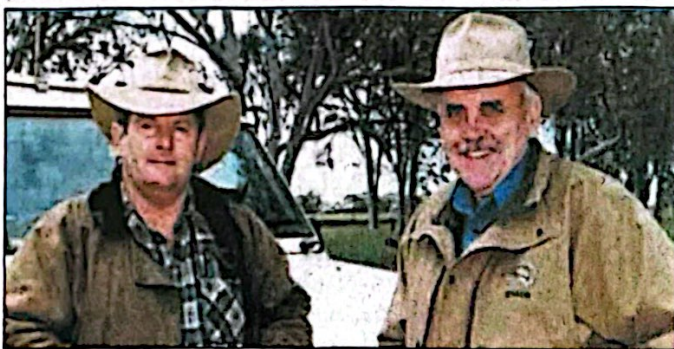


Millions of grain dollars spent and gained



□ This year, COGGO is celebrating 25 years of investing in innovation, research and development to advance the WA grains industry. Bruce Piper (left) was COGGO's first chairman and Geoff Smith was the inaugural chief executive officer.



□ In December 2002 COGGO members met with researchers at a Spring Field Day.

BAITING AND TRAPPING TO PROTECT NATIVE WILDLIFE

17 November - 28 November 2025

Feral predator control will be conducted from the Albany windfarm through the coastal reserves and into West Cape Howe National Park (WCHNP).

Baiting and trapping is used in WCHNP to control foxes and feral cats to protect endangered native animals including the western ringtail possum. Baits used in WCHNP are toxic to introduced animals, but not to native animals which have evolved tolerance to the 1080 compound. Trapping only occurs in the Albany coastal reserve system. Areas where baiting and trapping occurs are signposted.



ATTENTION PET OWNERS!
Baits will kill domestic dogs and cats
and traps could cause injuries.

Find out more: Torbaycatchment.org.au
Contact us: info@torbaycatchment.org.au



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

**ANIMAL PEST
MANAGEMENT SERVICES**



natural resource
management program



Albany



By **BELINDA MORRISSY**

IT IS with a great sense of pride that the Council of Grain Grower Organisations Limited (COGGO) chairman Chris Wilkins reflects on the 25 years the group has addressed issues directly impacting Western Australia's grain industry.

COGGO was formed in 1997 by a group of WA graingrowers who took the first step in controlling their own future.

They voluntarily contributed 0.5 per cent of their net farmgate grain production value to invest in plant breeding and associated research and development.

COGGO was initially formed as an incorporated body to represent 10 grower organisations, providing a co-ordinated voice in industry discussions on the future WA crop breeding directions.

To protect the value of its investments in commercial crop breeding raised through voluntary levies from WA grain producers, COGGO became a company limited by guarantee in 2000.

COGGO became a commercial partner in the wheat breeding company, Grain Biotech Australia (GBA) and a foundation partner in Canola Breeders WA, which became one of Australia's successful canola breeding companies.

COGGO also teamed up with wheat breeding company, Australian Grain Technologies, South Australia, to form AGT-WA, a joint venture breeding company focused specifically on developing wheat varieties for WA.

In 2011, COGGO sold its holding in Canola Breeders WA and AGT-WA, using the funds generated as part of a \$3.4 million dividend to members.

Since then, COGGO has maintained a Research Fund program, with an annual call for ideas for research and development projects, which helps improve the WA grains

industry's profitability.

Mr Wilkins is from Badgingarra and is the director of Synergy Consulting, having operated his own consulting business since 1998, providing agronomic and farm business management advice to farmers.

He became a COGGO director in 2010 and previously served as chairman from 2013 to 2018, when he succeeded inaugural chairman Bruce Piper.

"I am pleased to return to chair COGGO as we celebrate our 25th year," Mr Wilkins said.

"I became the chair again in February when Rhys Turton stepped down.

"Rhys's efforts have helped ensure that COGGO has funded some excellent projects during his tenure, and I wish Rhys well in his many other roles in the agriculture sector.

"As we celebrate this milestone, we're proud of the role COGGO has played in advancing WA agriculture, and we look forward to continuing to support bold ideas and breakthrough research that drive the next generation of innovation.

"I would especially like to acknowledge Bruce Piper's role as the driving force behind the establishment of COGGO and for serving as the company's inaugural chair for 16 years."

Mr Wilkins put his hand up for a second run in the role, believing in the importance of the organisation to the local grain industry in maintaining market competitiveness.

"It is a dreadful cliché, but COGGO is unique in Western Australia and possibly unique in the country in that we have been entirely funded by voluntary levies from farmers' voluntary contributions," he said.

"The projects we fund are entirely driven by ideas that people bring to us, which is the complete opposite of most ag research, where a

□ Continued on page 20



□ In recent time Nick Eyres led a Yuna Farm Improvement Group project which was supported by COGGO.

□ Continued from page 16

gap is identified through whatever mechanism, and then researchers are basically asked to see if they can put a project together to target this problem.

"We've got about roughly 10 per cent of farming businesses that are contributing members in WA."

All WA graingrowers are eligible to become members, with voluntary contributions being invested directly into the Research Fund.

The most recent projects are in collaboration with Murdoch University, ConsultAg and SLR Agriculture; developing high nitrogen use efficiency barley lines with Sakura Mudiyansele and Chengdao Li from Murdoch University, screening early growth vigour germplasm to enhance the adaptive response to early drought in narrow-leaf lupin with Gaofeng Zhou, also from Murdoch University; emerging biological crop growth enhancers evaluated in an independent field-based format with Michael Lamond/SLR Agriculture and Control of cockchafer with Ben Whisson from ConsultAg.

"For me personally, it's a surprise that 25 years have gone so fast," Mr Wilkins said.

"This year it's a celebration that we're still here, that we're still going strong and that farmers have considered us worthy of continuing to give money to.

"There are Western Australian farmers who think what we do is worth doing, and of course, we have never attempted to quarantine the

benefits out of our research projects to just our members.

"This is something that I advocate for strongly, because farmers talk to each other, agronomists talk to each other, people love sharing and finding out about research, we encourage members to share project news within their networks, and let others know about COGGO's funding of R&D."

Mr Wilkins said over the past 25 years, COGGO had supported more than 80 research projects with more than \$5.6m across a diverse range of areas, from crop breeding and agronomy to climate resilience and value-added grain products, with a return to members of nearly \$2.8m in dividends.

"It is with particular pride for the directors, and hopefully for the contributing members as well, that we've funded some projects that have grown into quite large innovative research that's used in-paddock in Western Australia," he said.

"To look back at things, we actually funded the first bit of research that Ben Biddulph and his DPIRD team did, looking at nucleating bacteria and their role in how frost occurs in Western Australia.

"Now that's something that hasn't yet really led to anything per se, like a new product or a new method of management, but it actually explained some of the mechanisms of how frost was occurring and why it was occurring sometimes and not other times.

"It was completely brand new research that was pie in the sky at the time and has

since led to some really large GRDC projects."

The current COGGO board consists of Mr Wilkins, company secretary Dean McKenzie and graingrowers; deputy chairman Will Carmody, Cascade and non-executive directors Barry Large, Miling, and John O'Neil, Wialki.

"We have a team of experienced people, generally ex-DPIRD senior researchers, senior consultants, and well-regarded farmers who act as a voluntary committee for COGGO," Mr Wilkins said.

"We review the research proposals that come to us.

"This year, there were about 20, and we ask each of the volunteers to cast their eyes over them, assess them, and rank them on some key criteria.

"They are freely giving up their time to the industry to help the board decide.

"As a panel, we give our rankings and opinions, and then the board meets and, using that information and advice they've given us, we make decisions."

Some of the projects that stand out for Mr Wilkins over the years involved grower groups and early breeding research.

"We funded a number of grower groups to do their local demos on canola seeding methodologies," he said.

"It's a project that pops up sporadically, and it's something that you think surely has been done to death, but as machines evolve and as you get new people coming through grower groups, it's often considered worthy and a project they're really keen on.

"The Yuna Farm Improvement Group did one of those five or six years ago, and farmers up there got a lot out of it.

"We also saw the development of some of the first speed breeding techniques in Western Australia that are now a very common technique in breeding."

Mr Wilkins said another project that the group funded in 2024 was a "bit different" but has proven popular and highly valued.



□ This year Chris Wilkins returned to the role of COGGO chairman for a second term.

"Farmanco put a project together called AgriBalance, which is about preparing people for natural disaster mental health," he said.

"It's pretty much a train the trainers exercise for professionals in agriculture, and that's deliberately really broad, because it includes early career researchers, young agronomists, people who work in banks, anyone offering a service to develop skills so they can recognise when someone they're dealing with would be well served by going the next step and talking to someone in the mental health space.

"It is common for agronomists and ag consultants and others in the professional service space in ag to be dealing with farmers who have just had a major frost or a big bushfire or lost someone in their communities.

"My day job is you've got weeds and pests and whatever and I can help you with the right choice on that as I'm in the business of providing solutions, but if we see a problem with someone's mental health, it's hard to know what to do about it with no skills, how do we know how to talk to someone about a mental health issue?"

Mr Wilkins said the workshops were held all over the Wheatbelt and were well received, and that the 2026 projects to be funded by COGGO will be announced in the coming weeks.