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Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

The idea for the article in this issue on Geoff Brown was triggered by his well deserved Honorary Order of Australia awarded earlier this year. Geoff's story is a chronicle of the modern Australian cotton industry since its formative years in the Namoi Valley in the 1960s.

The road between then and now has been littered with many obstacles and setbacks as well as triumphs. At the moment we are going through a decidedly difficult period with one of the worst droughts on record, coming only 10 years after another one of the worst droughts on record.

Geoff's story puts some of our current problems into perspective. In the early 1970s, the industry was just about wiped out by successive years of floods and huge insect pressure combined with insecticide resistance. For those of us who weren't around in 1972, we can only imagine the doom and gloom of that period.

But adversity is a great teacher and the industry came out of that crisis bigger and stronger, just as it has after every crisis since then. And just as it will after the current drought is a distant memory.

The difference this time is that not only is the cotton industry one of the main victims of the drought, but in many quarters cotton growers are being blamed for the drought, or at least the lack of water in the Murray-Darling. Commentators with absolutely no idea of the pain suffered by irrigators in recent years to provide environmental flows in the river, now want to ditch the whole Basin Plan – as if our western river systems provided a land of milk and honey in their natural state. The truth is that the natural state of the Darling is to run bone dry in a drought, just as it is now. Headwater storages and diversions even-out the flow and delay the drying-out. But the only way to get more water through the system in a prolonged drought is to turn the tap back on – and that is in the hands of a greater power than any of us.

The current water-related criticism of the industry is notable for some of the ridiculous notions being kicked around – such as banning the export of cotton from Australia.

Perhaps we have always had dumb politicians and journalists and the modern age of Twitter has just enabled them to come out of the woodwork. In the old days, the cranks would stand on a soap box in Sydney's Domain to harangue the amused spectators with their radical views. Now, they can sip a latte in a trendy cafe in Brunswick or Balmain while using their smart phone to spread their half-baked opinions which they confuse with facts.

They are either deliberately deceptive or they lack the intellectual capacity to understand even a moderately complicated argument.

Anyway, time to get off my soapbox. I look forward to catching up with as many of you as possible at the Cotton Collective in Griffith in July – unless a flood cuts off all the roads.

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