

Barry embraces farmer representation

JUST like his surname, Barry Large has always had a big presence in representing Western Australian growers, both at State and Federal levels. Having grown up surrounded by agriculture in the Wheatbelt and the proud owner of Moorara Farms at Miling, Mr Large says working in and supporting grower advocacy groups such as the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA (PGA) over the years has really just been an investment in his own business.

Playing an integral role in the inception of Grain Producers Australia (GPA) in 2010 after the Grains Council of Australia folded in 2008, Mr Large has been on the GPA board since it was founded and held the role of deputy chairman from 2013 until he was elected chairman of the group in September last year.

In his chat with *Farm Weekly* journalist BREE SWIFT, he encouraged all WA growers to get behind those groups that represent them so their commercial interests and the industry as a whole can continue to be protected.



QUESTION: Can you tell me about your upbringing – where did you grow up and what did your parents work as?

Answer: My parents worked for farmers and so my youth was spent growing up around agriculture and farming at Bruce Rock and Toodyay, in the WA Wheatbelt.

Q: What did you want to be when you were younger?

A: It was always my dream to be a farmer one day and provide financial security for my family.

Q: Along with Andrew Weidemann, you are one of Grain Producers Australia's remaining two founding board members.

What role did you play in the formation of Australia's peak national grain producer advocacy group?

A: After the Grains Council of Australia folded in 2008, when Australia's wheat export industry was deregulated, there was no national body to represent growers.

But we still needed a representative group to act for growers who pay compulsory levies under Federal legislation.

To fix this problem, a group of grain farmer leaders from across Australia got together over a series of national roundtable meetings and that's essentially how GPA was formed.

My role at the time representing WA growers was a responsibility I took very seriously and still do today.

GPA now has responsibilities representing all growers who pay compulsory levies to fund the Grains Research and Development Corporation, Plant Health Australia and National Residue Survey.

And we advocate other policies to deliver good outcomes for all growers, whether they're members of GPA or not, which is clearly demonstrated in our 2022 Federal Election Policy Priorities.

Our board also includes grower representatives from across the major grain producing regions of Australia, including Gerard Paganoni, our Western Region director, who farms at Broomehill.

Gerard brings his financial skills to the GPA board and he's our representative for growers, on Grain Trade

Australia's technical committee on 'Plant Breeding and Innovation'.

Having the grains committees and grower leaders of the State farming organisations as our members also provides GPA with a more inclusive and stronger grass-roots policy setting process and voice.

This empowers GPA to stand up and advocate for growers on national issues.

My role in the establishment of GPA was being part of a team of smart and committed grower leaders who made sure grain producers had this voice which we can now advocate with, on their behalf, to hold the government and other groups to account.

I'm extremely proud of this work which we achieved for growers.

Growers are fortunate that people like Andrew Weidemann and other farmer leaders persisted with this representative model that we now have today and it's continuing to evolve.

We've come a long way since then and we're continuing to get stronger, acting with a commercial and scientific focus on what's good for growers and our industry.

And we do this by keeping things simple and working on the basic motto, 'if it's good for growers it's good for GPA'.

Q: You became GPA's deputy chairman in 2013 before being elected chair in September 2021.

What are some of GPA's most significant policy priorities for the grains industry heading into next month's Federal election?

A: Every issue that our members raise for GPA to advocate is a priority, to deliver better profitability and sustainability.

We've gone through a grass roots process engaging with our members to develop our policy requests, and advocate outcomes at this year's Federal election.

Our document has 12 priority headings – and they're all priorities for growers.

But some of them, such as increasing the supply of skilled labour on grain farms at seeding and harvest times, are being felt more than others.

Reducing input costs is also criti-



▣ Miling farmer Barry Large, standing outside of Parliament House in Canberra, loves advocating for agriculture.

cally important for all growers right now.

That's why we are asking for commitments to policy initiatives to help bolster local manufacturing of chemicals, fertilisers and fuel, to mitigate supply risks and cut costs.

Digital connectivity is also a big one along with strengthening biosecurity protections and cutting freight costs.

While we're asking politicians to get behind these requests and make clear commitments, the reasoning behind them is beyond politics.

These priorities are commercially and scientifically focused, to deliver the best outcomes for growers – especially to improve our sustainability and help manage seasonal fluctuations and production risks.

Q: What are a few of the main commitments that the GPA is hoping to secure from the major political parties ahead of the 2022 Federal election?

A: We've been working for a long time now to try to secure a market study of the Australian grains supply

chain by the ACCC.

This independent analysis will allow the ACCC to use their special powers to compel information and harness expertise of the ACCC's Agriculture Unit, which was set up specifically for such purposes.

This is one of our core policy priorities and we're looking for a commitment now.

This request was formally put to the current Federal government, and Agriculture Minister David Littleproud, prior to the election.

We also put this to members of the coalition, including many in WA who understand the grains industry because it's a significant contributor to rural economies in their electorates.

To support this policy push, GPA also implemented its own evidence-gathering project during harvest, and in early 2022, interviewing a comprehensive range of industry participants and stakeholders.

A report with this evidence and analysis was also presented to the minister's office, for the government's

consideration – but we've not yet heard back on whether they've made a decision or not.

Among a range of serious issues, GPA's report found that about 25 million tonnes of grain is expected to be exported from the last harvest at a \$50p/t discount, which equates to a \$1.25 billion loss to growers.

This lost income reduces profitability, and weakens drought resilience, for producers, rural communities and economies.

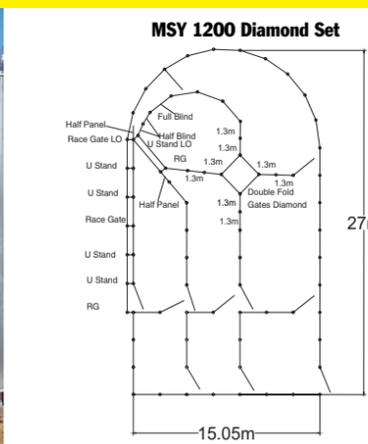
We need to know why this shortfall is happening with this in-depth analysis by the ACCC being the best way to provide these answers and solutions.

This was also the number one issue for growers raised at GPA's national harvest review meeting in January, and our policy position is shared with GrainGrowers Ltd.

This type of rigorous, independent analysis hasn't been done since the industry was deregulated in 2008 and is long overdue.

Given both national grains representative groups share the same policy

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position, it makes sense to get on with the job.

We now want to see a clear commitment made from all sides of politics during this campaign, to be proactive and do a market study, to optimise competition.

Q: Is there a party that you think would better serve the interests of Australia's agricultural industry?

A: We've seen good policy and significant outcomes delivered by all sides of politics over a long time which have benefitted grain producers, our communities and across Australian agriculture.

If we delivered a record 62mt crop last harvest, forecast at an estimated \$26b, and we still had issues with frost, labour supply, mouse plagues and weather damage impacting crop quality and value, there's still a bit of upside.

That's why this election presents a significant and timely opportunity for all sides of politics to make commitments that will help grow the grain industry's profitability and sustainability.

Some issues we also see as being bipartisan, such as protecting our agricultural sector by keeping out pests such as Khapra Beetle, which could devastate the grains sector.

That's why we want government to invest more into biosecurity protection measures.

Good political representatives will stop and ask the impacted stakeholders for their views on issues and input into policy positions, before making decisions that impact their livelihoods.

GPA's role is to continue speaking with and engaging with all sides of politics, whether we're in an election campaign or not, to help them understand the impact of their decisions on those who live with the outcome – especially grain producers and our grain farming communities.

Q: What is your favourite aspect of your role as GPA chairman?

A: Being away from my family and farm is often a challenge but the people you meet and the friends you make along the journey makes up for it a bit and is definitely an enjoyable part of the job.

When I first met Andrew Weidemann and Peter Mailler in 2008, we were attending a series of national roundtable meetings of grower leaders trying to work out a way to fill the void in national grains industry representation, after the Grains Council of Australia folded.

I'm not sure exactly when it was, but over time we became good friends and developed great mutual respect.

So you can make really good friends along the journey, not just good connections with other people who are also farmers or work in our industry.

Another enjoyable part of this job



India's Minister for Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal (left), Australia's Trade, Tourism and Investment Minister Dan Tehan and Grain Producers Australia (GPA) chairman and WA grain producer, Barry Large. Mr Large joined the round-table involving key agriculture and mining stakeholders to represent the views of Australian growers and discuss opportunities with grain trade to India.

is when we're working on a difficult issue and get a good outcome for all growers.

We're not expecting a thank you card from anyone, but at GPA we all know when we've done the right thing and that feeling is priceless.

Being good advocates, standing up for growers, also means you encounter a few bumps along the way.

If that's the price to pay for good advocacy and representation for growers, I'll pay it every day.

Q: As the chairman of a national grains advocacy group, you bear witness to the wants and needs of the sector in all of Australia's various States and territories.

A: How do you think the interests of Western Australian farmers differ from those of the rest of the country?

A: WA is predominantly an export State so the focus of our grain producers and industry is on export markets and customers, rather than a domestic market.

If you follow the commercial realities of the different supply chains in each State and ownership structures, such as CBH being a farmer owned co-op in WA, and the size of the indi-

vidual farms, then you generally get a good understanding of what makes the individual growers tick and where their priorities are on policy.

As we all know, there are also key differences with the soil types, climatic conditions and types of crops grown in different regions of Australia.

For me however, one area where WA is quite different, and it disappoints me a fair bit, is the support our growers give to representative groups such as GPA and the WAFarmers' Grains Committee and WA Grains Group who are on the GPA Policy Council.

Their leaders and professional staff do a great job and deserve more support and recognition.

I've always been involved in team sport and like playing the team game and that's why I'm a member of my farming group.

But I also see it as an investment in my business and it really is.

You speak to farmers in other States and more of them see real value in being members of their State farming organisations, as a way of getting commercial outcomes.

It's a way of getting the hands of the government out of your pocket

and calling out others who want to take a few dollars along the way.

We need to support those who support us in WA, rather than find one or two things wrong or something that we don't agree with in the system and use it as an excuse to do nothing.

It's the old saying, 'ask not what grower representation can do for you, ask what you can do for grower representation'.

If we're all on board with GPA, working as a team, that gives us a much stronger voice to hold others to account.

If you've got a good argument or a great idea, then stand up and prosecute it with GPA.

That's the way to get it heard at the highest level and take action.

Q: You have owned Moorara Farms for the past 30 years, growing hay, cereals, lupins and oilseeds.

A: How has the farm and your role in the business changed in that time?

A: My main focus in the early days at Moorara Farms was running sheep but some tough times and seasons taught me the importance of diversifying.

Grains are also now a big focus and

we still run a few sheep, with about 10,000 head before lambs.

Q: Is it a family run business? Do you see your kids one day running the farm?

A: I have five children – Kirsty, Amy, Courtney, Braxton and Mila.

I've always encouraged them to be farmers, if they want to be, but most of all I encourage my children to follow their dreams.

If they want to run the farm one day and that's their dream, then I'm good with that too.

Q: What have been the most significant challenges you have personally faced as a farmer?

A: There's no doubt we all face the perils of difficult seasons and production challenges and market forces that we can't control.

If there's anything we can do at GPA and through my role, to help make life easier for farmers to help deal with these difficult times, especially droughts, that's what it's all about.

Q: Have you drawn on your personal experiences as a farmer when representing the sector on various agricultural advocacy boards and committees? How so?

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A: It's always about being fair and equitable with making decisions and having empathy.

Asking yourself what's important for growers is the guiding principle for GPA and always will be.

Biosecurity for example, and our role with Plant Health Australia – it's not just about keeping Khapra Beetle out because it sounds like a good idea or we need to tick a bureaucratic box in some meeting.

When I'm at the table speaking about making decisions for growers, the government and industry people have to listen to what's being said, because they know it's coming from the heart, and it's honest.

They know and understand that I'm the only one in the room who'll be impacted if this tiny pest gets into Australia and shuts down our grain markets.

That's why we keep pushing them to do more for growers, and protect growers, because we're 100pc invested in the outcome.

Q: Being a farmer is a full-time job in itself.

What was it that initially prompted and then pushed you to also advocate for the industry in your numerous committee and leadership roles?

A: Someone once said to me, 'if you're going to complain about a problem and then not do something about solving it, you deserve what you get'.

That's the way we look at it at GPA.

It's about being responsible and doing a job.

If you're not a member of GPA and you're complaining about a problem, then you're not contributing to the solution.

It's that simple.

The world is run by those who turn up, so I turned up about 20 years ago and I'm still going and loving it.

If you're a grower and you've got an issue with the GRDC getting \$260m worth of grower levies this year, the best way to really have an influence on how they spend it is at the GPA policy table.

People don't value what they get for free so being part of GPA and the grass roots system we work in, has real value.

For me it's also a great way of giving something back to our industry.

Q: Throughout your career you have specialised in biosecurity policy and sat on the Biosecurity Council of Western Australia since January 2013.

From your experience, what do you think has been the biggest threat to WA's biosecurity over the past decade?

A: The biggest threat to not only WA's biosecurity system but the



□ Barry Large with wife Tina, and children Braxton and Mila at their farm, Moorara at Miling.

national system is grower complacency.

If you want better outcomes for biosecurity to protect your farm, then get behind your farm groups and farm leaders so we can push governments and others harder, to protect our farms.

Khapra Beetle keeps me awake at night, and the damage it could cause.

But the more support we have for GPA, the better we'll all sleep knowing we're putting our resources into stopping it getting into Australia.

Q: Who has been the biggest influence in your life?

A: That's easy – my father Bob and family who taught me to be true to myself and respect others.

Andrew Weidemann has also been a great mentor and leader I've respected working with at GPA.

Q: Of what professional achievement are you most proud?

A: Definitely my involvement with GPA and working with other people who I've had immense respect for and share a similar view of the world.

And that is, we're there to represent real growers and get real results and it's not about personal gain, only about farmers.

Q: Of what personal achievement are you most proud?

A: My children and my family, most definitely.

Q: You were the vice chairman of PGA's grains committee from January 2005 – January 2012.

How do you think the organisation can further evolve so that it continues to serve the interests of WA farmers?

A: My time with the PGA was invaluable because we worked on some significant agricultural policy issues and achieved some great results working together.

This experience taught me the importance of playing a role alongside some very good policy minds.

Learning how they responded to different issues and the strategies they used and connections they had, in representing growers with passion and commitment, still serves me well in my role at GPA.

Looking at the future, there's great opportunity for all grain producer groups and others to collaborate on issues and run campaigns with a team attitude and approach.

How PGA decides to evolve and where they see the best value for their members in the future, is ultimately for them to decide.

But what I can say is that today, in 2022, there's a lot more that brings all growers together on national policy than divides us – especially the need to fight against our common enemies.

If we're going to have multiple

groups with different structures, we all need to respect each other and find ways of working together and using our collective resources to get the best outcomes for growers.

This is especially true for the responsibilities GPA has under Federal legislation on biosecurity, research, development and extension and chemical use/market access.

Politics is the art of compromise, so we all need to seriously consider how to compromise and collaborate on issues to optimise our powers.

If we're going to expect politicians to rise above their differences and be bipartisan with their decision-making on issues that impact our lives and communities, and the business of growing and selling grain, especially issues such as biosecurity, then we need to do the same.

We need to walk the walk and talk the talk if Canberra is really going to take us all seriously.

But if nothing changes, we'll continue getting the outcomes we deserve, with nobody to blame but ourselves.

Our door is always open to the PGA and other groups to sit down and work out how we can use our resources collectively, to get the best outcomes for growers.

This is essentially the representative model GPA already operates under, with each of the State Grains

Committees represented on GPA's Policy Council, providing the grass roots views and voice of their members, into our strategic advocacy and policies.

We always keep it simple and grower focussed at GPA and the constant feedback is, this approach delivers great value for those growers who value their paid memberships.

Q: If you weren't working in the agricultural industry, what do you think you would be doing?

A: Before becoming a farmer, I worked as a stock agent for eight years and really enjoyed auctioning and selling so perhaps something in that line of work because you meet so many great people.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: Horse racing and skipping my boat with family and friends on trips to Rottnest Island.

Q: What is your next goal?

A: Live a long and healthy, happy life, see my children grow up to live their dreams.

Q: What is something people might not know about you?

A: I'm a big softie really and very caring and concerned for those closest to me.

□ To see Grain Producers Australia election priorities go to grainproducers.com.au/2022-election-priorities



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