

Australian cotton and Australian wool - natural partners

Adam Kay, CEO, Cotton Australia

Cotton Australia recently joined forces with CRDC and Australian Wool Innovation to launch the United Nations International Year of Natural Fibres. At this launch, Australian cotton and wool were recognised internationally for the natural part they play in clothing the world and providing tens of thousands of jobs in the process.

The location of the launch at the National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour, Sydney was very poignant as it was in nearby Port Jackson that the First Fleet arrived in 1788 armed with cottonseed and sheep. Since then, wool and cotton have played an intrinsic part in shaping Australia's agricultural history and the launch was a timely occasion to acknowledge the work of the industries, and all that is good about natural fibres.

Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke joined the Director-General of the United Nations Dr Jacques Diouf, Regional Rep-



Adam Kay.

representative for the United Nations High Commissioner Richard Towle, Assistant Food and Agriculture Organisation Representative for the Pacific Islands Paul Tomané, Australian Wool Innovation CEO

Brenda McGahan, Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay, cotton and wool growers and other key stakeholder groups who were present to launch this important event.

Dr Jacques Diouf, who was in Sydney as a guest of Minister Burke, described the International Year of Natural Fibres as a chance to focus our attention on the importance of the natural fibre to our planet's past and future. Dr Diouf also pointed out that in a time of increasing concern for global sustainability, both cotton and wool are prime examples of living in tune with the environment. The fact is that both cotton and wool are free from reliance on petro-chemicals, unlike manmade fibres.

Minister Burke paid tribute to Australia's wool and cotton producers, highlighting the fact that we are world leaders in innovation and productivity. He also stressed that both the cotton and wool industries have helped to shape regional communities and have underpinned the growth of the national economy. Minister Burke drew attention to the dramatic improvement in how both industries have worked to become more environmentally sustainable, and praised the cotton industry's efforts in water use efficiency. Minister Burke also emphasised that the Govern-
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Tony Burke.

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ment would continue to work with the industry this year to raise awareness of the importance of sustainably produced natural fibres, and to promote demand for Australian produce.

Like agriculture, textiles have been a fundamental part of human life since the dawn of human civilisation. Today, natural fibres still hold a dynamic market share and as they are biodegradable, renewable and have energy costs far less than those of synthetics, natural fibres also contribute to a greener planet. In a normal year in Australia, cotton is one of the highest rural exporter earners with 98 per cent of cotton grown in Australia exported generating more than \$1 billion in export earnings.

The launch was a key opportunity to draw attention to the significant advances the Australian cotton industry has made through the years. Through innovative farming practices we are the most water efficient cotton industry in the world, and we have managed to reduce pesticide use in the cotton industry by over 85 per cent over the past decade. Furthermore, the Australian cotton industry produces three times the global average and is the highest global yielder.



Australian Wool Innovation CEO Brenda McGahan and Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay at the launch of United Nations International Year of Natural Fibres.

Another point raised at the launch was the socio-economic importance of both the wool and cotton industries to the health of our regional communities. The Australian cotton industry employs over 10,000 people and is the lifeblood of many rural centres, with the majority of Australian cotton grown on family farms.

Cotton Australia and the CRDC were

very pleased to have had the opportunity to partner with key wool industry stakeholders to launch the International Year of Natural Fibres, and to discover our shared goals in promoting the importance of natural fibres. We look forward to collaborating with the wool industry again in the future, and the mutual benefits that will come from this relationship.

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