

W. Robert R. Beggs AM – Honorary Life Member

It was a great honour to receive an Honorary Life Membership of the Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association, at a presentation dinner held at the Windsor Hotel, Melbourne on 12 March 2009.

Barry Walker also received an Honorary Life Membership and I do congratulate him. Barry was recently awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his services to the wool industry and to the community.

It is extremely humbling to know that there are only three living Honorary Life Members of the Association. John Williams of Armidale is the other Life Member and it was unfortunate that he was unable to attend this dinner in Melbourne.

It was my father, Arthur Beggs CBE, who had the vision to establish the Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association (ASWGA). He knew from the onset that such an association had to include all superfine wool growers in the three major producing States and overseas Mill Members.

There were several keys to this vision.

Through his Wool Board connections, he met Count Aldo Zegna, who because of his large operation in Italy, was able to persuade a number of Mill owners to join as Mill Members. Tasmania had its own fine and superfine wool growers and it was Rod O'Connor who persuaded the wool growers in Tasmania to join the mainland States to form the ASWGA. The other key to the formation and success is a clear succession.

The succession plan means that each State, Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, elect a President of the Association for a term of three years, and the Vice President from the next in turn State is expected to be the next President.

I believe this succession flow is the key to the success of the Association, which has stood the test of time, during the ups and downs of the industry since the Association's inception in 1972.

My father founded a Merino Stud No 261 at Niawanda, Beaufort in 1932 purchasing ewes from Buln Gherin and Eurambeen, this was later transferred back to Bulk Gherin and he purchased the property in 1945. In 1960 I joined my



W. Robert R. Beggs AM being presented with his Honorary Life Membership Certificate

father in a partnership known as Buln Gherin Partners.

Buln Gherin was purchased in 1920 by my grandmother, also Robert Beggs from the Russell family at Mawallok.

MY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SHEEP AND WOOL INDUSTRY

My ancestors were Anglo-Irish and emigrated from Dublin in Ireland and arrived in Geelong on the 17 March 1850 aboard the ship *The Statesman*.

They had been involved with the fine linen trade and then became involved in farming.

From the early days in Western Victoria they were running Merino sheep. My father was already involved with many off farm activities and in 1963 was elected to the then Australian Wool Board.

At this stage I took over the full running of the property and the day to day management. The property ran a sheep enterprise, mainly Merinos, Hereford Cattle, some cereal cropping and a grass hay enterprise.

In November 1959 Margaret and I were married and built a house on the Western end of the property known as Buln Gherin.

After my father died, Margaret and I moved into the homestead at Buln

Gherin. We have three grown up married daughters and six grandchildren.

During the late '60s I showed Merino sheep at the major sheep shows in Victoria and in the 1980s established a Sharlea enterprise, constructing a purpose built shed to house approximately 500 sheep.

Currently the property is leased by an Estate from Casterton who purchased all our Merino sheep and are in the process of reducing their micron and putting more wool on a larger frame.

Margaret and I still live in the homestead and apart from managing a large native garden, are putting a lot of energy into beautifying the property mainly by embarking on a significant tree planting program.

Off farm I am still involved with the Council at Marcus Oldham College at Geelong and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, whose headquarters are in Canberra.

I was honoured to be involved with the Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association from 1981 to 1995. My first involvement was as a regional chairman, then Vice President from 1989 to 1991.

It is true that Australia no longer rides on the sheep's back and in my opinion the recent high point of the industry was in 1989, prices were good and there was no wool in the stockpile.

The original floor price for wool, which took the bottom out of the market, was a good scheme. This developed into the Reserve Price for wool and as growers we got greedy and pushed the price too high and the large stock pile that followed is now history.

Superfine wool is the flagship of the Australian Wool Industry and I am delighted that the Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association has stood the test of time and continues to be run by dedicated growers with no political baggage, all striving to do the best for their industry.

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