by 2030. This connects with the pragmatic step change of the early 1990s to align the Association across the whole agribusiness supply chain for impact. It took nearly another generation for this realisation to become fully effective based on the experience of change over the years and the current leadership of the Association.



During this period, Agribusiness Australia developed a positive reputation for organising and hosting well-received events for the industry, by expanding its offering into guest speaker lunches, CEO lunches, and state-based networking events. In 2019, Agribusiness Australia successfully hosted twenty events across five states and one territory. This is a direct outcome of the strategic vision set by the executive in 2016 when the Association was refocusing on the direction it needed to take to become a strong, respected thought leader for the industry.

Agribusiness Australia has worked closely with other associations to develop and publish different communications and reports. In 2019, Agribusiness Australia co-sponsored a report with the Australia-China Belt & Road Initiative and Elders which described the opportunities of the Belt and Road

initiative throughout China and central Asia. Titled *Belt and Road Initiative – Commercial Relevance to the Australian Agricultural Sector*, the report highlighted the important role that China has played in composing the Australian export landscape.

While China remains a dominant export destination for agricultural products, the challenge for the industry today is ensuring that Australia can meet and capitalise on the market opportunities China offers, whilst ensuring that the industry isn't solely dependent on Chinese exports – diversification is key.

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The future of Agribusiness Australia

Agribusiness Australia now operates in the most globalised landscape the agriculture industry has ever seen. Trade relations are a vital factor in the modern agriculture industry, we face increased global competition, and productivity is stagnating. It is the mission of Agribusiness Australia to empower its members to help find solutions that will drive the Australian agricultural industry forward and grow the sector year on year.

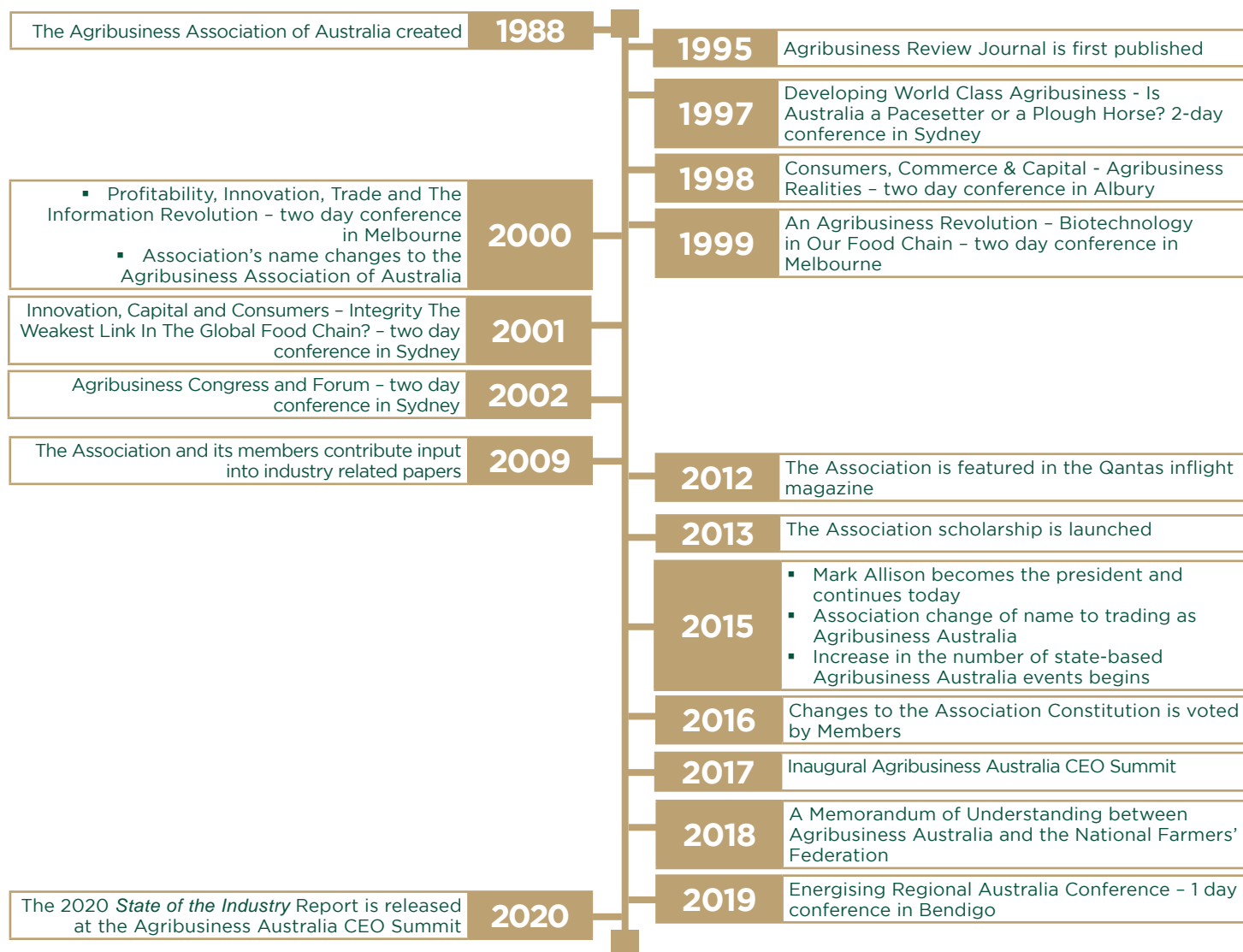
2020 represents an opportunity for a third phase of growth for the organisation. We will work with leading Agribusiness organisations to strengthen the voice of Australian agribusiness through strategic resourcing and working alongside other advocates across the whole supply chain. This will support a new decade of growth and cohesion in agribusiness. Agribusiness Australia intends to continue its work in making evidence-based and strategic contributions to the national conversation while remaining a non-aligned, apolitical body. 2020 will also see the association endeavour to host more events than ever across the nation, providing greater opportunity for knowledge-sharing and networking throughout the agribusiness sector.

The next decade will see Agribusiness Australia advocate and lead agribusiness' contribution to a sustainable, competitive and world class sector, driving prosperity for the industry and ensuring Australia are world leaders in agriculture.

“We will work with leading Agribusiness organisations to strengthen the voice of Australian agribusiness through strategic resourcing and working alongside other advocates across the whole supply chain.”



Agribusiness Australia key milestones



Agribusiness Australia Chairs and CEOs/EOs

Chairs	CEOs / EOs
Ian Fairnie	Jack White
David Campbell	Wendy Morrison
John Gunthorpe	David Ginns
John Crosby	Julie Opperman
Geoff James	Mark Rodda
Caroline Schaefer	Deb Baum
Theresa Craig	Theresa Craig
Mark Allison	Jan Davis
	Tim Burrow
	Liz Baines
	Leonie Welsh