

# Hehir motivated by passionate farmers

By Geoff Adams

When the new farmer-driven Waterpool Co-operative was being established two years ago, a small group of farmers had to come up with \$250 000 in two weeks to make it work.

The Kyabram based co-operative has been embraced by irrigators and now employs five people.

Terry Hehir was the inaugural chairman of the independent water trader and describes the establishment of the co-operative as an example of the power of a group of motivated and committed farmers.

Mr Hehir, named in the Queen's Birthday Honours list with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the general division for services to the dairy industry, points to the capabilities of many in the sector with whom he has worked during the years.

"I like being surrounded by equally passionate people; having believers with you," Mr Hehir said. "I hate being surrounded by negative people."

The award he sees as an acknowledgement for the industry.

A Wyuna dairy farmer, Mr He-

hir has served on dairy industry organisations continuously for about 30 years and has played a key role in starting Waterpool, the Australian Dairy Conference and the Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia Co-operative.

His involvement with the agricultural leadership organisation Nuffield, first as a scholar and more recently as the immediate past chairman of the Australian board, has taken him around the country and around the world.

Dairying leader Max Fehring, who has been something of a mentor to Mr Hehir, once told him: "You can work as hard as you like on the farm, but unless you can get out and surround yourself with motivated people and reach out to the broader industry, you are limiting your capacity to achieve your own opportunities".

"He showed me how to look beyond the farm gate," Mr Hehir said.

"Nuffield showed me to look beyond the region, the country, to the world."

He describes the program as a life-changing experience and now encourages others to participate.

He has served on the international board of Nuffield for

three years.

Mr Hehir and wife Pauline adopted biological farm principles in 2000 and decided to certify their production several years later.

He helped establish the Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia Co-operative as inaugural chairman, and still supplies the co-operative which markets its products under the True Organics and Organic Dairy Farmers labels.

Mr Hehir said he couldn't have been involved in the industry organisations without the support of his wife.

While he has an impressive CV of community service he has also had his share of small dramas along the way.

"I'm probably the only person who stood for the secretary's position with the Kyabram UDV branch and was defeated," he said with a smile, recalling the 1980s when he took an unpopular stance against quotas in the dairy industry.

The Kyabram UDV branch, one of his earliest forays into community groups, became the first dairy branch to win the VFF's branch of the year awards.



Honoured ... Terry Hehir, OAM, and wife Pauline at their Wyuna farm.

# Milk price step-up announced

Murray Goulburn has lifted this season's price to about \$6.81/kg/milk solids.

In its sixth step-up for the year, the company said it was lifting its price by 0.9¢/kg butterfat and 0.19¢/kg protein.

Managing director Gary Helou said external factors including fluctuating international commodity prices and currency movements would continue to be key factors in

determining the final price.

"This step-up will deliver an additional \$31 million to MG dairy farmers to support business cash flow.

"When this is combined with the five previously advised step-ups, MG has added \$247 million to farmgate returns since announcing a record opening price for the 2013-14 season last July.

"The continued focus on improv-

ing performance through reducing costs and investing to support innovation and value growth contributed to this step-up."

He said market demand for key dairy ingredients remained strong, but increased milk supply from New Zealand, Europe and the United States had led to recent declines in prices.

"Nevertheless dairy ingredients prices remain above historical av-

erage levels. The Australian dollar continues to be stubbornly higher than we expect it to be and remains a source of risk to next year's farmgate milk prices," Mr Helou said.

Meanwhile, the Australian Dairy Farmers Co-operative has announced an opening milk price of \$6.53 for suppliers to its Bulla Foods contract near Colac.

The price comes with a commit-

ment to increase, if Murray Goulburn hits the \$6.53 figure.

Chairman Scott Sieben said they had already found sufficient suppliers for the new 120 million litre contract and had a waiting list of about 80 million litres.

For the five suppliers for the ProCal contract in northern Victoria, the co-operative expects to announce an opening price within the next two weeks.

## Amazing sight ...

Visitors to the Echuca Steam Horse & Vintage Rally took a step back in time at the weekend when all manner of historic steam and petrol-fired engines and vehicles were on show, as well as large teams of Clydesdale horses used to demonstrate the way things used to get done. The grand parade on each day drew big crowds and there were many murmurings of "My dad had one of those" as the lovingly-restored antique tractors and equipment trundled by.

Picture: Jayme Lowndes/Riverine Herald



## Shareholders vote cash

Murray Goulburn shareholders voted to give up their A Class Preference Shares for cash at a special meeting in Melbourne last week.

The preference shareholders voted on the proposal to have the class cancelled in exchange for \$1.25 a share, as part of a restructure the company is pursuing.

The vote achieved the minimum 75 per cent of votes required to pass the resolution.

A total of 23 per cent of the A Class holders voted against the resolution.

These shareholders had been guaranteed a minimum return of eight per cent each year.

Murray Goulburn chairman Philip Tracy said he was pleased the resolution was passed.

"The A Class Preference Shares consisted of mainly very small shareholdings, 20 per cent of which we have been unable to contact, and was an old class of share that has been closed to new shareholders for more than a decade.

"In these circumstances, the board's view was that a cancellation of the A Class Preference Shares was the right way forward and represented the best outcome for both A Class Preference Shareholders and our current supplier/shareholders."

He expected the payment for the shares to occur about June 24.

## iLoddon Mallee group lobbies in Canberra

Representatives from iLoddon Mallee went to Canberra last Tuesday in a bid to have the Loddon Mallee region reinstated on the NBN roll-out list.

iLoddon Mallee project coordinator Margaret O'Rourke, iLoddon Mallee chair Bruce Winzar and Regional Development Australia deputy chair Stuart McLean met five regional MPs and Parliamentary Secretary Paul Fletcher and other advisers.

Ms O'Rourke said the group was advised to submit a detailed business case to assist their efforts to be ranked higher up the list.

"We were asked to develop

a submission to Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull to demonstrate our capability and uses of technology for the region," she said.

"Highlighting our strengths in education, health, agriculture and tourism will assist our priority rating for the future roll-out announcement.

"We can't underestimate the amount of work we need to do to continue to lobby and advocate for high speed broadband as we await NBN's Operational Plan."

Mr Winzar said towns in the City of Greater Bendigo and Campaspe, Macedon Ranges and Mt Alexander shires were

no longer on the list "and we want them reinstated".

"We formed a working group in 2011 to advocate for early roll-out of the NBN in the Loddon Mallee region and were successful in joining the second stage roll-out list in 2012 when we were promised over 29 000 premises in Bendigo would be connected by 2015," Mr Winzar said.

To date only 60 premises are connected in Bendigo and 32 in Swan Hill.

Ms O'Rourke said the iLoddon Mallee group was considering the entire region in its business case, particularly in light of the multi-

technology mix now being used in the NBN deployment.

"One project we are working on to assist our bid is independent testing of the three major mobile carrier networks across the region.

The testing, funded by RDA Loddon Mallee, will help local government understand where the mobile black spots are in the region and provide a further platform for advocacy."

■ The iLoddon Mallee Group represents all local government authorities within the Loddon Mallee region and includes representatives of Regional Development Australia, 10 local councils and major businesses.

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