Let Our Co-operative Spirit Stand

A centenary history of resilience and adaptation in the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia 1919 – 2019

Bruce Baskerville

Foreword by the Hon Robert S French AC

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Cover image: 'Enjoy Sunny West Butter', South West Co-Operative Dairy Products Limited factory in Harvey, producing Sunny West brand butter, 16 March 1934, Illustrations Ltd Collection, 013345PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia. Background image: 'Property of WD Johnson, near Bruce Rock, 1915, EL Mitchell Collection, 229208PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia.

Title: from speech by Matthew Padbury, Chairman of Westralian Farmers' Ltd, to foundation meeting of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia, 3 July 1919.

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Foreword

This book, which celebrates the centenary of the Federation of Western Australian Cooperatives, could be viewed as an institutional version of the many local histories which give rich granular detail to the history of Western Australia. However, as the pages of this enjoyable work show, its story is presented on a much larger canvas.

The history of the co-operative movement of which the Federation, now known as Cooperatives WA, is part can be traced back to early forms of co-operatives such as the Shore Porters' Society, formed in Aberdeen in 1498 and the Fenwick Weavers Society, formed in Fenwick in Scotland in 1769. However, the commencement of the modern cooperative movement is generally marked as the establishment, in 1844 of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers by 28 weavers employed in cotton mills in Rochdale. That was a consumer co-operative — its object being to use the collective economic power of its members to buy food and goods at affordable prices. Rochdale began a global phenomenon. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of co-operatives not only in the United Kingdom but in many other countries including Australia. The earliest known co-operative in Australia was the Brisbane Co-operative Society, established in 1859.

Co-operatives in Western Australia date back to 1868 when staff of the P&O Company in Albany formed a co-operative society to purchase goods wholesale from Melbourne and sell them out of their own store in Albany to reduce their living costs. There followed the emergence of a considerable number of farmers' and producers' co-operatives. A leading figure in the movement and in Western Australian history generally was Charles Harper MLA, who was also the proprietor of the *West Australian* newspaper.

An important development in the history was the establishment in 1914 of Westralian Farmers Ltd, which continued as a most significant actor in the co-operative movement in Western Australia until it listed on the Stock Exchange in 1984 and became Wesfarmers Ltd.

3 July 1919 saw the creation of the Federation from a large number of co-operative companies which had been established initially by Westralian Farmers Ltd as a network of local co-operative units acting as its sub-agents around the State. The history of the Federation is embedded in, and clearly affected by, the social, economic and political history of the State and the nation, and by global events, including the Great Depression of 1929. The perspectives of the book, local, national and global, are enlivened by its reference to the personalities and leaders of the co-operative movement in Western Australia over the last century.

A significant international event was Britain's decision to enter the European Common Market. Rumours of that possibility preceded its realisation by many years. Awareness of Britain's new posture led to an enhanced attention to trade opportunities in our region. There is a photograph in the text which makes the point. It shows a number of participants in the South East Asian Co-operatives Congress held in Kuala Lumpur in January 1958. They include ET Loton as an Australian delegate and Mrs Loton.

Diversification of engagement responding to social and economic change in a variety of ways is part of the history of the Federation — engagement with credit unions — with the fishing industry — with indigenous communities and with young people. The movement of women to leadership roles which began in the 1970s was another significant indicator of social change. Environmental issues, which obviously had practical significance for producers, started to appear on the Federation's radar at that time.

The withdrawal of Westralian Farmers Ltd from its close administrative support of the co-operative movement was a blow which 'severely impacted the Federation'. Difficult years followed but they passed and the Federation came back.

At the State level, regulatory legislation was modernised and eventually put on a national footing. By 2018, Co-Operatives WA had returned to an operating surplus for the first time in many years. It had a close relationship with the Business School at The University of Western Australia. The Executive Education Program, in which Co-operatives WA had participated, was to be rolled out nationally.

The book offers a history of the Federation drawn on a large canvas. It is a lively, and at times warts and all, account of an important player in the State's social and economic development. The Federation has had its ups and downs. Its resilience against adverse fortunes, its vibrancy and the optimism which this centenary history reflects are evidence of its continuing value to the Western Australian community. Most importantly, it is being driven by individuals of the kind who have driven it from its beginnings to where it is today.

I congratulate Bruce Baskerville on this work and Co-operatives WA and The University of Western Australia for bringing it to fruition.

Robert S French AC
Chancellor, The University of Western Australia

Preface

The year 2019 marks the centenary of the formation of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia, now trading as Co-operatives WA. This volume has been produced to celebrate the anniversary, and mark over one hundred years of achievement by the co-operatives movement in Western Australia.

This is a history of the Co-operative Federation, not Westralian Farmers' Ltd (later Wesfarmers) or its other larger members, nor the various national and international co-operative bodies that have come and gone. They are all entangled in the historical fabric of the co-operative movement, but the Federation has its own distinct story, and this book draws out that particular thread from the warp and weft of co-operation, a thread that in many ways is a story of continuing, sometimes hesitant, adaptation in a continually changing world.

The author, Bruce Baskerville, has a long record of researching the ways in which old institutions are transplanted and adapted to new environments, especially in settler societies. A key focus of his work has been common lands and commonage systems in Western Australia, New South Wales and Norfolk Island, and the ways in which local communities have managed commons and survived, occasionally thrived, in changing circumstances. His interest in this specialised field of historical research has given him an abiding interest in community and co-operative models of self-governance, and the historical bases for such models.

It was through researching and writing this history that he also came to know a little more about one of his great-grandfathers, Frederick George Anderson of Whitton Farm, Walkaway, and just what it meant for him to be one of the co-operators, depicted overleaf with his fellow directors, who contributed to and shaped Western Australia's distinctive co-operative movement.

Victoria District Co-operative Flour Milling Co Ltd, Board of Directors, Geraldton 1923
Author's collection

Acknowledgements

Although this book only has one author's name, it has been written with the help and assistance of many people.

Within the co-operatives movement, Peter Wells, Secretary of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia, or Co-operatives WA, has freely made available all the records from the Federation's archives, used his network of contacts to provide additional information and support, and answered my numerous technical questions.

Members of the Federation Council provided ideas and discussion for the book when it was still really an idea, or at least, not much more than a powerpoint presentation.

Two former members of the Council, Frank O'Connor and Trent Bartlett, very generously shared their time for interviews and memories of the Federation's more recent history, and discussion of co-operatives, co-operation and co-operators.

Professor Tim Mazzarol of the Centre for Entrepreneurial Management & Innovation and of the Co-operative Enterprise Research Unit, and Associate Professor Andrea Gaynor of the Centre for Western Australian History, both at The University of Western Australia, reviewed drafts, suggested other sources and research materials and generally brought rigour to the research and arguments advanced in the book.

The work of the late Dr Gary Lewis (1943-2019), cited several times, was ground-breaking in providing a continental-scale framework for the histories of co-operation in Australia.

The professional staff of the State Library of Western Australia, the Royal Western Australian Historical Society and the National Trust of Western Australia have been ever-helpful in locating historical images and copyright holders. The professional staff at the State Records Office of Western Australia were very helpful in locating records from the office of the former Registrar of Friendly Societies, and suggesting 'work arounds' for missing files.

Finally, all the members of the co-operatives movement in Western Australia who, through their enduring passion for co-operation and determination to ensure the continuity of their movement, in the face of numerous vicissitudes, have given the Co-operative Federation and the broader co-operatives movement the vitality that has ensured its success during its first century.

Introduction

The modern co-operative movement can trace its origins back to the foundation of the Rochdale Society in England in 1844. Today it is a global movement with co-operative and mutual enterprises found in almost every country and across most industry sectors.

Since the nineteenth century co-operative enterprises have been founded on seven guiding principles. These are

- voluntary and open membership,
- democratic member control,
- member economic participation,
- autonomous and independent organisations,
- education and training,
- co-operation among co-operatives, and
- a concern for the community.

These principles have changed little over the past 170 years and remain central to the co-operative ethos, although as this story shows, they have been interpreted in various ways, and received more or less emphasis at different times. The history of co-operation in Western Australia is replete with references to Rochdale as well as Raiffeisen, the two significant founding movements among nineteenth-century co-operators in England and Germany. The interested reader will find the characteristics of each spelt out in the glossary.

Let Our Co-operative Spirit Stand covers the early years between 1868 and 1918 when co-operatives were first formed in Western Australia. To begin with, these were consumer co-operatives and then fruit grower co-operatives, but with the adoption of co-operatives legislation the formation of producer co-operatives took-off, especially in the latter part of the Great War years.

The Co-operative Federation was established in 1919, and the second wave of co-operatives it fostered dominated the towns and villages of the emerging wheatbelt, as did the three 'big men' of the movement, Walter Harper, Thomas Bath and William Johnson. After World War Two, as the world economy changed, especially with Britain's entry into the common market in 1973, the co-operative movement became more diverse although the Federation long-remained a stronghold of grain producer co-operatives. The withdrawal of Wesfarmers, the 'parent company' for many of the older co-operatives, from the co-operative movement in 1985 disrupted many long-time relationships. However, after a period of difficulties, the Federation and its bigger members, notably Co-operative Bulk Handling, the Capricorn Society and Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative, actively re-engaged with a revitalising national co-operatives movement and a new sense of purpose developed as the twenty-first century unfolded. Now, a rich and complex history gives opportunities for both reflection and celebration in 2019, at the end of the Federation's first century as it looks forwards to its second hundred.

Research into the histories of co-operatives and the co-operative movement in Western Australia has been limited in scope, and mainly confined to histories of the relatively large co-operatives and former co-operatives such as Wesfarmers, Co-Operative Bulk Handling and the Grain Pool of WA (originally the Wheat Pool of WA). Apart from some limited examples, such as the Capricorn Society and Mt Barker Co-operative, the histories of the small producer and consumer co-operatives that have formed the numerically largest group of co-operatives during most of the twentieth-century in Western Australia have not received much attention, nor has their sometimes fractious history of working together to achieve collective goals. The local co-operatives, however, always formed the bulk of the Federation's members and made the co-operative movement a real, lived experience for many country people as well as many metropolitan residents who frequented the larger consumer co-operatives.

This book brings these co-operatives and their Federation into Western Australian history.

Early Co-operation, 1868 – 1918 | "Self-Help is True Help"[1]

Self-Help is True Help, Help Yourselves by Dealing with the Co-operative Society.[2]
Wanted: A Good Cook, at once; must be sober. Apply Co-operative Boarding House, Rocky Bay, North Fremantle.[3]
The Northam Co-operative Carriage and Implement Works, Vehicles of every description made to order, Horse-shoeing a Specialty, Funerals Conducted on the most Moderate Terms.[4]
The K & B Co-operative Society Ltd, Applications for Shares received at any time, Try Our Bread.[5]
Kalamunda Fruitgrowers Co-operative Ltd, Fresh Fruit from the Hill Gardens daily, Cool Summer Drinks.[6]

Advertisements such as these, offering a bewildering array of goods and services, often in curious combinations, proliferated in the newspapers and magazines of Western Australia around the turn of the twentieth century. The one thing they had in common was that they were being sold by a new form of business, the co-operative, or at least by businesses that claimed to be co-operative enterprises of some sort. This was the time of the gold rushes when the colonial population quadrupled in a decade, with the Goldfields and metropolitan areas growing rapidly. The expansion of the railways was underway, at the same time as the wheatbelt was starting to be systematically developed. Western Australia was booming, and with it came shortages and bottlenecks, rising prices in the shops and rising rents and housing shortages. People were looking for alternatives, and co-operatives were being touted as one answer. At the same time, other new forms of mutual enterprise were also being experimented with, such as provident societies and building societies. The common feature distinguishing them from a private company was their objective of providing services to members, and investing surpluses back into those services rather than distributing profits.

Colonial-era co-operatives

The first moves to establish co-operative societies in the colony took place during an earlier period of great economic change, the later years of the convict period.[7]

The earliest report of a functioning co-operative in the colony was in 1868 when staff of the P&O Company in Albany sought a pay rise because of rising living costs. The Company agent, William Clifton, instead advised them to form a co-operative society and purchase goods wholesale from Melbourne and then retail them in their own store in Albany to reduce their living costs.[8] Shares were sold, a store commenced, and within a year it was reported to be operating profitably while reducing the cost of goods in the town to a 'moderate price'. This was followed by the formation of a co-operative store in Toodyay, although it is not clear how long this lasted.[9] In 1869 the Perth Co-operative Society Limited was formed, following several meetings in the Perth Mechanic's Institute, "to supply provisions and goods to shareholders at the lowest rate consistent with reasonable interests on the capital invested".[10] Its five directors were either clerks

or artisans, engaged with several community groups, and under the chairmanship of Mr EH Laurence who was soon to become Resident Magistrate at Geraldton.[11] The Perth Co-operative Society operated for ten years, mainly trading in drapery and clothing, before voluntarily winding up in 1879.[12] The Northam Co-operative Flour Mill Co Ltd was formed in Northam in 1873, purchased an existing mill and operated it for two years until, after a series of industrial accidents, it closed in 1875.[13] The mill was then sold to a new owner and continued to operate.[14]

The common factors in the formation of these earliest colonial co-operatives was finding a way around what were considered the exorbitant prices charged by storekeepers, the suspected collusion by storekeepers to raise prices, and the widespread practice by storekeepers of paying their staff in store credit rather than cash. The co-operative shareholders were clerks, artisans and employees in the towns and small 'cockatoo farmers', as they were described. One of the claimed benefits of the Albany Co-operative Society was an increase in employees generally being paid in cash, with flow-on benefits in the whole Plantagenet district. The Northam mill co-operative was somewhat different, being formed by local businessmen, and it is unclear why it failed.

Although no further co-operatives were formed in the colony for another decade, when they did take-off in the 1890s the impetus came, separately, from these same two groups, town artisans and workers and small rural farmers. However, unlike the earlier co-operatives, the second wave of co-operative formation followed two gradually diverging pathways.

Snapshot | Albany Co-op Soc, 1868 – 1903

Western Australia's first known co-op was incorporated in 1868 as a joint stock company with a capital of £1,000 in 100 shares of £2 each. It operated until October 1883 when it was wound up because of debts and 'achieving its purpose of lowering prices and increasing competition in Albany'. The co-op stock was sold at auction in 1884, and then its 'commodious stone and brick' store on a freehold lot in Spencer, Earl and Frederick streets was sold in 1885.

In 1898 the Co-op was re-established as a registered company with a nominal capital of £1,000, in 1000 shares of £1 each and rented premises on Frederick Street. However, only 100 shares were taken up, and despite Miss Mary Hill making several large loans to it, the business did not succeed and collapsed after the manager left. A lengthy and acrimonious court case followed in 1903 over claims and counter-claims between the directors and manager over various financial practices. It was an ignominious end to co-operation on Albany's high street.

Farmer or producer co-operatives

The 1890s was a time of great ferment in the development of the rural sector, when either grain or dairy or wool or even fruit or some other crop could have become the main agricultural industry, and many small local producer organisations were being formed

and re-formed.[15] This was resolved in favour of wheat after 1907, but fruit growers were optimistic for success.[16]

The principal mover in the farmer co-operative movement was Charles Harper MLA of 'Woodbridge', near Guildford, and the Swan District Vine & Fruit Growers' Association (SDV&FGA). Harper was born and grew up in Toodyay and presumably knew of the 1868 attempt to start a co-operative there. Although not 'cockatoo farmers', these budding vignerons and orchardists practiced intensive production on relatively small holdings concentrated in a few well-watered districts. The SDV&FGA was formed in 1893 at a meeting in the Perth Stock Exchange convened by Mr LL Cowan, who was employed by the *West Australian* newspaper (of which Charles Harper was the proprietor) to travel through the colony's vine and fruit growing districts to report upon and assist in their horticultural development.[17] From his observations, he concluded the best way ahead was for the producers to form themselves into voluntary associations to supplement their individual and common endeavours.

'Woodbridge' at Guildford, c1900, seat of the Harper family, and birthplace of organised co-operative thinking and practice in Western Australia.
5790B, courtesy State Library of Western Australia and National Trust WA

The key aims of the associations, said Cowan, should be circulating knowledge of horticultural practices, wine making and fruit preservation, obtaining State support for the industry, preventing the spread of pests and fungal diseases, packing and marketing fruit crops and developing a wine cask-making industry, all tasks that no individual producer could carry out. To that end, Cowan spent much of the year canvassing and forming similar associations in Toodyay, Northam, Wellington (Bunbury), Murray (Pinjarra) and the Great Southern (Katanning). The Murray District V&FGA included Mrs Eliza Fawcett and Miss Margaret Alderson in its inaugural committee, making them the earliest known women to be involved at a management level in the emerging rural co-operative movement.

Cowan's endeavours culminated in an inaugural Agricultural Conference held in Perth Town Hall over three days in April 1893 attended by all the new Vine & Fruit Grower associations as well as other agricultural bodies. The conference had several far-reaching consequences, including a commitment by the colonial government to actively work for agricultural development and education.[18]

Harper had achieved his initial objective of having the colonial government take the horticultural industries seriously as part of the broader agricultural sector. At the more grandly named 'Pastoral, Agricultural, Horticultural and Vine and Fruit-growers' Association Conference', held in May 1894 in the new Bureau of Agriculture rooms (established as a result of the 1893 conference), Harper was the conference chairman, and he began pressing the case for co-operation.[19] He divided the conference into four key topics: education about soil culture, warfare against noxious weeds, transport and safe-keeping of produce, and co-operation among producers. On the fourth day of the conference, Harper spoke extensively on 'Co-operation and Credit Banks', moving a motion that efforts should be made to develop the principles of co-operation, especially credit-banks'.[20] His motion was enthusiastically carried, and a committee appointed to pursue the matter. Harper described the Raiffeisen co-operative banks of Germany and Austria, based on South Australian newspaper reports and discussions he had held. He argued these financed local farmers without loading them up with debts, and operated co-operative stores for farmers to purchase goods cheaply. Where there were Raiffeisen banks there were also insurance, dairy, hop growing, vigneron and other producer co-operatives, and the numbers of middlemen were reduced. These co-operatives were run along democratic lines, their members all lived locally, and shares were limited in number, cheap and could be paid by instalments. Shareholders received no cash benefits but instead cheap credit and affordable prices in co-op stores, and in years when the co-operative's income was greater than needed to maintain a reserve fund, investment was made into public works that benefited members.

These are features familiar in co-operatives today, but in mid-1890s Western Australia they seemed radical and even utopian. While William Loton MLA questioned the idea, others were won over. Walter Padbury said the "co-operative system was undoubtedly the best way of working", while the Rev Claires of Northam "professed to be a thorough believer in the co-operative principle". Alexander Richardson MLA said he was "struck with the fact that no English community had adopted the German system. It might be well for Western Australia to set an example to the other colonies". Harper, as conference chair, chairman of the Bureau of Agriculture and chairman of the committee set up to look at co-operatives, was now well placed to bring about change.

Co-operatives became something of an election issue for the first time at the 1894 Legislative Assembly elections when Mr HC Cooke, candidate for Northam, stated he was "strongly in favour of the co-operative system in which the producer and the consumer could be brought closely together without the assistance of the middlemen (applause)".[21] Several other candidates also made statements more or less in favour of co-operation.[22] At this point, the early formation of co-operatives moved from the country to the towns.

Store or consumer co-operatives

At the same time as the farmers were debating the pros and cons of co-operatives, the labour movement in the towns, especially on the Goldfields, was coming to a similar point from another direction. The 1894 conference of the Trades & Labour Council held in Fremantle debated a motion to remove a tax on livestock, which was claimed to inflate the price of meat by 150%. One option was for butchers to establish a store on the co-operative system, as they had done in Adelaide, which had seen the price of meat halve while the co-operative still made a profit on sales.[23] The following year at a public meeting in Perth to protest the high price of meat it was agreed to support the Co-operative Butchering Society in its efforts to establish butcher shops.[24]

Donkey team moving a building 22 kilometres from Malcolm to Gwalia to be used by the Gwalia-Leonora Industrial Co-operative 'Thrifty Store', c1910
Sons of Gwalia Series, 212079PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

While nothing seemed to come from the Trades & Labour Council meeting, agitation grew louder on the Goldfields, and it was announced and widely reported in the Western Australian press that delegates from three co-operatives in Manchester and one in Glasgow would soon be visiting the eastern colonies in Australia to develop direct trade ties.[25] A public meeting in the Lumpers' Union Rooms in Fremantle on the cost of bread discussed the concept of a co-operative bakery, with much debate over the co-operative principle of one vote per member, and allowing for members to have a monthly credit account as lumpers were paid monthly. The meeting finally agreed to establish the Fremantle Co-operative Distribution Society.[26] Determining what was a co-operative occupied several subsequent meetings, at which the principle of one member one vote was reaffirmed and advice was received from the Registrar of Friendly Societies that, as the rules of a co-operative society could not be registered under present legislation, the Attorney-

General might be able to grant some sort of permit for a temporary registration.[27] After some delay, the Society approached the Fremantle area MLAs, Elias Solomon, William Marmion and Matthew Moss, to lobby the Attorney-General to introduce legislation to provide for the registration of co-operatives.[28]

The problem with establishing a consumer co-operative on a legal basis did not seem to trouble the Murray District vignerons and orchardists. At almost the same time they advertised that the Murray Farmers Vine & Fruit Growers' Co-operative Society would be commencing a vine and fruit tree pruning contest, had issued tenders for the supply in bulk of bone dust for fertilizing corn crops, and now had 50 members and was operating on co-operative principles.[29] Meanwhile, the Fremantle Co-operative Distribution Society continued to meet and raise funds, writing to labour organizations about the benefits of co-operation, and urging Matthew Moss MLA to introduce a bill for registering co-operatives.[30] It held a mass public meeting on Fremantle Esplanade to explain and debate co-operation, tracing the origins of the movement back to the Rochdale Co-operative in England.[31] Moss introduced to Parliament a Provident Societies Bill in September 1896, modelled on Victorian legislation, but it was shelved by the Attorney-General the next month with a promise to return with a bill based on the English act which he considered more modern and up-to-date.[32] The Fremantle Co-operative Distribution Society, after hearing an address from the manager of the Ipswich Co-operative Society in Queensland, then decided to register as a company under the *Companies Act 1893*, as well as seek pamphlets and catalogues from the Manchester Wholesale Co-operative Society (CWS) in England to demonstrate how their co-operative could work.[33] There were continuing attempts to form consumer co-operatives, mainly in Goldfields towns and mainly in butchery, over the next few years but none came to fruition, with the lack of a secure regulatory structure seeming to be the main obstacle, as well as the transitory character of the Goldfields population.

The struggle for a secure framework

In 1897 the now-annual Producer's Conference, perhaps provoked by the shelving of Moss' bill, again turned to co-operation, and resolved after much debate about co-operative wineries led by the Toodyay V&FGA, to ask the Government to foster co-operative principles and make resources available to the Bureau of Agriculture to research the most successful examples of co-operation.[34] A few months later, a large meeting was held in York to form the "first Farmers' Co-operative Society in WA" to bring producer and consumer closer together and establish places for selling farm produce.[35] The meeting agreed to form a co-operative, named the Eastern Districts Farmers Union. This incurred the displeasure of the Northam merchants, who argued farmers were neither naturally co-operative nor experienced in business management, the merchants had better access to distribution networks, and co-operation would not work in sparsely-settled areas. Co-operation was, the *Northam Advertiser* concluded, "a snare and a delusion".[36]

Nevertheless, the Fremantle Co-operative Society succeeded in being registered under the *Companies Act 1893* in July 1897.[37] It thus became the third registered co-operative formed in Western Australia since the Albany and Perth co-operative societies in 1868 and 1869. By December 1897 it had commenced operating a bakery in Fremantle.[38] A re-formed

Albany Co-operative Society followed suit and registered under the Companies Act in 1898.[39] However, this adaptation of the co-operatives model did not please everyone, and debate about the merits and faults of co-operatives continued across the Western Australian press. A need was becoming evident for new, more appropriate forms of corporate and communal organization, of which the formation of co-operatives was but one example. Another, for instance, was the regulation of voluntary associations that began with the *Associations Incorporation Act 1895*, one of the first such pieces of legislation in Australia.[40]

Towards the end of 1897 the Government announced it would be introducing bills for registering trade unions and for registering provident and co-operative societies.[41] The bill had been drafted by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, following "chiefly the latest English legislation", but an innovative feature was that all property would be vested in the co-operative society as a body corporate rather that individual trustees, as was the case with most commercial bodies corporate.[42] However, despite these promising signs, by 1899 the bill had still not been introduced to parliament.[43] Finally, in the September 1901 parliamentary session Walter James, a minister-without-portfolio, introduced a bill, saying it was "almost a copy of the Imperial Acts of 1893 and 1894", and was the response to bodies wanting to form and register co-operative societies.[44]

Unfortunately for co-operators, the new State parliament differed from the old colonial parliament. There was much uncertainty over State and Federal roles in the first decade after federation and constant changes in the ministry. Members for both rural and mining seats, such as Frederick Piesse (Williams) and Albert Thomas (Dundas), questioned the need for the 1901 bill, with it eventually being referred to a committee for further consideration. The bill, now titled the Co-operative and Provident Societies Bill, was bought back to the parliament in October 1902, but not debated until August 1903 when Walter James, by now premier, argued that it was the same as the 1901 bill based on the 1893 English legislation and should be passed.[45] In response to questions he stated that ninety-percent of companies formed as co-operatives were too small for the complexities of the Companies Act, and he had overcome the objections in 1901 from members who mistakenly thought it was some sort of labour control legislation. Labor members Thomas Bath (Hannans) and William Johnson (Kalgoorlie) contributed to the debate. Bath, concerned that friendly societies and trade unions were beset by problems with "slipshod accounts and faulty audits" succeeded in adding requirements for a schedule of model rules to be included, and Johnson added provisions to allow State-appointed public auditors to audit the accounts for co-operatives to reduce such costs for them.[46] Finally, on 13 August 1903 the bill was passed by parliament. It received Royal assent on 8 September, and came into effect on 1 January 1904. It had been 35 years since the first co-operatives were formed in Albany, Toodyay and Perth, and had taken seven years for co-operative legislation to pass through the parliament.

Unfortunately, it had come too late for the historic Albany Co-operative Society. After re-forming and registering as a company in 1898, the society had been beset by management problems that seem to have disrupted a number of 'customary practices' concerning the handling of monies and debts, and it folded in December 1899 amid various accusations

that were examined in a lengthy court case in May 1903.[47] Walter James' later observation during the parliamentary debate about the complexities of company legislation, and his emphasis on the simplicity of the new legislation, were probably informed, at least in part, by the demise of the second Albany Co-operative Society as well as Bath's concerns about 'slipshod accounts'.

Western Australia's *Co-operative and Provident Societies Act 1903* was the first of its kind in the State, and one of the earliest in any jurisdiction within the British Empire outside England.[48] It defined a co-operative as

> a society for carrying on any lawful industries, businesses or trades specified in or authorized by its rules, whether wholesale or retail, and including dealings of any description with land; but no member shall have a claim or claim any interest in the shares of the society exceeding two hundred pounds.[49]

The Act specified, among other things, that such a society could not carry on the business of banking (contrary to Charles Harper's earlier thoughts), had to have at least seven members, written rules, a distinctive name of which 'society, limited' were to be the last two words, and had to be registered with the Registrar of Co-operative and Provident Societies (for a fee of £2, equivalent to $300 in 2018).

The second-wave of co-operatives

The new Register of Co-operatives formally commenced on 1 January 1904. Three co-operative societies were registered in 1904, the first being the Goldfields Co-operative Society Ltd, followed by the Fremantle Co-operative Society Ltd and then The Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-operative Society Ltd, with the Collie Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd registered in 1905.[50] The Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-op was the first producer co-operative, and the first fishermen's co-operative, registered under the new Act, and possibly took its name from the reputed cry of Italian fish vendors in Fremantle: "My God, lovely fish today, beautiful bloody fish".[51]

Snapshot | The Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-operative Society Ltd, 1904-1905

The Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-operative Society Ltd was the third co-operative society to be registered under the *Co-operative and Provident Societies Act 1903*. It also has the distinction of being the first to be de-registered.

The Co-op consisted of 51 Italian fishermen, all based in Fremantle, with its office in the City Markets in Perth. Its stated purpose was catch, supply and distribute fish, as both a wholesale and retail dealer, and to buy, sell, lease, hire, mortgage or otherwise deal in boats, ships, vessels, horses, carts, stalls and any other property necessary for catching and distributing fish anywhere in Western Australia. Capital was raised through shares of £25 each, limited to one share per person, paid for in cash or goods, with each shareholder required to be actively engaged in the fishing industry. Each member was entitled to one vote, shares could be

transferred between members and could also be inherited. After making some amendments to the proposed rules, the Registrar of Friendly Societies registered the society on 22 September 1904.

The Co-op rules included several unique provisions, one of which prohibited any member from withdrawing from the co-op unless leaving Western Australia for 'the continent of Europe', in which case the member would be provided with a third-class steamer ticket, the cost of which was deducted from the value of the member's share. The ticket and any money owing would only be paid once the member was already on board the steamer.

After operating for only a few months, in January 1905 the members petitioned the Registrar to cancel the co-op's registration. In December the co-op's 'first-class fishmonger's shop fittings' in the City Markets were sold off by auction. The stated reason for the cancellation was that "the members are unable to carry on the Society". One reason may be that of the 51 members who signed the request, 49 signed with an X, while of the office bearers only the secretary Vito Facchini signed his name. The shares were expensive (£25 is the equivalent of $A3,900 in 2018), and the co-operative rules, although simpler than those for a company, were still complex and required a solicitor to shepherd them through the Registry. The tabloid *Truth* was also carrying stories at this time complaining of 'dagos' operating refreshment rooms in Fremantle, so racism cannot be excluded as another reason for the Beauty's demise. The registration was cancelled on 6 March 1905, and WA's first fishermen's co-operative came to an end.

The Goldfields, Fremantle and Collie co-operatives were consumer co-operatives, while the Beauty Fishing co-operative was a mixed producer and consumer co-operative operating a fleet of 30 fishing boats and a fishmongery in the City Markets in Perth.[52] However, within two years, the Beauty co-operative had closed, the Goldfields co-operative had been wound up in 1905 by order of the Supreme Court for unpaid debts owed to a Kalgoorlie butcher, and the Fremantle co-operative, after converting from a company to a co-operative, merged in 1906 with the West Australian Co-operative and discarded its name. Of these first co-operatives, only the Collie Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd survived. Registrations of new co-operatives up to 1918 under the new Act were slow. Between 1912 and 1915 twenty new co-operatives were registered, of which over eighty percent were consumer co-operatives mainly based in the metropolitan area as well as Kalgoorlie, Meekatharra, Capel and Albany. A much smaller number of new producer co-operative societies were also registered, all in newly-developing wheatbelt or rural south coast locations.[53]

The new Act could not, alone, make the consumer co-operatives commercially successful, but it did provide the better-managed societies with a regulatory framework. The producer co-operatives, after early interest in the Act, instead mainly chose to register under the *Companies Act 1893* as co-operative companies, continuing what was by then

the practice among producer co-operatives. This was confirmed with Westralian Farmers' Limited being formed and registered in 1915 under the Companies Act rather than the Co-operatives Act.[54]

Charles Harper, now MLA for Beverley, had taken no obvious part in the parliamentary debates around the Co-operatives legislation, but as Chairman of Committees he exercised some influence. With the new Act achieved, Harper focused on developing the co-operative movement in accordance with his own thinking through the WA Producers Co-operative Union.[55] However, by 1910 he was ailing and in 1912 he died at 'Woodbridge'.

The WA Producers Co-operative Union had been established in March 1902 under the *Companies Act 1893* by a meeting held in the museum of the Department of Agriculture chaired by Charles Harper.[56] The objective of the Producer's Union was to initiate the formation of a co-operative association of farming and fruit-growing industries. Harper wrote to his son Walter, then in England, that "There is a bit of a revolution about to take place", with the new union to include all the market gardeners in Perth, most of whom were Chinese, and the company to be managed by a committee elected by the members with a percentage of all sales going back to the markets co-op to fund its operations.[57] A site was acquired in Perth beside the railway line and the Beaufort Street Bridge, and the first cool rooms in Perth were installed as well as the American 'gravity carrier' system for moving produce around the market.

The Union formed the Producer's Markets Co-operative in 1903, with Charles Harper telling his son Walter that they now "expect to have all the fruit sales well organised, as we have got a subsidiary company started, including nearly all the market gardeners (yellow and white)".[58] The technological innovations, as well as the co-operative's inclusive principles, would prove to be both revolutionary and an enduring, if unevenly applied, characteristic of the co-operation movement.

Another enduring characteristic is that both the WA Producers Co-operative Union and the WA Producers Salesrooms Ltd (Harper's 'subsidiary company'), were registered under the *Companies Act 1893*. Between 1904 and 1906, three other co-operative companies were registered under the Companies Act, all of them consumer co-operatives, but these were soon overtaken by producer co-operative registrations and the division between producer and consumer co-operatives became more marked as time passed. It is from these producer co-operative companies that the Federation, once it was formed, mainly (although not exclusively) drew its members, rather than the consumer co-operative societies.

By the time the Great War broke out in 1914, the co-operatives movement was on a sound legal basis and developing through either co-operative societies or co-operative companies. The largest, which would dominate the next six decades of co-operation in the State, was Westralian Farmers' Ltd, formed in 1914 by Harper's Co-operative Producer's Union and the Farmers & Settlers Association. The new co-operative acquired the Union's assets, and Walter Harper resigned the next year from the Farmers & Settlers Association to focus on Westralian Farmers' and the broader co-operative movement.[59]

Westralian Farmers' did not include the word 'co-operative' in its name, and argument over whether it was a 'real' co-operative would persist for some decades.

Charles Harper (left) and Walter Harper (right) spraying apple trees
with lime bluestone dust at 'Woodbridge' in 1905-06.
Photo in FR Mercer 1958: 53

Formation, Depression and War, 1919 – 1955 | "We Must Combine and Stand Shoulder to Shoulder"[60]

The Western Australian society that emerged from the Great War, like other settler and European societies, was traumatised, caught between desires for old certainties and needs for new ways, and on the cusp of huge technological changes.

Building local co-operative units

The war, however, was not a time of inactivity for the co-operative movement, especially the producer co-operatives. Far from it. In response to war-time scarcities in shipping and panic selling by wheat growers, the Federal and State governments formed a wheat pool to stabilise the wheat market. The Pool was a co-operative, and compulsorily acquired grain from farmers which it sold on their behalf, removing middlemen, covering all the handling costs and returning the proceeds to each farmer on a *pro-rata* basis according to the quantity of wheat delivered. The Pool often paid an initial advance slightly lower than the current price, but paid immediately, injecting cash into local economies. Westralian Farmers' Ltd was appointed an agent in Western Australia for the 1915/16 crop and by 1918 had become the sole acquiring agent for wheat. Initially, Westralian Farmers' wanted to transact all the business in Perth but quickly began to appoint local country agents to transact business locally. To prevent the development of a new class of middlemen, and to overcome opposition from established merchants in the older districts, Westralian Farmers' sent 'canvassers' throughout the newly developing wheat districts to marshal groups of farmers and organise them into local co-operative units or agencies. The key canvassers were LR MacGregor, John Thomson and JP Stratton from Westralian Farmers' wheat section, and George Cook, a Director of the Dangin & South Carolling Co-operative Society Ltd that had formed in 1916.[61] Dangin & South Carolling (near Quairading) was the first wheat farmer co-operative to last more than a year or two, and became unique as the only one to remain registered under the 1903 Co-operatives Act.[62]

Westralian Farmers' was the acquiring agent for the Pool, its new network of local co-operative units acted as sub-agents, receiving and handling wheat locally before being transported by train to the ports, and collecting commissions for this work. This 'agency' work was the initial function of the local units, before they developed a complementary local 'store' function. The war created the need for a wheat pool, which in turn created the need for a local agency network to connect producers and the pool, which in turn created the local co-op stores to help maintain local viability. The excitement of establishing these 'units' was described some years later by Walter Harper's biographer with the picture he sketched of

> settlers driving in buggies and sulkies, or riding on horseback to meet the Westralian Farmers' men in the local halls; the discussions about finance, premises, labour, legal matters; agreements on lines and rates of commission; all the problems of organisation under primitive social conditions and without financial resources; the explanations of Co-operative principles and aims; the election of boards of

> directors, and the enthusiasm of people subscribing small, hard-earned capital towards their own future.[63]

The use of canvassers to recruit members and establish units recalls Charles Harper's use of canvassers to establish the local vine and fruit-growers associations in the 1890s, and replicated the top-down approach to creating the producer co-operative movement in Western Australia. The central role of Westralian Farmers' is evident not only in the canvassers but in, for instance, advertising for local managers, such as that for the Yilliminning-Kondinin Farmers' Co-operative Company in 1917, which required applications to be made directly to Westralian Farmers' in Perth.[64] It is also evident in the formal notices of registration in the *Government Gazette*, placed by Westralian Farmers' in bulk using the same *pro-forma* wording with local details inserted, for example:

> NOTICE is hereby given that the Registered Office of the Kulin Farmers' Co-operative Company, Limited, is situated at the residence of Miss J. Gordon, Johnson Street, Kulin, and is open to the public between the hours of 12 (noon) and 1 p.m. daily.
> R. Ellson, Secretary, Kulin, 12th October, 1917.[65]

Creating the Federation

The mammoth effort put in by the canvassers is revealed in the 76 local co-operative companies registered over 1917/1918 (mostly in 1917).[66] Not all flourished, but most survived, and at the conference at which the Federation was founded on 3 July 1919 (by which time another ten had been established), 200 delegates from 65 local co-operative companies were able to attend and participate.[67] These local co-operative companies were the units established by Westralian Farmers', and the delegates initially attended the annual Westralian Farmers' producer's conference (descended from Charles Harper's producers conferences of the 1890s) before meeting separately to form the Federation.[68]

The opening address to the founding conference, given by Matthew Padbury, Chairman of Westralian Farmers' Ltd, was entirely accurate in referring to the "parent company" and the "outposts of the movement – the local co-operative companies".[69] It would be easy to view this effort with a cynical eye, but many of those involved in the local units were enthusiastic co-operators. The canvassers frequently cited the Rochdale example (Raiffeisen was too 'German' to mention at this time); each local co-operative was largely self-governing and the whole idea was attractive to those who wanted to "mind their own business" (i.e. control their own business affairs).[70] The new local co-operative units quickly established stores, buying goods at wholesale prices through Westralian Farmers' and selling cheaply to members.

Padbury went on to talk at the 1919 conference about the many changes in commerce coming with the end of the Great War, the combinations of interests and their organised, wealthy and powerful opposition, and the wave of industrial unrest that was "causing alarm in all sections of the community". The conference, after meeting for three days in the Westralian Farmers' Building in Wellington Street, Perth, agreed to advance the activities of the co-operative movement "by uniting all bodies into one body controlling

the central organisation". The 'central organisation' was Westralian Farmers' Ltd, and the new body was named the Western Australian Co-operative Federation. The relationship between the 'central organisation' and the local 'units' would evolve over time, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes tensely. Its evolution often occurred in ways unforeseen by those who created the Federation which, in many ways, came to act as a mediator between central and local interests although it was sometimes portrayed as a front for Westralian Farmers' wider commercial interests.

The Federation's formation was also welcomed in the labour movement and the industrial co-operatives, with an enthusiastic editorial in the *Westralian Worker*, as

> promising to become the biggest economic force of a decade … [that will attack] a gluttonous shipping combine and a hostile and indifferent Federal Government … abolish existing evils and economic waste which threaten to engulf the country in revolution … [through] the protecting bonds of united action, defensive and offense, [in which] the dingoes of commerce can be held at bay and eventually exterminated".[71]

The Federation Council met for the first time on the afternoon of Thursday 9 October 1919 in the Westralian Farmers' Building, and appointed Walter Harper the first chairman of the Federation, accepted Westralian Farmers' offer of free office accommodation in the building and, for £52 per year, the secretarial services of staff member Robert Dunman.[72]

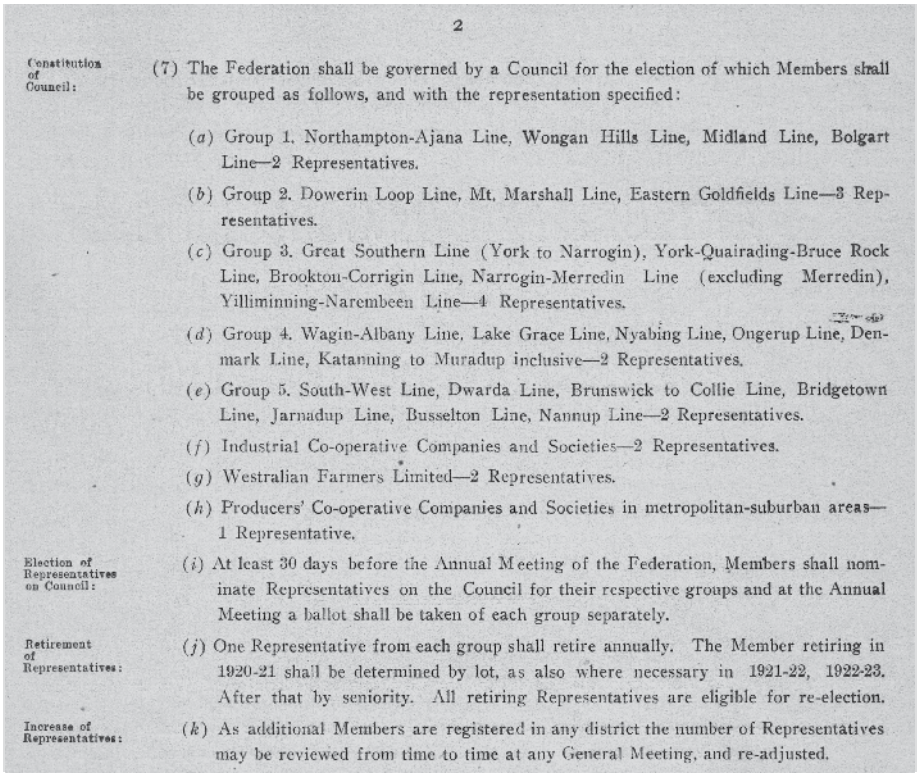
Making local identities

The emotive language of the *Westralian Worker* seems to jar with canvassers' low-key meetings in country halls and railway sidings, and co-op offices in private homes only open an hour a day. However, they reflect a range of post Great War uncertainties, and tensions played-out in different forms at the local level, especially in the face of opposition from established store-keepers and merchants to the formation of local co-operatives in the 'old districts' of the State (those pre-dating Federation). The co-operatives directly competed with the private stores as both buyers of produce and sellers of goods. The old merchant's stores often had long-established relationships underpinned by years of extending credit to local producers. Sometimes, a new co-op might buy an existing store and take over its business and premises, or even rent a building from a store-keeper, but generally the early spread of local co-operative units mirrors the spread of wheat farming throughout the newer districts of what became known as the wheatbelt where there was little in the way of established infrastructure.

Even more specifically, they tended to follow the new railway networks. The Federation's first constitution of 1919 defined 5 'groups', each of which aligned with particular railway lines and would elect between two and four members of the Federation Council. They were basically Council electorates, but established a pattern of localities.[73] The 1927 constitution upgraded the groups to seven defined 'co-operative districts', with each local unit to be a member of a district. Each district had a council elected by its member units, with the Central Organisation also being an *ex-officio* member of each district council. The districts were now more than just electorates, although they were still defined by

railway lines. The Northern District was defined as 'Moora to Geraldton' (i.e. along the Midland Railway Co line) and 'Pithara to Ajana' (i.e. along the WAGR line), while the Eastern District consisted of six lines radiating out from Merredin to nominated stations such as Dangin and Babakin.[74] After 1938, as local populations seemed to stablise, the specific definition of co-operative districts was left to the Federation Council to determine. As local government developed, there came to be a certain contiguity between the co-operative districts and the roads board districts (re-named shires in 1961).

Units near district boundaries could transfer from one district to another, and one article in the Federation's 1927 rules, rather alarmingly titled "Invasion of Territory", prohibited one unit from holding any agency that geographically overlapped with that of another unit.[75] The units were specifically designated as agents of the Central Organisation (Westralian Farmers' Ltd), with the Federation to formally approve all agency agreements and adjudicate any disputes between an agency unit and the Central Organisation.[76] The Federation could terminate or transfer any non-Westralian Farmers' agencies, and had to approve any unit transferring to another district. Holding agencies was a major source of income, including agencies for commercial products such as farm machinery and fuel. Not surprisingly, disputes over the boundaries between units were not uncommon.



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Constitution of Council:

(7) The Federation shall be governed by a Council for the election of which Members shall be grouped as follows, and with the representation specified:

(*a*) Group 1. Northampton-Ajana Line, Wongan Hills Line, Midland Line, Bolgart Line—2 Representatives.

(*b*) Group 2. Dowerin Loop Line, Mt. Marshall Line, Eastern Goldfields Line—3 Representatives.

(*c*) Group 3. Great Southern Line (York to Narrogin), York-Quairading-Bruce Rock Line, Brookton-Corrigin Line, Narrogin-Merredin Line (excluding Merredin), Yilliminning-Narembeen Line—4 Representatives.

(*d*) Group 4. Wagin-Albany Line, Lake Grace Line, Nyabing Line, Ongerup Line, Denmark Line, Katanning to Muradup inclusive—2 Representatives.

(*e*) Group 5. South-West Line, Dwarda Line, Brunswick to Collie Line, Bridgetown Line, Jarnadup Line, Busselton Line, Nannup Line—2 Representatives.

(*f*) Industrial Co-operative Companies and Societies—2 Representatives.

(*g*) Westralian Farmers Limited—2 Representatives.

(*h*) Producers' Co-operative Companies and Societies in metropolitan-suburban areas—1 Representative.

Election of Representatives on Council:

(*i*) At least 30 days before the Annual Meeting of the Federation, Members shall nominate Representatives on the Council for their respective groups and at the Annual Meeting a ballot shall be taken of each group separately.

Retirement of Representatives:

(*j*) One Representative from each group shall retire annually. The Member retiring in 1920-21 shall be determined by lot, as also where necessary in 1921-22, 1922-23. After that by seniority. All retiring Representatives are eligible for re-election.

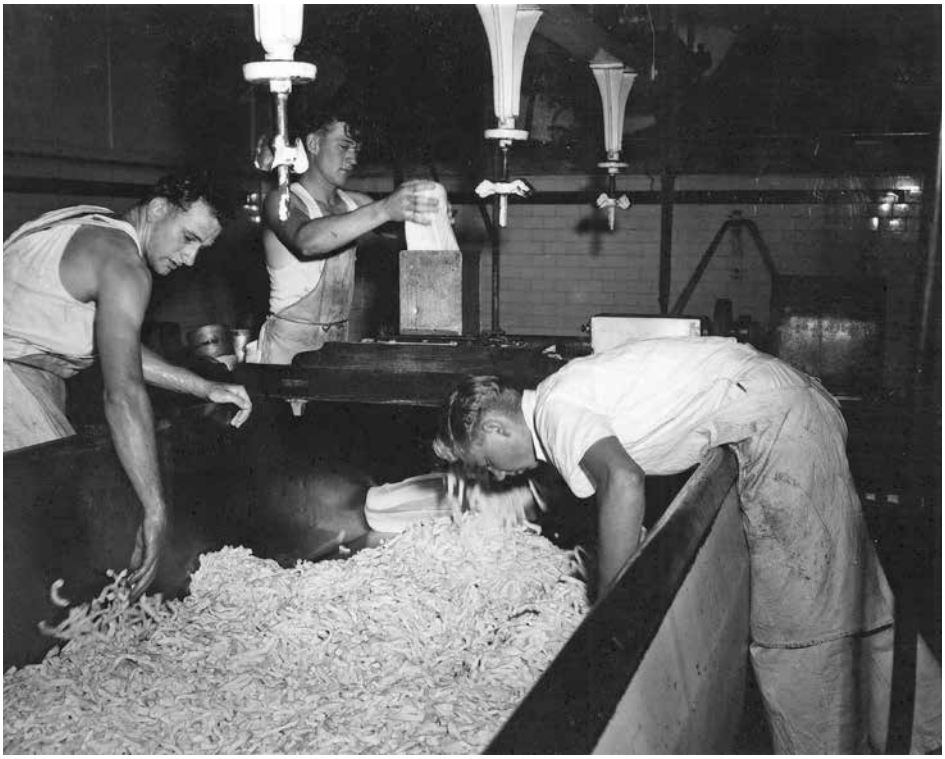
Increase of Representatives:

(*k*) As additional Members are registered in any district the number of Representatives may be reviewed from time to time at any General Meeting, and re-adjusted.

The early 'railway line' local districts, in the 1919
Articles of Association of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia,
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

These various provisions grouped the local units into co-operative districts, controlled inter-unit relationships, and gave the Federation a quasi-judicial role in determining boundaries and settling disputes. One consequence was the way in which this contributed to the formation of local identities as new farming areas were carved out of the woodlands and began to converge around certain railway sidings and towns. As lineal railway line-based identities declined, the new local identities centred on village or town hubs were sometimes chastised by Federation leaders as 'parochial' and 'sentimental', exacerbating geographical distances and inhibiting the 'co-operative spirit'. Walter Harper and Thomas Bath, in particular, spent much of their time touring the local units seeking to inspire a broader sense of co-operation and overcome what they saw as haphazardly developing local loyalties.[77]

Development in the 'old districts' pre-dating the co-operative movement unfolded along somewhat different social and economic cleavages. Producer co-operatives, especially those associated with wheat growing, did not develop in the old districts of the Swan Valley, the Greenough and Irwin or the Vasse and Sussex districts although some industrial (or manufacturing) co-operatives grew up in the port-towns of Geraldton and Bunbury.



Pressing curd into moulds, South West Co-operative Dairy Farmers Ltd
Factory at Harvey (Sunny West brand), December 1953
Government Photographer Collection, 010973D, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

The spread of dairying from the 1910s in the South West overlaid, in some areas, older patterns of rural organization, but its co-operative form was mainly in butter and cheese factories rather than wheat farming. During the late 1920s the Briswae, Northcliffe, No 121 and No 133 Group Settlements in the South West registered under the 1903 Act as co-operative societies, but they did not develop into either producer or consumer co-operatives despite early hopes of becoming part of the co-operative dairying movement.[78] The answer may lie in their registration under the 1903 Act just as the companies legislation was bring changed to cover co-operative companies and effectively suppress new co-operative societies for the next two decades, rather than any disruption of older local economic patterns. In 1938, a special membership category of 'Dairy Member' was introduced by the Federation for its co-operative company units processing, manufacturing and/or selling dairy products.[79] Local storekeeping was not as characteristic of the dairy co-ops as it was in the wheatbelt.

Among the co-operators, as members of the central and local co-operatives increasingly referred to themselves, their movement was often characterized as co-operation *versus* competition. This was made clear in 1938 changes to the Federation's rules that any person engaged in a private store or trading house in opposition to any local co-operative was specifically barred from district council meetings.[80] However, competition also sometimes involved fellow co-operative units, and the Federation was needed to resolve such competitive differences, which in effect reinforced local economies and identities as well as a centralizing tendency in Federation management. These disputes were carried out largely within the co-operative framework established by the Federation from 1920 onwards, which contained them during times of disputation between farmer organisations in the 1930s, and remained largely intact until the 1980s.[81]

The urban consumer co-operatives (or industrial co-operatives as they were sometimes inaccurately called), although never as numerous as the rural producer co-operatives, are nevertheless part of the Federation's story, and their engagement with the co-operative movement maintained an enduring tension within the movement that was only really resolved 90 years after the Federation's formation with the *Co-operatives Act 2009*. These two strands, the consumer (Rochdale) and producer (Westralian) versions of co-operation, were not a hard division, but more two related ideological strands running through the movement that were only occasionally revealed with any clarity at Federation conferences and in the occasional publications produced by the Federation. The chief protagonists were Walter Harper for the Westralians and William Johnson for the Rochdalers with Thomas Bath something of a mediator between the two, often arguing that co-operation was a 'middle path' between what he called the anarchic individualism of capitalism and State socialist operations.[82]

Snapshot | Dangin & South Carolling Co-op Soc Ltd, 1916 – 1955

Dangin was a village formally established in 1902 to recognise an existing private subdivision. It had a temperance hotel, and when the town of Quairading was formerly established in 1908 seven kilometres further eastwards on the new railway line with a licensed hotel, Dangin's population gradually drifted to the new town. South Caroling was another village, established some 15 kilometres south of Quairading in 1906, and the people of the two settlements developed a number of shared institutions, including the Dangin and South Caroling Co-operative Society.

The Co-operative was registered under the *Co-operatives & Provident Societies Act 1903* in 1916, before Westralian Farmers' canvassers came to the area, and initially sold stores on the railway siding. It joined the Federation on its formation in 1919, and remained unique as the only producer co-operative formed under the 1903 Act that did not transfer to the companies legislation after 1929, having to receive a dispensation from the Registrar of Friendly Societies to retain the word 'co-operative' in its name.

The co-operative store was opened in Dangin in 1918. Its annual reports were submitted to the Federation, and it made use of the auditing service provided through the Federation from which a picture of its operations can be observed. The auditor frequently in the early years commented, sometimes with exasperation, on the unruly way in which the accounts were kept and transactions recorded, and over time gradually trained the store manager in adequate bookkeeping practices. The co-operative consisted of the store and a Westralian Farmers' agency, and in 1918 each contributed to the salaries, insurance, taxation and reserve fund. Ten percent of net profit from the store and 40% from the agency went to the reserve fund, with the other 50% distributed to members. In 1918, eleven percent of the 73 shareholders were women, who by 1921 accounted for nine percent of 110 shareholders.

The agency income was derived from wheat handling, which in 1919/1920 earned £486, from which it paid £295 in wages to labourers handling the wheat sacks. In 1921/22, earnings were £740 and wages £518, figures that indicate the co-op's local economic impact. The store income, apart from sales, also came from a post office allowance (as a postal agency), a railways allowance (for caretaking the Dangin siding) and merchant discounts. The balance between store and agency profits varied over the years, with the store dominant until 1930 when it almost collapsed to only 15%, reflecting the impact of the Depression. In 1933 the Co-operative Bulk Handling facility was opened at Dangin siding, and by 1935 the two were roughly even. By 1940 the store accounted for 65% of profits, but by 1945 had again fallen to 16%, then rising to 40% by 1951.

However, it was clear the store was in decline, and in 1953 a general meeting of members considered whether to amalgamate with Quairading Farmers' Co-operative. Although rejected, the main reason given for amalgamation was local people increasingly driving to and shopping in Quairading, and while costs needed to be controlled and the staff needed to give more attention to customer satisfaction, it was the members themselves who needed to purchase locally. However, despite such exhortations from the co-op directors, the decline continued, the store closed around 1955 and Dangin & South Caroling Co-operative Society Ltd was wound up in 1958. The Co-operative Bulk Handling operations at Dangin closed in 1980.

Gnowangerup & District Co-operative, old store, c1965

Gnowangerup & District Co-operative, new store, December 1966
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

Founders of the Federation | "The Co-operative Movement Would Remain His Monument"[83]

Walter Harper, Thomas Bath and William Johnson effectively formed a triumvirate that for thirty years would shape and develop the co-operative movement in Western Australia. Others were involved of course, and at various times held the limelight, but Harper, Johnson and Bath were the real power centre for the founding generation. Harper championed the producer co-operatives and a Westralian version of co-operation, while Johnson championed the consumer co-operatives and more traditional Rochdale co-operation. They did not always agree, but they all believed co-operation was the way forward. The characters of the three men were described by Harper's biographer in 1955: Harper the businessman with a strong sense of *noblesse oblige* and old gentry connections, Johnson the politician and enthusiastic public speaker who self-deprecatingly referred to himself as a Bolshevist, and Bath the likable idealist able to turn words into practical deeds.[84]

Thomas Henry (Tom) Bath 1875-1956

Tom Bath arrived on the Goldfields in 1896, a miner from New South Wales. He became involved with the local union movement and was first editor of the union newspaper the *Westralian Worker*. He was secretary of the Kalgoorlie Trades & Labour Council and worked the backrooms in faction fighting between miners' unions. During the late 1890s he was secretary of the Goldfields Knights of Labor (a North American labour movement that promoted gradual change and the unity of all producers, from shopkeepers and farmers to labourers, and which in Canada strongly promoted worker co-operatives), and spoke publicly a number of times on co-operation.[85] In 1902 he won the seat of Hannans for Labor in a by-election, and contributed to the parliamentary debates on the Co-operatives and Provident Societies Bill. In 1904 he moved to the seat of Brownhill and in 1905 was appointed Minister for Lands and Education just before the Daglish Labor government fell. From 1906 to 1910 he was Leader of the Opposition, and in 1911 won the country seat of Avon. The new Scaddan Labor government appointed him Minister for Lands and Agriculture in 1911, an office he held until 1914 when he retired from parliamentary politics.[86]

Bath's interest in co-operation is evident in his first speech to Parliament when he said that the Goldfielders did not resent profits from the railways being spent in agricultural areas

> for they are of the opinion that the country must, in the long run, rely on its agricultural resources … [but] … there should be some more scientific mode of bringing the producer into more direct touch with the consumer. A great deal of money has been expended in providing facilities for the agricultural producer, but we find the people on the goldfields do not benefit thereby … [we] might go into the question and see if the producer cannot be brought into closer touch with the consumer without the middleman taking a share of the profit.[87]

During his term as Opposition Leader, Bath obtained a 65 hectare grant at Tammin in 1907 through a State land settlement scheme. He first began to live at Tammin in 1911, and developed the property for wheat, gradually extending it into a 197 hectare farm.[88] The Tammin Farmers' Co-operative Company was established in 1917 by Westralian Farmers' canvassers.[89] Thomas Bath was a director of the Tammin Co-op, and often cited it as an example of the benefits to producers of belonging to a co-operative.[90] Unlike Harper and Johnson, he was never a director of Westralian Farmers', but was a director of the Wheat Pool and Vice-Chairman (to Harper) of the Federation, also serving as voluntary secretary for a period.

Bath travelled extensively visiting local co-operatives and studying their activities, compiling regular statistical reports and overviews for the Federation, and like Harper and Johnson was well-known throughout the movement. His engagement with co-operation and the Federation can be seen through the role he played in the conflicts that arose between farmer organisations during the Great Depression.

The co-operative movement was unprepared for the Depression, despite warnings from Bath. As Federation Vice-Chair he had toured the wheat-producing areas in Canada and the United States in 1927 and saw the massive expansion of production taking place at the same time as it was expanding in Western and eastern Australia and Argentina, and the stockpiling that was beginning. At the same time, wheat consumption was beginning to decline in European and Asian markets, especially as tariffs and other trade barriers were being erected to encourage domestic production. On his return he urged the more rigorous study of international markets to understand these trends, and warned that growing ever more wheat would progressively produce lower and lower prices. As a director of the Wheat Pool, he was able to insist on the rapid sale of the 1929/30 crop before the Wall Street crash, but for many farmers the situation rapidly deteriorated.[91] Five million hectares of woodlands had been cleared by 1931, from which 1.6 million hectares of wheat had been harvested, and for which extensive credit had been made available. By the end of that year the State's 10,600 wheat and sheep farmers owed the Agricultural Bank £13 million ($1.2 billion), other banks £11 million ($1 billion) and country storekeepers £1.5 million ($140 million), among others.[92]

Bath had been warning for some years about co-operative units allowing people to run up debts. Goods were being advanced to farmers on seasonal credit, which was often accumulating from earlier years. The Central Organisation estimated that by 1930, co-operatives were lending £750,000 per year to farmers to carry them over the winter. The co-operatives were never intended to be financiers, and traded on small profits and small reserves. Coupled with poor financial management skills in many co-operatives and the deteriorating financial situation, some co-operative units were increasingly unable to either advance further credit to members or recover debts. This in turn incurred some antagonism from indebted farmers towards the co-operatives that fed into more rebellious sentiments in some districts. New farmer organisations arose, notably the Wheatgrowers' Union formed in 1930 in Lake Grace and led by Ignatius Boyle, which campaigned for a guaranteed minimum wheat price subsidised by the Federal government.[93] The Union was hostile to Westralian Farmers' and the Wheat Pool because, it claimed, they were

using monopolistic powers to pay low prices for wheat. The Pool in response argued it could pay no higher than the actual prices for which the wheat was sold.[94] In 1932 the Union organised a 'strike', with its members refusing to deliver wheat for sale, but neither the Federal nor State governments would increase their financial assistance, and the members could not create enough of a wheat shortage to affect the price. The strike collapsed, but antagonisms remained.

The Union claimed the Federation was merely a puppet of Westralian Farmers', and that the co-operative bulk handling of wheat being developed by Westralian Farmers' was being forced on farmers for the benefit of the co-operative movement whereas a rival scheme being developed by the Union would give individual farmers a higher return. Thomas Bath took umbrage at this, as shown in an exchange during the strike between Bath and Tom Retalic of the Babakin branch of the Wheatgrowers' Union. Retalic reiterated the Union's claim in a local newspaper, and for added impact took a swipe at Bath about the Tammin Co-operative after Bath said that in the previous year no cash payments had been made by Tammin to its members as their dividends had instead all been placed in their credit accounts. This, said Retalic, was "true blue co-operation which even gets a profit out of the clients dividends by selling them stores instead".[95]

Bath's sharp reply was published in at least three newspapers circulating through the wheatbelt.[96] Westralian Farmers' was a co-operative, he insisted, and debts owed to it and local co-operatives were really debts owed by farmers to their fellow farmers. Tammin was an example of a co-operative now back on a sound basis, with the surpluses being credited to members as good as cash because they were, in effect, getting stores at cost. Westralian Farmers' was pioneering all the work for bulk handling, while the Union was simply plagiarising that experience for its own scheme without creating any savings. For additional impact he added that the Union simply complained about the cost of 'power kerosene' (a petrol-paraffin fuel used in tractors), while the Co-operative Federation had made a detailed submission to the Federal Royal Commission on petrol supplies, and was endeavouring to get the Royal Commissioners to visit Western Australia and take evidence. Bath concluded

> I am sure it is better, to help in the constructive efforts of those co-ops, which are working to ensure co-operative stability, and mutual fair dealings among their members. I have no desire to join the ranks of those who seek "To face the garment of rebellion … of fickle changelings and poor discontents".[97]

Thomas Bath was a long-time advocate of bulk handling, which had first been discussed by the Federation in 1920. Its chief attraction was reducing the costs, hard labour and vermin problems involved in handling jute sacks of wheat, and opposition came mainly from private wheat traders and jute importers, as well as the Wheatgrowers' Union.[98] Bath, Harper and Johnson toured the wheatbelt and co-operative units in the early 1930s explaining and advocating co-operative bulk handling through the co-operative movement, with Bath specialising in canvassing the Wheatgrowers' Union strongholds. He was an original director of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd from its establishment in 1933, and in 1943 when the directorate was first directly elected by the members,

he was one of the few returned to the board table.[99] Bath later calculated that between 1933 and 1949, Co-operative Bulk Handling had returned £4 million ($225 million) to 8,000 growers.[100]

Before bulk handling: foremen supervising lumpers carrying sacks of wheat on their back, Fremantle docks, 1920s
People and Places, 031197PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

Bath's less well-known role was as mediator between Harper and Johnson, and often between other people and groups. He invited the Wheatgrowers' Union to submit articles for publication in the *Westralian Farmers' Gazette* that he edited, he argued at public meetings in favour of co-operative bulk handling when the Collier Labor government was considering establishing a State-owned scheme, and then during 1935 he again toured the wheat districts seeking to reconcile the Union and co-operative movements. He met with the local co-operative directorates, one by one, in the early stages of the Depression to examine their accounts and help them develop means of recovering debts. He mediated between local co-operative stores and Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Purchase Department through which lines were imported from the Manchester CWS, such as Indian tea, and was a key figure in the Federation negotiating with the Department to write-off £350,000 of outstanding local co-operative unit debts to help them recover from the Depression.[101] Bath long advocated market research and education in co-operative principles, and something of the Knights of Labor's emphasis on producer co-operation and negotiating incremental change remained with Bath throughout his life as a co-operator. After Bath's death in 1956, the Federation established a lending library of co-operative literature to perpetuate his memory.

TH Bath Memorial Library, Westralian Farmers' Building, Perth, September 1961
Illustrations Ltd Collection, 113348PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

William Dartnell (Bill) Johnson 1870-1948

Bill Johnson's involvement with the co-operatives movement began, like Tom Bath's, on the Goldfields, where he arrived in 1894 from New Zealand as a carpenter. Like Bath, he soon became secretary of the Kalgoorlie Trades and Labour Council and business manager of the *Westralian Worker*. He was aware of the Knights of Labor through the broader labour movement, but was not a member. Johnson and Bath both attended the first Trades Union Congress at Coolgardie, Johnson for the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters & Joiners and Bath for the Knights of Labor.[102] At a pro-federation conference in 1899 Johnson was elected to a committee to demand Premier Forrest hold a referendum on whether Western Australia should join the Federation.[103]

As Labor MLA for Kalgoorlie from 1901 to 1905 he contributed to the parliamentary debates on the Co-operatives and Provident Societies Bill. In 1906 he won the seat of Guildford (which encompassed Harper's 'Woodbridge' estate) and relocated his family to the town, becoming an advocate for the Midland Railway Workshops at Midland Junction and for state enterprises generally to protect workers from what he called 'the exploiters'. One of those State enterprises was the State Implement Works set up in 1913 in Kellerberrin to manufacture agricultural tools and machines. He was an anti-conscriptionist in 1917 when he lost his seat, regaining it in 1924 and holding it until his death in 1948.[104] Johnson held several ministerial portfolios, including Bath's old ministry of Lands and Agriculture between late 1914 and 1916 in the Scaddan Labor government.

Johnson purchased and operated a farm at Kumminin, near Bruce Rock, in 1912, about 30 kilometres south of Kellerberrin. He was a director of the Bruce Rock Co-operative Company from its establishment in 1917 by Westralian Farmers' canvassers.[105] Johnson's Rochdale leanings and the tensions between the local co-operatives and the Central Organisation can be seen through the manoeuvring around changes to the co-operatives legislation in 1929. Johnson sponsored the proposed amendments through the State Parliament. These had arisen, he said, from concerns expressed over several years at the Federation's annual conference that the co-operative companies were susceptible to being taken-over by private shareholders with no commitment to co-operative principles, who could then easily convert the company into a limited liability company and retain all profits for themselves. This had already happened at least once, Johnson ominously told the Assembly.[106] What Johnson did not mention was that all the co-operative units established by Westralian Farmers' canvassers were registered as limited companies, of which Westralian Farmers' Ltd was a shareholder and held one of the director's seats on the unit's directorate. The Bruce Rock Co-operative's rules (a *pro-forma* set of rules provided by Westralian Farmers' to all their units with provision for some local variation) provided for one vote per shareholder, but allowed shareholders to hold between five and 100 shares each, with a requirement for a director to hold at least ten shares.[107] They were co-operatives in name, and owned by co-operators, which he insisted made them vulnerable to take-overs.

'Ready for the stripper', Property of WD Johnson (Minister for Lands) near Bruce Rock 1915
EL Mitchell Collection, 229206PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

Johnson spoke for nearly an hour on the bill, giving a history of the co-operative movement in Western Australia, emphasising the role of co-operatives and especially Westralian Farmers' in marketing farmers' crops, and the development to that point of the Co-operative Federation, which he described as the representative of all co-operative companies and organiser of the whole co-operative movement. All 50 co-operative companies were members of the Federation, he said (not entirely accurately), as were some of the eight or so co-operative societies. The stated aim of the changes was to guarantee the continuity of co-operative principles in co-operatives registered under the *Companies Act 1893*, but it was not intended to apply to co-operative societies. Johnson outlined the key elements of the changes: the word 'co-operative' would be restricted to organisations that operated on a 'truly co-operative' basis, which meant interest paid on capital would be limited, profits would be distributed on the basis of business transacted by the farmer with the co-operative, and each shareholder would be limited to one vote. These were in accord with the Rochdale principles, said Johnson, which directed that the distribution of profits should be among the producers and those who built up the co-operative rather than those who simply bought a share to obtain cheaper goods in the co-op store.

Producer co-operatives, argued Johnson, could not operate on a cash basis as they needed to implement long-term planning, purchasing and marketing over several seasons, and so needed more capital than usually needed by a consumer co-operative. Westralian Farmers', for instance, had to purchase jute bags, fruit cases and superphosphate in bulk when prices were cheap, stockpile them, and distribute them to farmers through the units when they were needed. The Federation and the co-operative companies were essentially a producer's movement, while, on the other hand, the co-operative societies were 'purely' stores catering to consumers and not directly associated with the marketing of farmers' produce. They did not need the new protections Johnson was advocating.

Johnson genuinely believed this distinction made the co-operative companies the true inheritors of the Rochdale pioneers, but seems to have been blind to the Federation sometimes acting as a catspaw for Westralian Farmers'. Between his speech and the Bill's final passing some major changes were made. His original aims remained intact: the use of the word 'co-operative' in company names was limited to actual co-operatives, interest paid on capital would be limited, profits would be distributed on the basis of business transacted by the farmer, and shareholders were limited to one vote each. However, it also allowed Westralian Farmers' to transfer its subsidiaries and agencies to the company's co-operative regime after which their other shareholders could no longer withdraw their capital at will, and it prohibited any further registrations of co-operative societies under the 1903 Act.[108]

Johnson protested that fixed capital and automatic transfers were contrary to the voluntary character of Rochdale, but had to accept this compromise as the price for his other changes.[109] He later complained that the Co-operative Federation, at the instigation of Westralian Farmers', had quietly lobbied Country Party MPs to insert these clauses to protect Westralian Farmers' own corporate interests. One was to protect its 'dry shareholder' investors (who held shares in Westralian Farmers' but did not trade

through it), another was its control of certain local units and agencies that were often regarded as Westralian Farmers' fronts rather than genuinely autonomous co-operatives. After 1930 they formed at least half of the co-operatives voting at the Federation's annual conference.[110]

Johnson's own Bruce Rock Co-operative Company commenced in 1917 as a Westralian Farmers' unit with an issue of 10,000 shares at £1 each. In his 1929 speech he argued that in a 'true' co-operative the number of shares held by a shareholder would not matter because their return was based on the amount of business they conducted through the co-operative – its profits were distributed among the producers as bonuses, not to speculative 'dry shareholders'.[111] Even though he decried anti-Rochdale practices that favoured shareholders over producers, the outcome of the 1929 changes was to both entrench them and, paradoxically, prohibit the use of the word 'co-operative' for any new consumer co-operatives that were not units of Westralian Farmers'. They formalised the distinction between co-operative companies aligned with the Federation and the co-operative societies that largely remained outside its orbit for the next twenty years.

Johnson and Harper argued over the outcome, but after Bath's mediation they eventually agreed that developing the overall co-operative movement was of greater importance and set aside their differences. As Johnson explained when introducing the Bill, the movement was strictly non-partisan, "we meet as co-operators and work as co-operators. It is a question of the co-operative movement being served".[112] After the passage of the Act, Johnson was appointed to the Westralian Farmers' directorate and made their *ex-officio* representative on the Federation Council.[113] By mid-1930, Johnson and Harper were friends again, and attended the annual general meeting of Quairading Co-operative Company, which for the 1929/30 year declared a profit of £2,452 and paid a dividend of 7% on paid-up capital and a cash bonus of £1,070.[114] Johnson and Harper both gave "interesting and instructive addresses on the co-operative movement", for which they received a vote of thanks. Despite the bruises of 1929, the co-operators were all feeling well served.

Charles Walter (Walter) Harper 1880-1956

Walter Harper was born into an old gentry family on their 'Woodbridge' estate at Guildford, and grew up with his father Charles' passion for co-operation. They both engaged in agricultural experimentation at 'Woodbridge', especially orcharding, and his father sent him to study fruit growing and marketing in in Britain, Europe and California.[115] Walter Harper had already been assuming his father's role as a leading co-operator when Charles died at 'Woodbridge' in 1912. Harper Senior's biographer wrote that "the principles which the son so richly inherited from his father, and which governed the whole of his activities, were specifically channelled into today's great co-operative enterprise."[116] Harper inherited 'Woodbridge', and it was his home where he and his wife Rosa raised their family until his death in 1956.

Harper told his biographer in 1955 to "write a book about the Movement and leave me out of it".[117] Despite such self-effacement, Harper is the best-known of the three men today, and the only one to have a stand-alone biography. It illustrates his long

involvement with all aspects of the diverse co-operatives movement, and the reader wanting to know more should turn to that publication. There is also a complementary stand-alone biography of his father and his involvement with co-operation. This short sketch therefore, as with the other men, focuses on one illustrative aspect, that of Harper the integrationist. His biographer wrote of him

> He has fought constantly to achieve that which is most difficult and rare in the conduct of human affairs, not compromise but integration, the point at which groups will drop conflicting aims and merge together with one outlook more satisfying to all than any distinct views they may have held before.[118]

Harper's defence of co-operation and its integrative capacity is revealed in a paper he published in 1933 in which he outlined the achievements of co-operation and responded to its critics.[119] In his foreword Harper criticised the "ill-advised or unscrupulous persons" who indulged in misleading propaganda to prey upon the primary producer and his understandable resentment at the "present crisis" (that is, the Depression), persons who sought to convince him there something wrong with the Federation (and by implication, with Westralian Farmers' Ltd), with "destructive criticism" rather than a "recital of the constructive work which is being done on his behalf". The groundwork was laid for a contest between the genuine but hard-pressed farmer and the bogus critic in a "rival organisation" (the Wheatgrowers Union) who offered no real alternative.

He listed the achievements of co-operation to that date, chief among them being bulk handling of wheat, an achievement of permanent value that would endure for all time. The focus was on developing standards of service and profit that were fair and, as he continually stressed, offered hope of permanency. This had resulted in the gross profits of private country storekeepers being lower than anywhere else, while the sale of superphosphate and jute bags by Westralian Farmers' had established much lower prices for the farmer than would otherwise be the case. Even in England, the home of co-operative stores, the profit margin in co-operative stores was greater than in Western Australia. The Rochdale principle that had been adopted in Western Australia was to sell goods at fair competitive prices from which reserves could be built up and bonuses paid to shareholders. Co-operatives needed capital in greater amounts than the farmer or the State could contribute in actual cash. Capital was essential or a co-operative store would die, but because of the Depression the profit margin being applied in co-operative stores was much smaller than could be permanently adhered to. Wholesale prices for the local stores were deliberately kept low by Westralian Farmers' at that time to support farmer-members. Permanence and fairness were watchwords for co-operation, and experience had shown that the farming community was too small and dispersed to give all its business to one store even though multiple services needed to be provided. Only co-operation, he argued, with the Central Organisation and the local units working together, could achieve this balance.

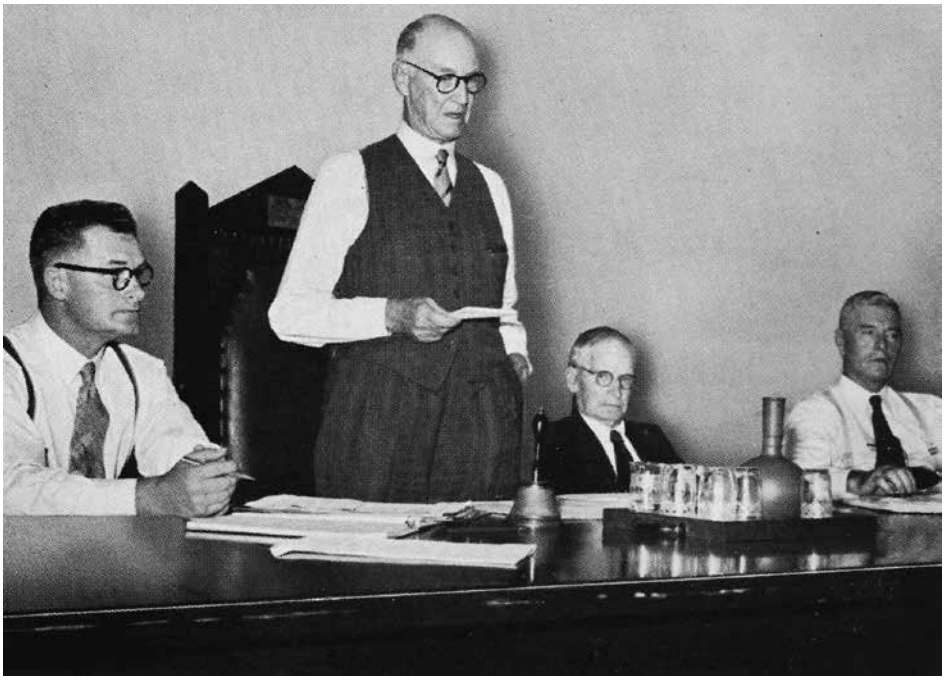
Through co-operation the costs of wheat handling had been reduced while services had been increased, such as the provision of wheat sheds and weighbridges at railway sidings, and the declaration of Esperance as a wheat port. Harper estimated that in the

Wyalkatchem district farmers had saved £21,000 through the bulk-handling system. This, he contended, would never have been achieved without the co-operative movement. Similarly, the cost of farm insurance had been greatly reduced and made more stable by the establishment in 1919 of Westralian Farmers' insurance scheme with its own agents in country co-ops and profits returned to farmers through bonuses, as well as lower prices in stores. In the field of dairying, South West Co-operative Dairy Products Ltd had now taken on the production of butter and other dairy products and stabilised the prices paid to dairy farmers, while Westralian Farmers' had taken charge of marketing dairy products and developing export markets, especially in Britain through the Manchester CWS. He cited other examples of stability and fairness to producers and consumers that had only been achieved through co-operation.

He then addressed various specific questions about Westralian Farmers'. The first of these was whether Westralian Farmers' Ltd was really a co-operative, to which he responded that it followed the Rochdale principles of one shareholder one vote, the right to vote at general meetings, nominal interest payable to shareholders, surplus profits to be reserved for paying bonuses on trading, and limited shareholding so that it was within reach of all client-members. In other matters, he was strenuous in arguing that the trustees and councillors of the Wheat Pool were all elected by members, with local district representation, and that Co-operative Bulk Handling would, in due course, also have its directors elected by shareholders, but in the meantime, they were indirectly elected anyway because farmers elected the directors of Westralian Farmers' and the Wheat Pool, who were the directors of Co-operative Bulk Handling.

Harper believed he was offering co-operators a guide for responding to the Wheatgrowers Union, as well as Rochdale purists, through logical and persuasive argument. The co-operative movement encompassed the rural giants like Westralian Farmers' and the Wheat Pool, as well as the small country stores, the wheat farmer, the dairyman and indeed all country folk. Bath could work the soap box, Johnson the theatre of parliament, but for Harper it was the quiet persistence of direct appeal. Working together, they sought to harmonise the diverse interests of rural producers under the common rubric of co-operation.

Besides their extensive inter-related business interests, the three men shared other social interests and cultural status. Harper had inherited property at 'Woodbridge', and Bath and Johnson both purchased and developed farms in the wheatbelt. Bath was at Tammin and Johnson at Bruce Rock, both towns with local Westralian Farmers' co-operatives on which each man served as a director. Bath and Johnson also had town houses, Bath in Mt Lawley and Johnson in Guildford and later West Perth, that were connected to their farms by rail. They emulated Harper's country gentleman lifestyle, and in doing so presented an air of social stability in the new wheatbelt communities, which was reinforced through the co-operatives movement and their ideas of local economic autonomy. They were frequent guests of honour at local functions, and they are commemorated in a number of Harper, Bath and Johnson streets throughout wheatbelt towns. This all had the unintended effect of supporting the development of the local shire identities that bemused the three men.



The 1953 Co-operative Federation Annual Conference in the Westralian Farmers' Building, with from left to right Bill Blackwell (Secretary), Walter Harper (retiring Chairman), Hon Thomas Bath (Deputy Chairman) and E Thorley Loton (incoming Chairman). The gothic-styled chair behind Harper is the 'Johnson Chair', dedicated to the recently deceased William D Johnson. Picture in John Sandford 1955: 299

They also helped to isolate the more activist farmer organisations in the 1930s as anarchic and socialistic while presenting the co-operative movement as offering communal and economic stability, fairness and permanence. These were characteristics critical to successfully 'settling' the new farmer communities, given all the uncertainties of clearing the woodlands for agriculture, then the Depression and then the Second World War. In that spirit, Bath sought to reconcile with the Wheatgrowers Union groups in the late 1930s, and Harper, whose father had led the anti-federation National League of Western Australia in the late 1890s, could find common ground with Boyle, an ardent Westralian secessionist in the 1930s in the face of Johnson's equally strident anti-secessionism.[120] Their sense of co-operation extended well beyond the economic to the social and cultural realms.

Snapshot | Midland-Guildford Co-op Co Ltd, 1947 – 1958

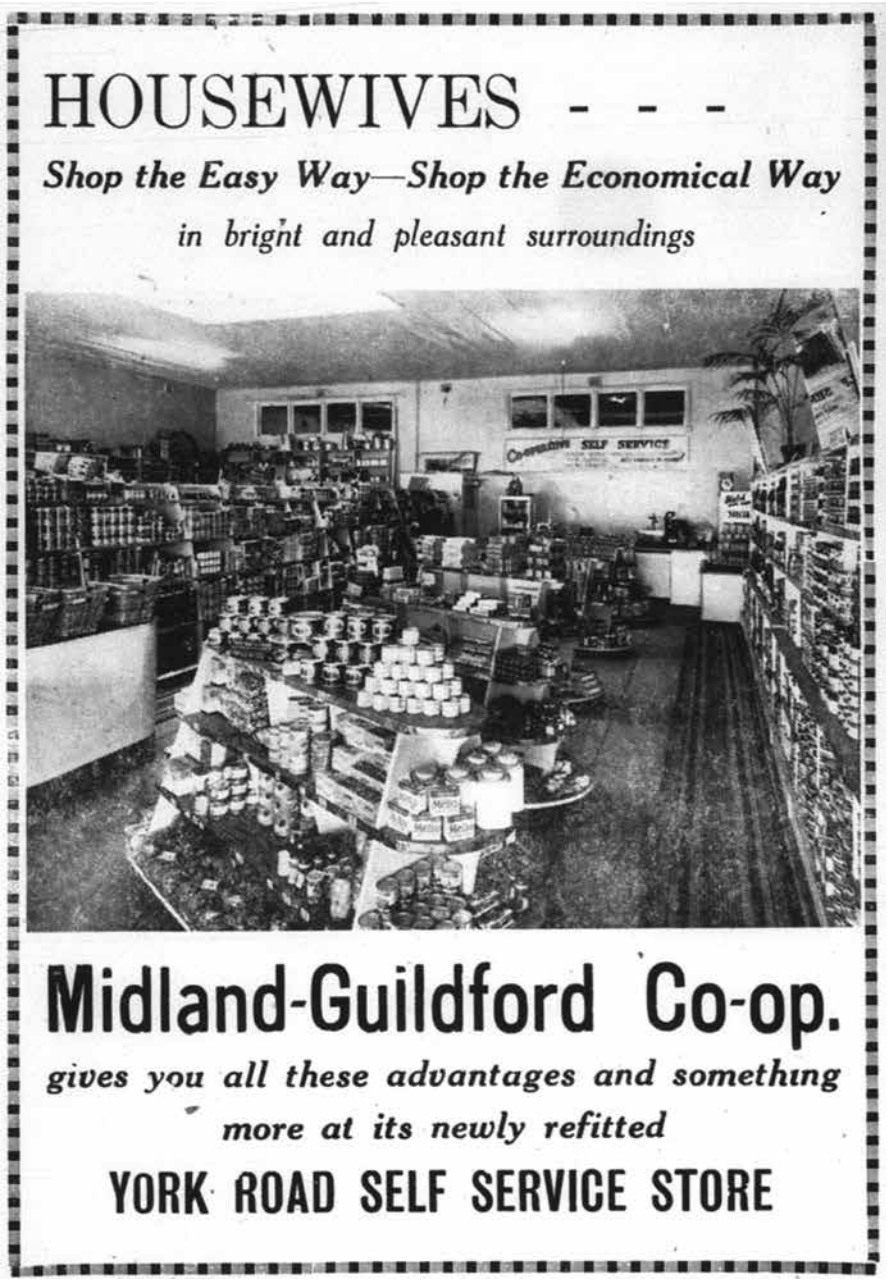
The Midland-Guildford Co-operative Company Ltd was registered under the Companies Act in 1947 with its office on Great Eastern Highway, Midland Junction. It's intention was to purchase C & G Stores, on-sell their Bassendean store to the Bassendean Rochdale Co-operative and keep and operate the Guildford and Midland stores as wholesale and retail merchants and storekeepers. The co-op would have a nominal capital of £20,000 in £1 shares, and would initially issue 5,000 shares.

The directors were all local residents under the chairmanship of William D Johnson. It sought support from people who appreciated co-operative principles, and encouraged 'basic wage families' to apply for a minimum shareholding of five shares on a £1 deposit with the balance paid quarterly or out of rebate earnings. Share applications could be made at C & G Stores, Trades Hall Midland Junction, Midland Railway Workshops canteen or the Bassendean Rochdale Co-operative Store.

The Midland Junction store was refitted as a self-service store 'based on the latest overseas merchandising methods', and at the end of its first year distributed £900 in rebates to shareholders and paid a 4½% dividend on shares, but from the beginning suffered problems with raising enough capital, shortages of stock, competition from new chain stores, and staff problems with difficulties attracting staff to work weekends. Nevertheless, its perceived success inspired the formation of the Osborne Park Co-operative Society with support from the Federation and the Trade Unions Co-operative Trust Fund in 1951.

The Co-operative Federation's Federation Trust Ltd provided several loans to the Co-op, including a loan to finance the construction of a mobile self-service unit. The Collie Co-operative Store had acquired such a unit that toured nearby rural hamlets selling goods, and Midland-Guildford sought to embrace the same concept. Unfortunately, despite the optimism, the mobile unit proved unviable in the metropolitan area and was eventually sold to the Wagin Farmers' Co-operative. Midland-Guildford co-operative never raised more than £5,000 capital, and despite its initial success and several loans from the Federation Trust, including the funds to purchase C & G Stores, it never became commercially viable, and in 1958 went into liquidation. The Federation reported to its 1959 conference that "despite all the effort and finance we have put into it we must now concede defeat. Our hopes that the Metropolitan people there would rally with sufficient support to overcome the initial difficulties to be encountered did not materialise."

In contrast, the Osborne Park Co-operative Society learnt some lessons from Midland-Guildford, with its advice that any new consumer co-operative needed a minimum of 300 shareholders, should be in an established shopping area, should have a building large enough to accommodate at least four separate departments, and could not survive on grocery retail alone as the profit margins were too small.



The new world of self-service cash and carry shopping
(York Road is now Great Eastern Highway, Midland)
Swan Express, 17 January 1952: 3
Courtesy State Library of Western Australia

Consolidation, Change and Adaptation 1955 – 1983 | "The Battering Ram of Change"

In 1943, in the midst of World War Two, the *Companies Act 1893* was amended. The new Act, despite its name, did not come into effect until 1948.[121] It was the main framework within which most co-operatives would operate for the next six decades, especially those who were Federation members.

The provisions of the co-operatives section inserted into the Companies Act in 1929 were largely repeated in the 1943 Act, which updated the whole legislative framework for companies in Western Australia. The main change from 1929 for co-operatives was to allow a company board the option to distribute all the annual surplus as a bonus to shareholders rather than placing it in the reserve fund, balanced by limiting the payment of any surplus in a co-operative's liquidation to shareholders who had done business with the company in the past three years.[122] From this time, almost all Federation members operated under what was called the *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*, a phrase used to refer just to Part VI that contained the co-operatives provisions within the broader Companies Act.

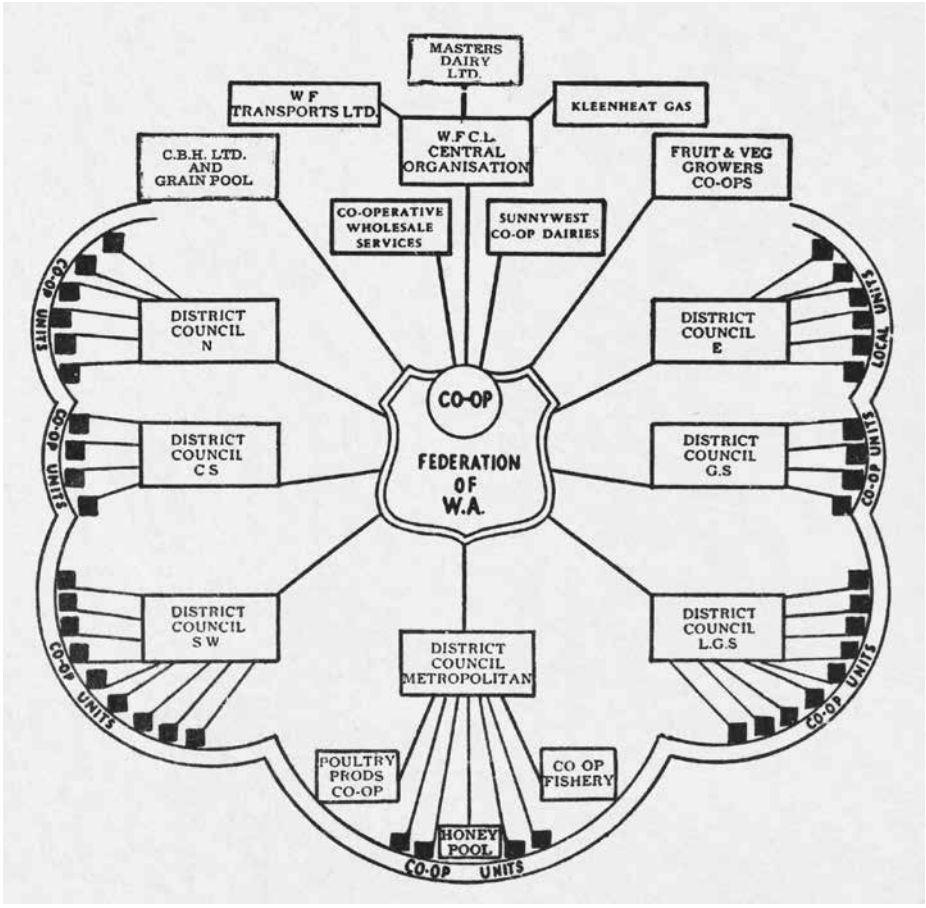
A less-noticed but important change under the new Act was a relaxing of the prohibition on registering co-operative societies under the 1903 Act. A 'consumer society', which was defined as a society "constituted primarily for the benefit of consumers as distinct from a society constituted primarily for the benefit of producers", could choose to register under either Act, although a producer co-operative could only register under the Companies Act.[123] There was now a recognised and clear legal distinction between the producer and consumer co-operatives. Following the effective suppression of new co-operative societies after 1929, consumer co-operatives engaged in retailing were again allowed to be established in their own right, but as a more distinct type of co-operative compared to the usual producer members of the Federation. The first of the new consumer co-operatives to be created, well after the war's end, was the Osborne Park Co-operative Society Ltd. It was established in 1950 with its office in West Leederville, and joined the Federation soon after.[124]

With these legislative changes coming into effect, the Federation faced a period of great change in the post-war years. Firstly, Johnson, then Bath and then Harper all died within a few years of each other, leading to a sudden if not unexpected generational change in leadership. At the same time the prosperity of the post-war boom years brought more fundamental changes, changes very different to the previous thirty-five years of conflict, thrift and hardship that had forged the old leadership. These changes could be characterised as the industrialisation of agriculture (with properties consolidated into larger holdings and the increased use of machinery rather than people as farm workers), the move from railway to road transport, the spread of chain stores, and the threat – then reality- of Britain joining the European common market and abandoning old trade ties. Adapting to these changes, which were also associated with rural de-population and consequent fall in store customers, pre-occupied the Federation for the

next thirty years.[125] The new leaders would not mould the co-operatives movement in their own image as Harper, Bath and Johnson had done, and their tenures would be increasingly brief.

Central versus Local

The development of the local identities around the producer co-operatives, especially those formed over 1917-1918 that had been censured by Harper, nevertheless unfolded beyond the reach of the Federation. By the mid-1950s, they were the cause of division within the Federation between the 'rationalisers', led by John Thomson, former General Manager of Westralian Farmers', and the 'sentimentalists' led by Bill Blackwell, the Federation Secretary. This division also brought to the fore the retail or store functions of the producer co-operatives, or as one co-operator inaccurately insisted, "you must remember that this discussion centres round the consumer part of co-operation and not the production part".[126]



Organisational diagram showing the Federation in the centre, with local units and district councils around edges, and Westralian Farmers' and its entities gathered at the top.
Inside cover, 46th Annual Conference Report, 1966, courtesy Co-operatives WA

In a nutshell, the rationalists' argument was that the smaller local co-operative units were failing as businesses and that their amalgamation with larger nearby co-operatives was the only way to save them, an idea captured in their slogan "Amalgamate or Stagnate".[127] The sentimentalist response (for which they lacked a snappy slogan) was that the co-operative philosophy was founded on democracy and voluntary association, with its purest expression in small local undertakings that encouraged a strong sense of local attachment and affection. They cited both Rochdale and Raiffeisen in their support.

The Federation's executive in 1956 appointed a committee to investigate and report on what it called the 'unification of co-operative trading' after the matter had been raised by Mr J Dyson of the Harvey Co-op. Dyson argued that the new chain stores such as Woolworths, Coles and Freecorns were causing a weakening and heavy losses among the local co-op stores, and in order to survive, the co-operatives movement needed to "rid ourselves of our ideas of isolationism and glorification in self-ownership and local control".[128] The committee's report was considered at the 1957 conference, and John Thomson supported Dyson, arguing that motor cars and new roads made travel to larger shops easier and people now "lived under immensely changed conditions" to what they had in the "dim dark ages … of horse and sulky".[129] On the other hand, Blackwell argued that experience showed that the more remote members are from management, the more their loyalty to co-operative ideals faded. Centralisation, as he referred to amalgamation, would not in itself bring efficiencies or impart knowledge, and he pointed to decentralised English and Scandinavian co-operative systems as evidence. The Federation, he argued, had to learn the art of delegating authority. Its new generation leaders had the advantage of seeing problems across the whole movement, but this could lead them to see the local co-operators as stupid rather than disadvantaged. Another speaker argued that centralisation would remove responsibility from local managers and breed resentment, while another that it would lead to a loss of local pride in the ideals of co-operation that had resolved the problem of bulk handling of wheat in the 1930s, and that was needed to deal with the looming problems in railway transport with the closure of small lines and sidings and aging rolling stock.

Both sides drew upon their own understandings of Rochdale to bolster their arguments, but in many ways the debate was a symptom not only of the changing times but of the shift from the old guard to the new. Other issues came up in the debates: co-operatives lacked the capital for expansion, too many bonuses were being paid rather than accumulating in reserve funds, inflation was gradually reducing the value of returns, and the fixed value of shares was cited as a disincentive to invest in co-operatives. The debate was mainly framed in terms of central versus local control, and was not resolved one way or the other, instead being referred to the district councils where it quietly simmered for another decade. The Federation's responses centred on training and education, with Federation executive members attending local co-op board meetings to argue for better business practices. A more passive response lay in quietly supporting amalgamations without openly criticising local allegiances. The training and education response was by far the most considered and developed, with its emphasis on increasing business skills and managerial professionalism. Perth Technical College (a predecessor to

Curtin University) became involved with the training program, giving it both credibility and a certain level of vocational rigour.

The Federation executive appointed an education committee in 1956 with a focus on staff training. The committee's first report brought the focus to 'efficiency', especially in the local stores and consumer co-operatives, and proposed establishing a co-operative staff training centre in Osborne Park with the Osborne Park store as a demonstration centre.[130] This was the last conference attended by the Honourable Thomas Bath, as he was invariably addressed by now, and he gave the proposal his "most wholehearted blessing". With that imprimatur, the training program took off. With financial assistance from Westralian Farmers', the Osborne Park premises was set up, and the first course held on 6 August 1956. Over 1956/57, 139 co-operative staff attended eleven courses with lectures ranging across co-operative history, staff management, customer relations, self-service store layout, stock control, an introduction to LP gas, and trends in drapery. In addition, 46 students were enrolled in the Technical College's correspondence course on bookkeeping, country study groups were formed to extend the Osborne Park network, and directors' assemblies were established for co-op directors covering topics such as cost consciousness and the duties and responsibilities of directors. By 1963, the program was fully operational, and Westralian Farmers' had seconded an officer to the Federation as Staff Training Organiser. Courses had increased to 24 and covered subjects such as food merchandising, hardware display, salesmanship, ticket writing and secretarial, and a three-day managers' seminar had been held in Cottesloe. The benefits were said to be increased store-keeping efficiency, and better awareness of co-operative principles and the value of the Federation.[131]

Another part of the training program was to provide incentives and promotional opportunities for staff in local co-operatives so that, with training now available, they could move around stores, increase their knowledge and skills, and become eligible for appointments to the higher managerial levels within a 'Co-operative Service'. The main weakness of the training programs was the lack of staff to participate, especially as younger and brighter country people were attracted by other work opportunities in bigger provincial towns and Perth, as well as what seems to have been a quite deliberate boycotting of the programs by some local co-operatives.

Western Australia, Britain and the Common Market

By the early 1960s, the 'ECM question', or the uncertainties around the likelihood or otherwise of Britain joining the European common market, came to prominence. In 1962, Professor Ian Bowen, Professor of Economics at The University of Western Australia, gave a long and detailed talk to the annual conference on the probable effects of Great Britain entering the common market. Although it would be another ten years before Britain's accession, the die had been cast when Britain's Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had submitted the first request for membership in 1961.[132] Bowen had experience with co-operatives in England and California, and gave a lengthy paper that concluded it was inevitable Britain would eventually join the European 'economic movement', a move initially prompted by Egypt's sudden restrictions on shipping in the Suez Canal in 1951 that caused a 'great shock' to British manufacturers. He said Australia's

future trade opportunities lay in South East Asia, Japan, India and possibly communist countries such as China. Australia, he said, was now "rather like some-one who has moved into a new town and has to set up business in this strange environment".[133]

Left to right: Mrs. E. T. Loton, Mr. R. C. Gates (Registrar of Co-operative Societies in Union of Malaya), Miss G. F. Polley, General Secretary, International Co-operative Alliance, Shri Dat Narais Sinha (Minister for Irrigation in Government of India), Mr. E. T. Loton (Australian Delegate), Yang Anat Mulia Raja Musa, Speaker in the Parliament of Union of Malaya.

Chairman of the Federation, Mr E Thorley Loton and Mrs Loton, pictured at the South East Asian Co-operative Congress in Kuala Lumpur, January 1958.
38th Annual Conference Report, 1958, courtesy Co-operatives WA

Bowen's audience included MPs representing the premier and the opposition leader as well as the Farmers Union (a successor to the Wheatgrowers Union) president, and it had a profound if confusing effect. The next year, Sunny West Co-operative Dairies was looking for new markets in South East Asia and Japan (despite a world-wide glut of dairy products), while Westralian Farmers', Co-operative Bulk Handling and the Honey Pool were holding exhibits in London. In 1965 Walter Crosse, Deputy Chairman of the Federation and a director of the Grain Pool, attended the Commonwealth Conference on Agricultural Co-operation at Exeter University in England. This was the first such Commonwealth-wide conference since 1951, and Crosse was enthusiastic about discovering the work of Horace Plunkett, a 'pioneer of agricultural co-operation' in Ireland who, he claimed, did more than anyone to broaden ideas of co-operation beyond Rochdale and into agricultural production. This had been dramatically illustrated throughout the Commonwealth since 1951 where along with increasing self-governance

all the main tropical crops such as cotton, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, sugar and oilseeds were being co-operatively marketed and more than half these crops were being produced through local village co-ops and village credit societies. Crosse was especially enthusiastic about India, which he assessed was at about the same stage as Western Australia had been in the 1930s, and he sent the Indian delegates histories of the Wheat Pool and Co-operative Bulk Handling as models they could follow. He drew four relevant conclusions from the conference for the Federation in Western Australia:

1. The future of co-operation lay in education and training of co-operators
2. Larger co-operatives should work with smaller co-operatives to strengthen and eventually absorb them
3. Research and up-to-date statistics were vital, and
4. The basic principles of co-operation did not need revision, but needed to be applied and adapted to particular circumstances with a degree of imagination.[134]

Crosse's enthusiasm after the conference suggests that Britain's entry into the common market was more of a concern for the producer co-operatives rather than the consumer co-operatives. His conclusions placed the Federation's training and centralisation approaches within the bigger context of a rapidly changing world, implying they were the correct way to go, while his discovery of Plunkett and the adaptability of Rochdale confirmed for the producers that their Westralian version of Rochdale was sustainable. With hindsight, that comforting vision may not have been the most helpful.

Britain's second attempt at joining the common market under the Wilson Labour government in 1967 prompted a more realistic approach. Irwin Hunter, marketing manager for Westralian Farmers' and its Federation representative, attended the 3rd Asian Agricultural Co-operative Conference in New Delhi in 1967 and returned with a more sobering view for the Federation.[135] He stressed the need for the Federation to actively sponsor specific development programs in Asia to raise living standards and ultimately create customers for Australia's food exports. India, he said, had too many small co-operatives and needed centralisation, while more generally production, processing, marketing and technological assistance was needed across the region. He cited the example of 'automatic bakeries' being developed in India under the Colombo Plan. The manager of the Honey Pool also provided examples of promoting honey sales in Hong Kong for tobacco curing, increasing sales of table honey in Japan, and had advised the Mexican government on an orderly marketing scheme, although he also outlined the new streamlined marketing of Western Australian honey in London.

Until the 1960s, Britain was Western Australia's main trading partner, with agricultural products the State's main export.[136] In 1954/55, for instance, Britain received 45% of Western Australia's exports and other Commonwealth countries another 12%, or nearly two-thirds of all exports.[137] However, the destination of Western Australia's exports changed rapidly during between 1961 and 1973, as shown in the table.

Table | Changing markets for Western Australian exports, as a proportion of the value of total exports, 1938/39, 1961/62 – 1974/75, 1984/85[138]

	1938/39	1961/62	1966/67	1969/70	1971/72	1974/75	1984/85
Britain	31.4	12.0	8.6	4.6	5.7	2.4	1.7
Commonwealth§	6.7	13.0	11.8	9.8	8.4	10.1	5.8
Eastern Australia	23.6	22.0	21.5	18.1	14.6	10.4	20.1
Foreign	36.0	49.7	66.5	67.3	79.0	76.9	72.1

§ not recorded as a distinct group after 1963/64 in the official Western Australian year books
Commonwealth = mainly India, Pakistan, Malaya/sia and Singapore, Hong Kong, New Zealand
Foreign = in 1938/39 mainly Netherlands East Indies, USA, Germany and Japan
between 1961/62 – 1984/85, mainly Japan, USA, Middle East, China

The decline in exports to Britain and other Commonwealth countries during the decade when Britain was seeking to join the common market, and more so afterwards, is clear although somewhat underplayed as, from the mid-1960s onwards, the value of mineral exports to Japan greatly overshadows that of agriculture. Bowen's warning touched on real concerns within the co-operatives movement. That concern was reinforced in the record number of 30 rural co-operatives that were wound-up between 1963 and 1971, and major population decline in the wheatbelt during the same period.[139]

Credit Unions and co-operation

The 1960s was for the Federation and rural producers generally a decade of both exploring Asian opportunities and continuing British links, of not wanting to believe Britain would abandon them, but just in case, devising alternative plans. There were calls to broaden the base of Federation membership, more discussion of the social importance of co-operation, and an increasing interest in credit unions, harking back to Charles Harper's enthusiasm for Raiffeisen. In 1969 Mr B Calverley, president of the Australian Federation of Credit Union Leagues, addressed the annual conference for the first time, emphasising their role as a new source of co-operative credit and citing examples in Canada and New South Wales. The first credit union formed in Western Australia, the ABC Staff Association (WA) Credit Union Society Ltd, was incorporated in 1962 under the *Co-operative and Provident Societies Act 1903*, bringing a new purpose to the Act, and joined the Federation the same year. The Metropolitan Co-operative Credit Society Ltd formed the same year, and further credit unions, mainly occupational but some based in certain districts or particular ethnic communities formed throughout the 1960s, with nine new credit unions joining the Federation in 1964.[140] By 1970 the Credit Union League of WA was the credit union's umbrella group, and it joined the Federation and actively participated in Federation affairs for several years.

Great Britain made its third and finally successful application for common market membership in 1969, with its entry to take place on 1 January 1973. Old patterns in the overseas trading of Western Australia's agricultural produce, in a world of Commonwealth Preference, were to come to an expected but nevertheless jolting end.[141] The adjustment

was difficult. The Education and Publicity Committee's concerns in 1971 were emblematic. After the promising days of the 1960s, by 1971 participants in training courses had fallen by two-thirds since 1965, and the number of courses offered had decreased by 13%, while costs had risen by 84% per course and doubled per student. Westralian Farmers', Co-operative Bulk Handling and the other big co-ops had introduced their own in-house training schemes and the small stores were unable to sustain the scheme alone.[142] The program was terminated, and later replaced with a Storekeeping Advisory Committee, and later again another training program. The storekeeping committee sought to help local co-ops identify problems and address them, but was regularly rebuffed by local directors when it proposed the amalgamation of stores. It identified a lack of management skills, old merchandising approaches, failures to properly budget and identify costs, and the impacts of rural depopulation.[143] Depopulation was becoming a bigger issue over time. Between 1947 and 1971, Western Australia's agricultural workforce fell from 18 percent to 9 percent of all workers, and by 2018 to three percent.[144] The staff training program can be seen as one way in which the Federation was attempting to prepare, through increasing professionalisation, for Britain's impending exit from trading within the Commonwealth, but the changes ran deeper. By 1973, there was a sullen acceptance that Britain had gone, that getting into Asia would not be easy, that local co-operative stores were stuck in a rut, and a lingering sense of drift pervaded the Federation.

However, there were some brighter lights. The Mt Barker Co-operative, firmly based on the production and export to Britain of apples and dried fruits, was enmeshed in a market already suffering from an oversupply of fruit in the late 1960s, and after 1973 when the British market vanished, it decided to change from a producer to a consumer co-operative. No bonuses or dividends were paid for several years, assets were sold and a loan secured to convert the now empty fruit packing shed into a supermarket. The Co-op's first woman director, Mrs Edna Adams, was elected in 1975, and she persuaded the other directors to convert the old sheds rather than demolish and build a new store in order to "create a village atmosphere … to fit in with the rest of town".[145] It was an imaginative response to change while sticking with a Westralian version of Rochdale. Many local co-operatives, however, had little capacity to do likewise, but Mt Barker's transition from producer to consumer was a harbinger of Western Australia's path to continuing co-operation after the British abandonment.

An awareness of just how fundamentally different the global economic system was becoming was revealed in two papers to the 1975 Federation conference. Mr T Eastwood of Westralian Farmers' Ltd criticised Milton Friedman's argument that corporations accepting any sort of social responsibility were "undermining the foundations of a free society". With that attitude Friedman, said Eastwood, would not be able to get a job in a co-operative![146] Conversely, Mr I Kins of the State government's new Consumer Protection Bureau quoted Adam Smith's view that "in a mercantile system, the interest of the consumer is almost constantly sacrificed to that of the producer … production, not consumption, is the ultimate object of all industry and commerce".[147] He quoted Smith in order to refute him, with his counter-claim that the 'informed consumer' is now demanding that his interests in the market place must be taken into consideration. Friedman and Smith were the poster-boys for the new theories of monetarism that

were then coming to the fore.[148] Their literal appearance at the Co-operative Federation conference heralded big new political and social forces that obscured the Federation's post-Britain ennui with an ambivalence in response to a host of changes.

Consumers and consumer rights

One of these new forces was the consumer movement. As Kin's address had presaged, the State was beginning to remove trade protections and instead require, through regulation, new ways to allow consumers to make more informed decisions for themselves. Four basic consumer rights were identified under the new *Consumer Protection Act 1971*: the right to safety and health, the right to choose, the right to be informed and the right to be heard. The Consumer Affairs Bureau would take actions on behalf of consumers in all areas of the private sector relating to the supply of goods and services, including co-operatives. Kin advised the producer co-operatives they needed to provide more information to consumers about their goods, while the consumer co-operatives could assist consumers with reducing the gap between wholesale and retail prices. New issues continued to arise, such as use-by dates, listing ingredients on packaging, identifying chemicals used in production and so on. Consumer protections also came in the form of the Federal *Trade Practices Act 1974*. The Federation had some concerns the new laws would impact on Westralian Farmers' which, like the Manchester CWS, provided merchandise and grocery lines to co-operative stores at wholesale prices. The Federation's concerns were realised in 1976 when Westralian Farmers' wholesale services went into liquidation, unable to compete with new corporate grocery wholesalers under the new Trade Practices regime that removed various practices tying retailers to wholesalers. The Federation Chairman, Mr RG Sutherland, noted that 'traditional institutions', in particular "one major co-operative activity" (i.e. Westralian Farmers' wholesale services), were "feeling the battering ram of change" through external threats and a lack of support and loyalty (i.e. from local co-op stores).[149] He called for 'loyalty and unity' to be the Federation's watchwords for the future, and said traditional institutions had to change and adapt or be destroyed. The hard realities of free market approaches and the end of the mercantilist Commonwealth Preference were bringing hard choices to Federation members.

The president of the Australian Federation of Credit Union Leagues gave a lengthy address to the Federation in 1976, and in the vote of thanks it was noted that credit unions were drawing on the same philosophy as the Federation members, and experiencing the greatest growth among "co-operative-type organisations" which could help the Federation's leaders "think more clearly" about future directions.[150] Two years later two executives from the West German Raiffeisen Union, who were touring Australian co-operatives, addressed the conference in the hope of fostering closer ties.[151] However, while the credit union movement, which had promised some renewal of co-operation, continued to develop it also gradually drew away from the Federation.

The *Credit Unions Act 1979*, which the Federation helped develop, gave the credit unions their own statutory framework, outside the *Co-operatives and Provident Societies Act 1903*, with three objectives that echoed those of the co-operators.[152] Credit unions were to raise funds through subscriptions, make loans to members, and encourage thrift and

render services to members. When the Act came into force, it automatically removed all 36 existing credit unions from the 1903 Act and registered them under the new Act.[153] Of those 36, eleven were Federation members, but none remained engaged with the Federation after 1980. In retrospect, the achievement of separate statutory arrangements was something of an own-goal for the co-operative movement at a time when it needed the credit unions' new thinking.

Demonstrating the use of a new Redicard (credit union) credit card, Perth 2 March 1984
Stevenson Kindler and Scott Collection, 363313PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

Diversification

For many farmers and producer co-operatives of the 1970s and 80s, diversification referred to new crops and markets. This had been emphasised in an address to the Federation's 50th jubilee conference in 1970, when the Deputy Director of Agriculture stressed the need for diversification in agricultural crops and produce, and cost-cutting in farm management including the amalgamation of properties.[154] Dairying, for example, would face big changes as Britain was the market for 85% of Australian butter, a market that was about to be closed. Loss of British markets would be compounded by new processing technologies such as UHT.[155]

The development of new markets after 1973 was critical, and attention was heavily focused on South East Asia and Japan as well as the Middle East. One perhaps unexpected country for market development was the People's Republic of China. Professor Bowen

had identified China's potential in 1962, and in 1973 the Federation's annual conference was informed that Westralian Farmers' General Manager, Keith Edwards, would shortly be going to China as a member of a Federal trade mission.[156] Westralian Farmers' Travel would be organising a tour for Federation members who also wished to go along, and the official mission would also include the Federation Chairman, Mr Sutherland. Press reporting later emphasised China's interest in buying Australian wheat, wool and sugar, with potential for increasing wheat quotas for Western Australia wheat farmers (quotas were imposed in 1969, in response to over-production, world-wide tariffs and import restrictions, to limit the amount of wheat that would be received at wheat handling facilities).[157] India had been the great hope in the 1960s, but Japan was increasingly being encouraged to look beyond its mineral needs to agricultural produce, and it was also possible China could potentially fill that role.[158] This was quickly apparent when quotas were raised in 1972/73, and the area sown for wheat increased three-fold to 3 million hectares in 1973/74 as wheat exports to China rose.[159]

Meeting between Westralian Farmers' Ltd and Toyobo Co Ltd of Japan,
following sale of 6,500 bales of cotton grown by the Ord River Co-operative, 1968
Little Album, P1999.4080, courtesy Royal Western Australian Historical Society

Diversification also meant encouraging new co-operatives beyond the wheatbelt. Earlier, in 1967, Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative had extended its operations into prawning out of Onslow, and a new fishing co-operative had opened in Shark Bay. The Ord River Co-operative, formed in 1963 by cotton farmers, had installed a second cotton gin in 1972, and the Federation chairman, in noting Kununurra was equidistant between Perth and

Tokyo, signalled the Federation was looking northwards.[160] The co-operative movement was moving out of the South West, and becoming more aware of the advantages of the State's geographic location on Indian Ocean shores. During the 1970s, at least three new consumer co-operatives were formed in the North West.[161]

For the Federation, diversification also meant looking to new members who did not necessarily come from the wheatbelt shires. In 1976 the State Minister for Education and Cultural Affairs in Sir Charles Court's Coalition government, Graham MacKinnon MLC, spoke to the annual conference on the "social and cultural side of the Movement".[162] After citing several examples of artist and artisan co-operatives, he suggested the Federation could offer its expertise to arts, cultural and sporting groups to, for instance, develop the co-operative buying of materials (in which Westralian Farmers' wholesale services might play a role), co-operative ownership of infrastructure such as potter's kilns, and the co-operative purchasing of school text books. Pertinently, MacKinnon observed that the Federation's focus on primary production and marketing, with some rural retailing, meant co-operative ideals were largely unknown in the metropolitan area where most Western Australians now lived. He recommended attention be given to promoting "the philosophy of co-operation" in cultural and social activities in urban areas to attract new members to the Federation. The Minister was hardly a cultural revolutionary, but his signposting of possible new directions was not universally welcomed, with one of the delegate feed-back groups saying his thoughts were "not closely relevant", and more time should have been spent on the problems in co-operative storekeeping.[163]

Delegates had already been given something of a wake-up call in 1971 when Helen Langley, president of the Junior Farmers Movement, and the first woman to ever address a Federation conference, told the somewhat surprised delegates that youth groups like Junior Farmers and Rural Youth were working towards personal development mostly through competition, and although they co-operated in an organisational sense, competition was a powerful motive. She told the delegates that co-operation, as an idea, had not been sold to 'youth' in Western Australia, while other countries were far ahead in engaging them with co-operatives, citing the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Uganda and the United States as examples. She said the Federation's leaders and members "ought to be aware of ideas and matters which require putting into practice and present some of those ideas to the young people", although concluding "There should be no concession to age – youth should be involved because co-operation appears essential and meaningful to them".[164] The next speaker expanded the point, noting that people under the age of 30 made up half the population and they had cultural and health needs differing from their predecessors. Through co-operation they could develop a 'sense of belonging' that would benefit the co-operatives movement. The conference decision to 'take a detailed note' of Miss Langley's points seems inadequate in an organisation needing to reach out to a rising generation.

The next speaker also touched upon an issue of some contention. Hew Roberts, Director of Adult Education at The University of Western Australia, noted that the ideal of co-operation was one of the most honoured values in human history, going back "as far into the dreamtime as the aboriginal tribes that once sat around their campfires where

we sit in comfort today".[165] Aboriginal engagement had been raised in 1969 when the Bassendean Rochdale Co-operative Co Ltd, which was an exclusively consumer co-operative, argued the Federation could encourage "underprivileged people in the Metropolitan area to consider the establishment of an aboriginal co-operative society".[166] How this was to be done was not spelt out, but an attempt by the Federation to assist with developing an Aboriginal co-operative on "an island in the North-west" had failed, from which it was concluded training of Aboriginal personnel was needed in order to advance 'the co-operative way of business' in Aboriginal communities.[167] Aboriginal engagement with the co-operatives movement had been canvassed at the 1970 conference, when some delegates wanted the Federation to seek membership of the "Aboriginie Advancement Council" and encourage Aboriginal people to participate in co-operatives. This, however, "was not a unanimous recommendation from discussion groups", and seems not to have progressed, at least in any formal sense.[168] Regardless of the sensitivities of some delegates, others believed that bringing Aboriginal communities into the co-operatives movement was both needed and in accordance with Rochdale principles, and co-operatives were indeed being formed in Aboriginal communities. The Kadee (Aboriginal) Co-operative Ltd was the first specifically Indigenous co-operative to become a Federation member, joining in 1977 after being incorporated under the Companies (Co-operatives) Act earlier that year.[169]

While thoughts of engaging with 'youth' and Aboriginal people left some delegates bewildered, Helen Langley's presentation also marked the rise of another group within the co-operatives movement. Women had been involved in organising the early Vine & Fruit Growers Associations in the 1890s. The first women to be a director of a co-operative from its inception dated from 1944.[170] The Federation had conducted educational courses from 1950 in Perth that included special sessions for women on topics such as modern chemical sprays in the home and garden, and cultural activity in country areas, visits to the stock foods factory in Welshpool and the Wesfarmers Machinery Department in Bassendean, and an open invitation to attend all of the men's sessions.[171] The 1951 school, on the theme of 'More Productive Farm Animals', attracted 45 men and 18 women students.[172] The 1961 conference considered a proposal from the York Co-op Co that the Federation should develop a policy on equal pay for equal work between the sexes, but after general discussion it was agreed to defer the matter "at this stage" because of the variances in defining what equal work and equal conditions meant.[173] By the time of Langley's address, women were beginning to attend the Federation conference as delegates in their own right rather than as 'wives', and a Mrs Wilkinson moved the vote of thanks to the chairman for conducting the 1971 conference. In 1975 Edna Adams was elected as the first female director of the Mr Barker Co-op Co despite, as she later recalled, one senior shareholder declaring that "he would not be supporting a woman candidate for a director's position; however, once I was elected he became one of my best supporters".[174] Mrs Adams later became a Senior Vice President of the National Country Party's State Council, and its first female Senate candidate. Before this, women had already been extensively involved with co-operatives, generally as employees in rural stores and co-operative factories rather than in management or executive roles. Co-operatives were probably major providers of paid jobs for country women during the twentieth century, albeit mostly in lower-level positions.[175]

Redeveloping the Mt Barker Co-operative sheds into the new Co-operative Store, c1977
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

Women processing Abrolhos Islands western rock lobster,
Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative, 20 April 1976
Stevenson Kinder & Scott Collection, 327915PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

One area of diversification that brought new members into the Federation was fishermen's cooperatives. Commercial fishing had taken off during the 1890s gold rushes for local sales in Perth and the Goldfields, with compulsory licensing of commercial fishermen from 1899. Export-oriented crayfish canning was developed just before World War Two, followed by freezing crayfish tails for export after the war. Domestic demand for fresh fish increased with the uptake of home refrigerators after the war. The main commercial fishing areas were Shark Bay, the Abrolhos Islands and adjacent Batavia Coast, and Albany.[176] The Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-op Soc Ltd had its brief existence over 1904-05. The next fisher's co-operative was formed in Fremantle 42 years later with the Fremantle Fishermen's Co-operative in 1947, followed in 1950 by the Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative. Between 1978 and 1985 a further six fisher's co-operatives were formed, reflecting the spread of commercial fishing into new areas further around the coast between Esperance and Shark Bay.[177]

One feature of the fisher's co-operatives compared to the farmer co-operatives was that their marine districts were not exclusive to each co-operative, and the produce came from hunting rather than cultivation, but they were alike in that new technologies increased the geographical range of fishing and types of commercial processing. Another similar factor was the creation of new fishing grounds through the development of an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Indian Ocean, somewhat akin to creating the wheatbelt. The EEZ extends over the sea bed 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) from the coast of all maritime countries, and was developed as part of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that was finalised in 1982. Negotiations began in 1973, and the first reports to the Federation conference were made in 1976 by Joe Pupazzoni who represented fisher co-operatives. That had been a record year for fishers, with the highest prices ever paid to co-operative shareholders, and the potential expansion of fishing grounds to cover an area equal to the continental land mass was intoxicating. Coupled with the principal export market for fish, especially crayfish, being the United States rather than Britain, the fishermen's co-operatives were vital and growing compared to the melancholic rural co-operative scene.[178]

In 1983, the old tensions between local autonomy and central authority were overcome, almost without even a whimper, when the districts and district councils were abolished and replaced by four 'group councils' representing retail storekeeping, fruit and vegetable wholesalers, services and fishing. These groups each nominated members to the Federation Council, replacing the old district representatives, along with one member each nominated by the managers group, Westralian Farmers', Co-operative Bulk Handling, the Grain Pool, and one member with special qualifications. The replacement of geographical or local interests with corporate interests in forming the Federation's governing body was a significant change that represented a final victory for the centralisers. That this seems to have be so easily achieved at this time points to the changing situation for many of the local co-operative units. Between 1980 and 1985, fifteen local co-operatives increased their share capital (more than at any other time), and eight were wound up, including the Bruce Rock Co-operative in 1981 and the Tammin Co-operative in 1986.[179] It was a victory, however, driven by a changing world and perhaps a pyrrhic victory in light of the subsequent disappearance of the 'parent company' when Westralian Farmers',

to the surprise of many in the Federation, began to pursue a very different path. By the early 1980s, the co-operatives movement overall, despite the fishers' successes, was not a happy camp, and even bigger changes were to hit in the 1980s as the monetarist paradigm began to bear fruit.

Snapshot | Geraldton Fishermen's Co-op Co Ltd, 1950 +

At the same time as the Dangin and Midland co-ops were beginning to experience difficulties, a new player come on the scene. Geraldton Fisherman's Co-operative was formed in 1950 as a co-operative company. It immediately prospered, and joined the Federation. The initial reason for forming the co-op was the refusal of private buyers to increase the price they paid fishers despite rising retail prices in the United States, the principle market for crayfish (or Western Rock Lobster, as they were officially designated in 1969). A group of fishers met at the Geraldton Waterside Workers Hall to form the Co-op, and 70-80 applications were received for shares. They secured an agreement with a buyer to purchase all their output for two years, secured land and then the shareholders built the first factory.

By May 1951 when the co-op began processing 4,500-kilogram consignments, it had 14 permanent staff, 20 casuals, a snap-freezer for 380 x 25lb (11 kg) cases at -40˚C with a holding room for 1,400 cases at -23˚C, a 2-ton bait room and 2-ton fish freezer in operation. Before World War Two, crayfish tails had been processed for canning, but in 1946 experimental exports of frozen tails began, at first to Britain and then the next year to the United States. The Co-op processed the live crayfish, which they received at the wharf or on the beach from fishers in jute bags, and snap-froze the tails, sending them to Perth by refrigerated trucks for export. These operations were reflected in its first year of operations when, after £6,919 in costs for wages the largest expenses were for electricity, cellophane, freight, bags and cases, and ammonia (a refrigerant gas).

Like the bulk handling of wheat, the Co-op's investment in technological advances in fish processing, and in marketing the catch in a new market, were as important to its success as good prices paid to shareholders. These set a pattern reflected in net profit at the end of 1951 of £5,926 ($257,000), which had doubled at the end of 1952 to £15,385 ($569,182). The net profit for 1958 was £36,812 ($1,154,546), with a 5% dividend to shareholders and rebates on crayfish trading of 4½%, on merchandise of 5% and on fish trading of one penny per pound (500g). Assets included £70,640 ($2.2M) in buildings, plant and equipment at Geraldton and £23,152 ($726,123) at Shark Bay, and a fleet of three trucks, two utes and one Volkswagen van.

In 2016/17, Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative was ranked 23rd by turnover in Australia's Top 100 Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises ($372 million) and 89th by assets ($140 million).

Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative Marine Store, c1996
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

Changing Environments, 1984 – 2009 | "Only the cockies liked Wellington Street"

By the late 1970s, a view was developing within Westralian Farmers', according to its official history, that it was outgrowing its co-operative roots and that the age of the rural co-operative was 'mature', if not already past.[180]

The Westralian Farmers' Building, 569 Wellington Street, Perth, c1925
Home of the Co-operative Federation from 1919 to 1981
EL Mitchell Collection, BA533/80, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

From Westralian Farmers' to Wesfarmers

Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Ltd, or Wesfarmers as it was now more commonly known, had taken on board the rubric of diversification with gusto, beginning with the acquisition of Gascoyne Trading in 1950 and the State's first LPG franchise in 1956 which it named Kleenheat Gas. Initially these were to provide further services to producer

members. They were not themselves co-operatives but companies in which Wesfarmers had a controlling interest, and did business with non-members and members alike. More such entities were acquired over the years, and by the early 1980s co-operation as a guiding philosophy was becoming less central to Wesfarmers as an entity. The view from within the Wesfarmers administration, if not its board, was that the requirements of the *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943* which, for instance, capped the dividend payable to members, as well as fixed the $2 (originally £1) share value, was causing an accumulation of earnings that could not be distributed. Surpluses, in the Rochdale model and, to that point, its Westralian variation, were to be returned to members as bonuses or rebates or placed in a reserve fund to provide or enhance member services. This basic principle of co-operation, however, was coming to be regarded as a constraint on Wesfarmers operations, and an invitation to the corporate raiders of the early 1980s to try and take over the company by purchasing its $2 shares (echoing Johnson's concerns in 1929). The one-shareholder-one-vote principle, as well as the emotional attachment many members had for their Westralian Farmers' shareholding, mitigated against such a threat, but in the context of the times, Friedman's dictum that the only social responsibility of business was to increase its profits was ever-more enticing. The accumulated wealth of Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Ltd was now seen as 'unlocked value'.

Wesfarmers executives and Labor Premier Brian Burke inspect the
architect's model for the new Wesfarmers House in 1984
Roger Garwood and Trish Ainslie Collection, 142768PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

The old Westralian Farmers' building in Wellington Street, just across from Perth railway station, home to the Federation offices since 1919, and the place in which it had been founded, was also becoming a symbol of co-operation's 'maturity', and General Manager John Bennison was convinced that its antiquity and lack of services

such as air conditioning were inhibiting the recruitment of new staff. "Only the cockies liked Wellington Street", he later recalled.[181] The company needed a 'modern face', and Bennison moved its operations into "modern digs in the Perth CBD". In 1981 the old building was sold and Wesfarmers temporarily relocated into the modern Allendale Square tower in St Georges Terrace.[182] The Federation moved with it, but times were rapidly changing. In 1987 Wesfarmers Ltd moved into its new headquarters, Wesfarmers House, at a prestigious The Esplanade address in central Perth. By then, the Federation and Wesfarmers had parted ways. After some short-term stays provided by larger members, the Federation acquired a more stable address and meeting place as a guest of its auditor, Munro & Associates, in West Perth.

American follies

The election of the Hawke Federal Labor and Burke State Labor governments in 1983 ushered in a period of deregulation, abolition of tariffs and removing controls around the banking and finance sectors. Westralian Farmers' went through a sequence of restructures in 1984, 1988 and 2001 to emerge as a publicly-listed company, styled Wesfarmers Ltd, for this new world. However, it had stopped participating in the Federation and the co-operatives movement long before 2001.

At the 1984 annual conference members had questioned the Federation's direction, expressing concern that services were being cut back when the Federation should be more outgoing, and that the purpose of the Federation was to serve its members which required a "high degree of support from the general membership", while another, somewhat surprisingly, or perhaps sarcastically, asked whether the Federation was operating to a budget.[183]

The Federation's 1985 conference illustrates the times. Held at the vast, newly-built Merlin Hotel in Adelaide Terrace Perth, the program was officially opened by Labor Premier Brian Burke who extolled the opportunities in the forthcoming America's Cup contest off Fremantle, and especially the proposed Americas Cup Cultural Expo & Co-operative Conference, or ACCECC 87, that was to run from October 1986 to March 1987.[184] ACCECC 87, Burke said, "would involve our State in a major stimulation of international trade", a statement made at a time when such exaggerated language seemed unremarkable.[185] Conference sessions included 'The co-operative profit-maker and its impact on the Australian and West Australian business world', chaired by the Wesfarmers chairman with one of the speakers being a director of Bond Corporation, and 'Presentation by WA Co-operative managers – how they plan to profit from ACCECC 87'. The traditional rural co-operative stores were a marked absence from the conference program.

ACCECC 87 was discussed by the then-national body, the Co-operative Federation of Australia, at its February 1985 council meeting in Adelaide, attending by two Western Australian representatives. The meeting was ill-tempered and argumentative, the ACCECC planning appeared disorganized with extravagant claims of hosting an international co-operatives conference, shipboard events during the yacht racing, subsidized airfares, large donations, and a supposed split in the international co-operatives movement that could be of advantage to the ACCECC proposal. Things quickly turned sour, and at

its January 1986 meeting the national body resolved to no longer have anything to do with ACCECC 87, accepted the resignation of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia and asked it to pay outstanding fees of $3,000.[186] In the event, ACCECC 87 never happened.

While the quixotic pursuit of America's Cup dreams was going on, the Australian Agricultural Council, a Federal government agency, instituted a Working Party on Agricultural Co-operatives that recommended consideration be given to establishing uniform co-operatives legislation throughout Australia. The agency argued that legislative inconsistencies between the states created barriers to the development of internationally competitive national agricultural co-operatives. This set in motion a sequence of events, little noticed in Western Australia, that eventually led to co-operative laws with continental application.[187]

Retreat

There is a view that Westralian Farmers' retreat from co-operation left a vacuum in the co-operatives movement and severely impacted the Federation.[188] What Matthew Padbury had referred to in 1919 as the 'parent company' had readily abandoned its loyal 'units', a sort of re-run of Britain's jilting in 1973. Frank O'Connor, a Federation Council member between 1986 and 2001, recalls this period as marked by the loss of Wesfarmers financial and secretarial support and office accommodation, changing executive officers, and the collapse of the national body.[189] The adaptation of Rochdale to Westralian co-operation, with its emphasis on producers rather than consumers as championed by Harper and Bath, seemed to have reached a 'maturity' that was no longer considered sustainable in the age of WA Inc and Gordon Gekko.[190] Wesfarmers' official history focuses on the gratitude of newly-enriched shareholders after 1984, but makes no mention of those left behind.[191]

However, was the Federation and the co-operative spirit really a dead duck? Back in 1979 the Federation, in the spirit of the coming age, had acquired ownership of Wespak Pty Ltd, a company established by Westralian Farmers' in 1934 that produced crates and other packaging for, in particular, fruit and vegetables.[192] The purchase was to allow rapidly rising costs to be met from this new income stream rather than through levies on members, as well as ensure Wespak's continuing viability to maintain services to country storekeepers.[193] This was reported at the Federation's last conference organized in the old Westralian Farmers' Building in Wellington Street, and the impending need for (and cost of) new accommodation was prescient, reflected in the relatively down-market conference venue that year at Belmont Race Course. Just three years later, the Federation Council had taken the view that this arrangement created a conflict of interest between the Federation's voluntary character and the commercial basis of its members, and sold Wespak in 1982 to a private buyer for a profit of $48,900.[194] The Federation seemed to be adapting to changing times.

Not everyone accepted this, with accusations at the conference that the Wespak sale would fragment rather than strengthen the co-operative movement.[195] The Federation was, between 1980 and 1985, peripatetic and lacking the professional secretariat services

once available in Wellington Street. Income was shrinking as memberships declined, falling from 70 in 1985 to 48 in 2004.[196] From 1982, a new line item appeared in the Federation's annual financial statement – rent, which amounted to $3,264 that year and continued to rise.[197] The ACCECC 87 adventure had proven to be a mistake that isolated the Federation from the national body and probably exhausted a lot of local resources and goodwill. Nevertheless, despite the melancholic picture, all was not gloom. For a decade from 1985 onwards, the Federation had the services of Don Munro as its accountant and secretary, and the use of his offices in West Perth for council and executive meetings, which returned some stability to the organization. Annual conferences continued to held. The Federation continued to assist members in difficulties when it could, such as purchasing the landholdings of the dissolving Yuna Farmers Co-op Ltd for $7,000 in 1987, which it sold a year later to a neighbouring farmer.[198] Its various financial accounts were consolidated into one, and by 1991 the Federation's investment portfolio (mainly in Wesfarmers shares and franked income) had a value of $142,000.[199]

Federation Chairman Mr John Carstairs with Coalition Premier Richard Court
at the annual conference held at The Vines Resort, Ellenbrook, c1997.
Courtesy of Co-operatives WA

Environmental awareness

The Federation also began to display some awareness of environmental change. A consultant hydrogeologist gave a paper at the 1978 conference to which the conference responded with some 'worries' that future water supplies were "not looking the best".[200] But it was the fishermen and their engagement with the evolving EEZ issue that brought environmental issues to the Federation. In 1979 a detailed paper was given at the annual conference by fisher's representative Laurie Connell on the state of play which identified the main EEZ issues as the duties of coastal states towards conservation of the marine environment and its resources, including regulating catches to provide sustainable yields, science-based environmental management, restoring depleted fish populations, and equitable access to marine resources. The paper stressed the need for more research and education (a co-operative principle) especially in deeper waters, the high cost of boat building in Western Australia, the need to develop markets for increased catches, and a concern that success would lead to the traditional owner/operator fisherman being displaced by large commercial fishers with hired hands (echoing rural concerns about farm amalgamations).[201] These issues all resonated with the earlier experience of farmers in the wheatbelt and dairy industries, although Connell was the first to place them within a context in which the environmental base also needed to be specifically considered and valued. Connell was actually building on two decades of growing environmental concerns and awareness in the cray fishing industry, out of which the industry's engagement in the EEZ negotiations had evolved.[202] The Chairman's report to the 1983 conference noted that the effects of declining rainfall and multiple cropping were becoming evident in wind erosion, the breakdown of soil structures, and increasing salinity, although he did not mention the contribution of the cumulative impacts of land clearing.[203] He concluded that the Federation and its members needed to support soil conservation, reafforestation and scientific research into improved plant varieties. Despite this, however, with the withdrawal of Westralian Farmers' from the co-operative movement, 1985 was something of a turning-point for at least a decade and environmental concerns slipped from the Federation's view.

In 1994 the Federation lobbied for and achieved amendments to the *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*.[204] In a nutshell, Rural Traders Co-operative Co Ltd intended to demutualize, issue a prospectus and eventually list on the Stock Exchange. One co-operative had already done so in 1992, but when Rural Traders sought to transfer to the Corporations Law in order to do so, the Australian Securities Commission refused the transfer the grounds that a co-operative was a 'non-company' and the previous transfer had been an administrative error. The amendments to the Act were to allow such transfers, as well as the largely fictitious option of transferring the other way (that is, from being a public corporation to a co-operative). Co-operatives wanting to transfer to the corporation's regime would be termed a 'noncooperative', and any entity that did transfer was prohibited from including the word 'co-operative' in its subsequent name. The amendment bill passed through both house of State parliament without any debate, and came into effect at the end of 1994.[205] The State Attorney General said that under the older arrangements the "development of cooperatives in Western Australia into corporations, if they so desire, is impeded", an impediment that would be removed by the amendment.[206] In the context of the 1990s, the idea that a co-operative would

naturally develop into a private corporation reflects a time when mutual enterprises had come to be regarded as inefficient and not 'business-minded'. Demutualisation, as Wesfarmers had shown, seemed the logical and profitable response.

It was also at this time that the evolution of a national co-operative framework took another step. In 1996, the Standing Committee of Attorneys General and the Ministerial Council for Corporations decided the best way to achieve uniform nation-wide legislation was an inter-governmental agreement setting out 'core' legislative provisions which would be consistent across all jurisdictions. All governments except Western Australia signed the Co-operative Laws Agreement to implement these provisions, which would use Victoria's *Co-operatives Act 1996* as a model.[207] The Federation had been engaged with these discussions to some extent, but resisted any talk of changing the Western Australian legislation to be consistent with other states because it feared an increase in 'bureaucratic controls', and cited New South Wales as the example to be avoided.[208] Nevertheless, a Western Australian parliamentary committee recommended in 1998 that the State join the Co-operative Laws Agreement, but the Federation retained its diverging views and discouraged joining, although it still recognised a need for some updating of the Western Australian legislation.[209]

The post-Westralian Farmers' period was a difficult one. The philosophy and principles of co-operation, and the co-operative model of business, had been under both direct assault and dispiriting neglect. National bodies rose and fell in quick sequence. Between 1996 and 2004 the Federation again moved offices three times, spending three years as a guest of one of its more successful members, the Capricorn Society, in Burswood from the turn of the century until early 2004 when a period of revival commenced with the appointment of a new secretary, Peter Wells, from Co-operative Bulk Handling.

Rejuvenation in the new century

By 2001 the Federation was attempting to persuade Richard Court's Coalition State government of the need to revise and update the co-operatives legislation, primarily the *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*, as well as the *Co-operatives and Provident Societies Act 1903*. The government, however, had been unreceptive, and by 2002 all other states and territories had adopted the 1996 core provisions. Each retained some distinctive State provisions, but overall 95% consistency was achieved between the various pieces of legislation.[210] The Federation Council formed a legislation sub-committee in 2002, and compared the Western Australian legislation with that in other states, especially Queensland, to advance its arguments. Positive signs slowly began to emerge during the later years of the Gallop Labor government and, in 2004, an Industry Reference Group (IRG) was formed between the Federation Council and ministerial officers responsible to the Minister for Consumer Protection to develop draft legislation.[211]

At the end of 2004, State parliament passed the *Loans (Co-operative Companies) Act 2004* to make it possible for the State government to loan money to a range of co-operatives for them to acquire business assets, and then claim the capital repayments of the loan as an income tax deduction.[212] The scheme replicated similar schemes in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and applied only to producer co-operatives. The Federation

started to work with the State Department of Agriculture and Food to assist start-up and existing co-operatives with plans to access loan funds. The co-operative business model, at the Federation's urging, was also being embraced by industry cluster groups with co-operatives able to assist positioning small to medium businesses to better compete for a share of large infrastructure projects primarily in the resources sector.

Some Federation members had transferred to the new Federal *Corporations Act 2001* as co-operative businesses. The Capricorn Co-operative Society had done so in order to be able to operate on a nation-wide basis, but it still remained a member of the Federation as it continued to operate as a co-operative.[213] The 2004 Act and the new Federal corporations legislation signalled the increasing importance for the Federation of looking abroad and across the Nullarbor, and re-engaging with developments in the broader co-operative movement.

A green paper for updating the legislative framework for co-operatives was developed through the IRG, and this became available for public comment in early 2006. The Federation had been apprising members of progress with the green paper and bill, and encouraged individual co-operatives to make their views known during the comment period.[214] The bill was based to a considerable extent on the Queensland legislation (itself based on the Victorian model), and one of its claimed advantages would be to provide Western Australian co-operatives with innovative capital raising opportunities, addressing a recurring theme in co-operatives history.[215]

While the new legislation was working its way through the parliamentary system, the Federation set about getting its own house in order. A modern strategic plan was developed by the council and adopted in 2005, the membership subscriptions were revised and levies on members abolished, and a new emblem and trading name, 'Co-operatives WA', was adopted.[216] The Federation also began to look across the seas with a proposal to attend the International Co-operatives Association conference in Singapore in 2007, for which it had received encouraging responses from the Association. The Chairman of the Federation also reported to the members that year that the Federation had been instrumental in rejuvenating the Co-operative Council of Australia (the national body at that time) as part of its strategy to develop strong representation at all levels of government.

Meanwhile, the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs took another step in 2007 to implement the national 'core provisions' agreed in 1996, and developed the Co-operatives National Law to remove all remaining distinctions between the various State co-operatives laws that had survived the earlier transition to the Victorian model legislation.[217]

The Co-operatives Bill was debated in parliament and passed the Legislative Assembly in April 2008. The bill was the Western Australian version of the Queensland and Victorian model, and its coverage was comprehensive. It included the promotion of cooperative philosophy, the facilitation of cooperatives in cross-border fundraising and trading, simplifying the registration process of cooperatives wishing to trade in other states and territories through mutual recognition, providing access to a 'cooperative capital

unit', a type of financial instrument that enables fundraising among non-members and provides another way for cooperatives to raise capital, providing new confidentiality safeguards for a cooperative's membership register, ensuring directors of cooperatives are accountable to their members for their actions and decisions, introducing updated requirements for disclosure to members when cooperatives are formed and when shares and debentures are issued, and facilitating takeovers, mergers, transfers, reconstructions and more efficient winding up.[218] The bill received strong cross-party support, and was about to be debated in the Legislative Council when a State election was called on 7 August. The bill lapsed. At the subsequent election, the Carpenter Labor government was replaced by the Barnett Coalition government, and the Federation quickly began making representations to have the Bill placed before the new parliament as a priority, ideally to be passed by early 2009.[219]

The Federation had also returned to its educational priorities, and worked with the Co-operative College in Manchester (which was also founded in 1919) to provide director and management education workshops in 2008 in Perth and several country towns, workshops that proved to be very successful. The Federation also commenced an engagement with The University of Western Australia's Business School which was already involved in research to increase the profile of the co-operative model in business schools and tertiary studies, and the promotion of co-operative business structures.[220]

Global Financial Crisis impacts were becoming evident globally in 2008, leading to wide ranging reviews of corporate practices and business structures. The Federation's chairman, Chris Enright, noted that Australia had not suffered to the same extent as other countries, but stressed the need for a strong awareness of lessons to be learnt from recent events. He quoted extensively from a report on the resilience of the co-operative model in times of crisis prepared by a Scottish and Canadian team of researchers. They found that co-operatives as a business form were more resilient and more able to sustain themselves in times of crisis. They emphasised the importance of understanding the history of co-operation "as a means to address the current crisis and avert future crises".[221] As if to emphasise the point, the Federation joined with other State peak bodies to identify the top 100 co-operatives and mutual enterprises (including credit unions) in Australia, to emphasise to policy makers the value and depth of the co-operative enterprise across the country.

The increased activity by the Federation was being noticed, and in 2009 inter-state observers began attending the annual conference. Of greater significance, in March 2009 the lapsed Co-operatives Bill was reintroduced to State parliament, and quickly passed through both houses to come into effect in August as the *Co-operatives Act 2009*.[222] The new Act fundamentally changed the framework for co-operatives in Western Australia, sweeping away the 1903 and 1943 acts and abolishing the hard distinction between co-operative companies and co-operative societies that had existed since 1929. By this time, the Federation and the co-operatives movement generally had well and truly recovered from the loss of Westralian Farmers' and the subsequent period of chaos. Now, at the age of 90, it was ready for a new phase in its history.

Snapshot | Capricorn Co-op Soc Ltd, 1975 +

The Capricorn Society Ltd was founded in South Perth in 1970 by a group of eleven Golden Fleece service station lessees. It began as an unofficial buying group, known as Group 11, which by 1974 had grown to 17 lessees. The Group needed to formalise its arrangements, and agreed on a co-operative as the best and least complex enterprise model suited to their needs as small business operators in the retail motor industry. They saw it as a way of building up purchasing power, allowing them to bring competitively priced services and goods to members, and to get around the restrictive trade practices of the big international oil companies who owned the service stations, and through which they exclusively marketed their own-brand products.

The Capricorn Society Ltd was registered under the 1903 Act in 1975, and issued 5,000 shares of $1 each, with profits to be distributed in proportion to member's purchases through the Co-op. Twenty-one members purchased 5,000 shares each to the provide the Society its initial working capital, a showroom and warehouse was leased in Stirling Street, Perth and the business opened as Capricorn Automotive Suppliers. Despite some early ups and downs, the 1980s were a time of expansion for Capricorn, opening up membership to mechanical workshops, panel beaters and other automotive industries, as well as diversifying into areas such as rental cars and a travel agency. New premises in Belmont were acquired in 1982, and in 1984 Capricorn's first member's convention was held in Bali, by which time membership had reached 300.

Capricorn's annual turnover reached $14 million in 1987, when a decision was made to move into the eastern States markets, beginning in New South Wales where by 1987 it had enrolled 50 members. By 1991 it had members in all states and territories, and in 1993 *Business Review Weekly* listed Capricorn 51st among the 100 fastest-growing companies in Australia, by which time membership had passed 2,000. Overseas expansion came in 1997 with Capricorn registering in New Zealand, and then South Africa in 2000, achieving a vision of its founders to 'stretch around the world' like the Tropic of Capricorn.

With the new century Capricorn's diversification continued when it established Capricorn Mutual Ltd as a licensed financial services provider in 2003, and the following year was ranked 66th in Australia's top 100 companies. In 2006 Capricorn became a member of the International Co-operative Alliance, and by 2008 it was operating a number of entities and lodged its first prospectus with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Social Business Australia Pty Ltd was launched in 2010 as a subsidiary to engage in social businesses, within a larger restructuring and strategic change in Capricorn. The next year member purchases exceeded $1 billion for the first time.

In 2016/17, Capricorn was ranked 5th by turnover in Australia's Top 100 Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises ($1.68 billion) and 65th by assets ($339 million).

Co-operative Bulk Handling's new grain silos, Geraldton, c1997
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

A New Beginning, 2009 – 2019 | "Many years of work and patience come together"[223]

The Co-operative Principles in 2009

One of the most noticeable aspects of the new Co-operatives Act was the inclusion of the seven co-operative principles (see Appendix A1).[224] This was a feature of the legislation based on the Victorian model, and it was the first time they had been given a statutory basis in Western Australia, as well as on a continental scale. The principles were placed at the very beginning of the Act, and as such they clearly reasserted the ideals of co-operation, a reassertion backed by parliamentary authority and royal assent.

The annual conference in 2010 was notable for its optimism. The potential of the alliance with Professor Tim Mazzarol and The University of Western Australia's Business School to position Western Australia as a centre of excellence in researching and developing co-operative business models was becoming evident, with a three-year study receiving significant Federal funding that would conclude in the United Nations Year of Co-operatives in 2012. Administration under the new Act was also being activated, with all existing co-operatives under either the 1903 or 1943 legislation having a three-year transitional period in which to register under the new Act and so, in effect, transfer their operations to the new framework. "The clock is now ticking" the chairman reminded conference delegates.[225] And, in a signal of the Federation's return to the national stage, the chairman confidently concluded his annual report by thanking the councillors, the secretary and office for their professionalism and knowledge which was now making "Co-operatives WA the envy of our inter-state counterparts". It had been a long road back.

Co-operative Bulk Handling completed its transition to the new Act in 2011, the first co-operative to do so, which set the template for others to follow. Eleven other co-operatives made the transition that year. These included some venerable old co-ops such as Quairading (established 1917 under the 1893 Act), Mt Barker (established 1918 under the 1903 Act), and Geraldton Fishermen's (established 1950 under the 1943 Act).[226] Planning was beginning for 2012 with a proposed Co-operatives WA/University of Western Australia Business School 'town and gown' event featuring international and inter-state speakers on co-operation and sustainable business.[227] The collaboration between Co-operatives WA and the University was being sponsored by Co-operative Bulk Handling and the Capricorn Society, among others, and the International Year of Co-operatives was intended to showcase the new Western Australian co-operation. This was extended to lobbying the Federal government to recognise co-operatives as part of an emerging 'Fourth Sector' of for-profit enterprises, and to promote the development of reliable data on the co-operative sector by the Bureau of Statistics. This repositioning of Co-operatives WA was made clear with the adoption in 2011 of a Statement of Corporate Intent, with its vision for the Federation "To be viewed as the centre of excellence and leading authority on co-operatives in Australia", and purposes that included "Promote co-operative vision and values and the co-operative business model" and "Promote the co-operative sector's significant contribution to the economy and the community".[228]

The *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943* and the *Co-operative & Provident Societies Act 1903* were finally repealed in August 2012, bring the transition phase to a close. A further 36 co-operatives had transitioned to the new Act by August, and the Federation played an important role in helping co-ops make the change. This now led on to the Federation working with the State Minister for Commerce to amend the 2009 Act to ensure consistency with legislative harmonisation between the states, of which a major benefit would be to assist co-operatives operate across State borders.

The relationship with the University Business School, especially through a three-year Australian Research Council linkage grant study, had bought notable benefits. One finding was that the strength of any member-owned enterprise came from engendering a strong sense of 'belonging' and 'identity' among members so they share a strong sense of community and purpose. The grant had also forged a strong collaborative relationship between academia and senior management in co-operative enterprises that would be further built upon in the future. The chairman's closing words in his annual report reflected the Federation's revived sense of purpose: "Co-operative enterprises build a better world".[229]

The United Nations Year of Co-operatives in 2012 lifted community awareness of co-operatives. Co-operatives WA's chairman claimed that its membership was now the most engaged of any of the inter-state federations, and a positive relationship had been established with the Western Australian government. The marquee event for 2012 was the annual conference conducted jointly with The University of Western Australia's Co-operatives Research Academic Exchange and titled *Co-operatives in the Fourth Sector: The Role of Member Owned Businesses in the Global Economy*. A number of international and national researchers and academics took part in the two-day conference, which renewed interest in the resilience of the co-operative business model amid the lingering fall-out from the Global Financial Crisis four years earlier. Western Australian-based co-operatives continued to feature in the top 100 mutual enterprises, including Co-operative Bulk Handling, Capricorn Society, Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative, and the WA Meat Marketing Co-operative, as well as other mutuals such as HBF WA and the Royal Automobile Club WA, all of which had an annual turnover of at least $100 million.

The Federation's re-engagement with inter-state and international co-operatives also led it to participate in forming the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM) in 2013, which succeeded the Co-operatives Council of Australia as the national body. Co-operatives WA joined as a voting member to provide a voice for its small members who lacked the resources to join in their own right.[230] The Capricorn Society had been a principle instigator of the new body, which had grown out of the International Year's organising committee, and along with Co-operative Bulk Handling was one of the three Western Australia bodies on the inaugural six-member BCCM Board.[231]

Following the International Year, the Federation entered a more reflective phase with a focus on professional development for the directors of co-operatives, hosting a workshop in Perth and another in Mt Barker, and awarding education grants to enable attendance by smaller co-ops. The dialogue with the State government over amendments to the

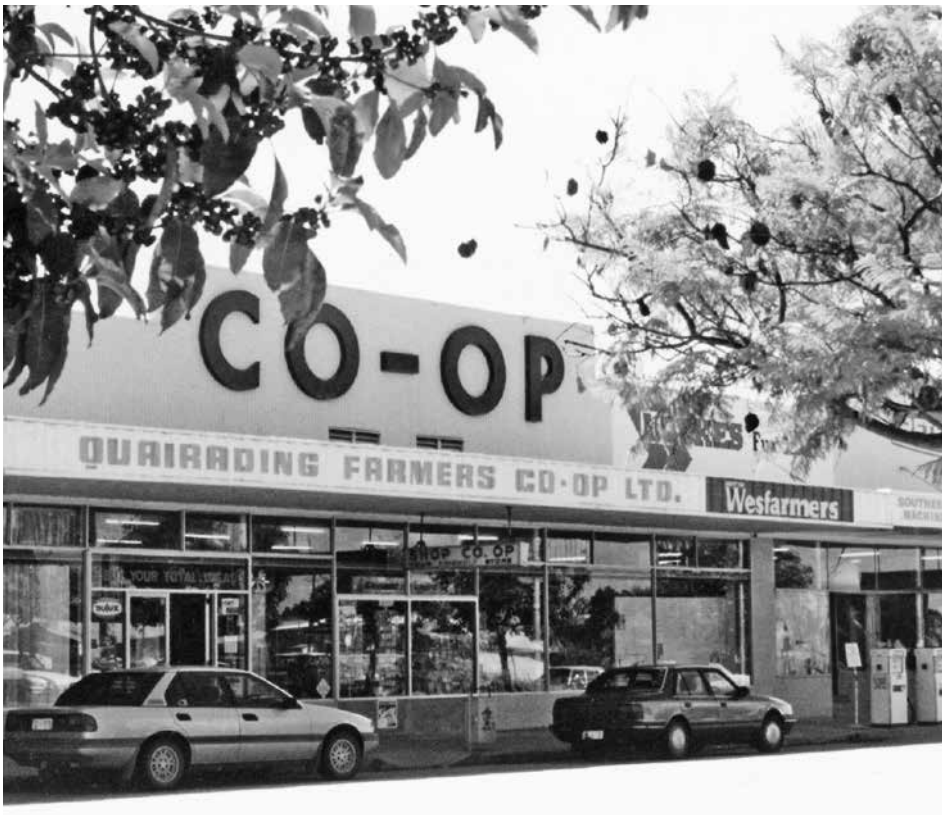
2009 legislation continued.[232] The following year an executive leadership workshop was held at the University Business School, with the Federation sponsoring the registration fees of three co-operatives, and providing a travel grant to Cunderdin Co-op to attend the BCCM summit in Sydney. 2015 was also a significant year in that the first woman to serve on the Federation Council, Kelly Pearce, joined as nominee of the WA Meat Marketing Co-operative.[233] 2014 and 2015 were also notable for the registration of several new co-operatives under the 2009 Act, including three Aboriginal co-operatives and a Contractors & Self-represented Workers Co-operative.[234] Like most new co-operatives registered under the 2009 Act, they had very different objectives to the co-operatives that formed the Federation nearly a century earlier.

State sovereignty, National consistency

As the new framework was being settled in, the Co-operatives National Law arrangements were formalised in 2010 in the Australian Uniform Co-operative Laws Agreement.[235] Most other states and territories adopted their own versions between 2014 and 2015, although Queensland withdrew from the Agreement in 2015 and continued to operate under its 1997 legislation.

Amendments to Western Australia's 2009 Act were achieved in 2016 to ensure the Act would qualify as a 'corresponding co-operatives law' ostensibly to support co-operatives operating across state borders.[236] The parliamentary debates around the amendment bill point to a more complicated set of circumstances, and indicate it was intended, from a Western Australian perspective, to allow Western Australian co-operatives to operate nationally while retaining the sovereignty of the State parliament over co-operatives law within Western Australia.[237] Some particular Western Australian characteristics would remain unaffected: co-op members under 18 could still vote, an individual co-op member could represent a corporate member, a non-member of a co-op could act as a proxy for a member, the value of shares of former members could take account of falls in the value of a co-operative's assets, and the local timing for lodgement of annual reports would be retained. The parliamentary debate was long, with criticism of the complexity of the amendments, nostalgia for the old pre-1985 co-operatives, some sharp critiques of certain current co-operatives, and concerns that Western Australian sovereignty was in fact being ceded. In the end, however, the bill passed with members professing to agree with the member for Maylands' statement that "I love the co-operative movement".[238]

The Federation assisted members with adapting their rules to the requirements of the 2016 amendments to the Act, and also had to update its own rules under the new *Associations Incorporation Act 2015*.[239] The training focus continued in 2016, with sponsorships and travel grants for local co-op directors, and an emphasis on cost-efficient boardroom training covering topics such as duties and liabilities of directors, financial governance and risk, and the co-operative advantage. The formation of several new co-operatives was assisted by the Federation, including the Nannup Truffles Growers Co-operative.[240] During 2017 five co-operatives celebrated their centenary: Cunderdin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, Wagin and York. They were honoured with the title of 'centurion members'.



Quairading Farmers' Co-operative Store, c1997
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

The annual conference in 2018 heard from the Federation chairman that Co-operatives WA had now returned to an operating surplus for the first time in many years, and that the University Business School executive education program in which the Federation had been participating was to be rolled out nationally. The Federation had also been a partner in screening at the Transition Film Festival in Leederville *A Silent Transformation*, a film produced in Canada about the innovative and transformative power of the co-operative enterprise model.[241] The screening prompted a steady flow of inquiries about forming new co-operatives. The Federation subsequently assisted in the formation of the Australian Sandalwood Co-operative, WA Hemp Growers Co-operative, SF Irrigation Co-operative and the Accredited Grass-fed Beef Co-operative. In this period the Federation also developed a good working relationship with the Registrar of Co-operatives through the renewed interest in co-operation and the practicalities of the mass transfer of co-operatives to the new legislative framework.

The chairman's report concluded by referring to the forthcoming centenary of the Federation in 2019, which would be "a very significant event in the journey of co-operatives in Western Australia".[242]

Snapshot | Sweeter Banana Co-op 1993, 2012 +

Commercial banana growing began in Carnarvon in the 1940s, just upstream from the mouth of the Gascoyne River. The plantations now cover around 180 hectares, with yields of around 40-43 tonnes per hectare. The 'sweeter banana' is mainly the Cavendish cultivar, Williams variety, grown in Carnarvon and distinguished from the varieties grown in Queensland by its thinner skin and creamier flesh. Carnarvon's banana plantations all use irrigation, in an arid desert climate, and plant trees closely together to create a shady microclimate and longer growing season, which develops an environment conducive to the smaller, sweeter fruit.

The co-operative was formed by six local family growers in 1993 to develop a recognisable brand for marketing the fruit, and gradually expanded to over 20 grower members. Banana production in Carnarvon had reached a peak of 16,000 tonnes in 1993, but this declined over the next decade due to intense competition from Queensland growers before growing again over the following ten years to account for up to nearly a quarter of the Perth market, of which 60% came from the Sweeter Banana Co-operative.

The co-operative achieved this through creating two brands to market premium and slightly damaged fruit, developing cold storage, developing its supply chains to include a major retail chain, and creating a value-added product (banana bread) that used surplus fruit and helped create a floor price for bananas. Cyclone Olwyn devastated much of the plantations in 2015, and damaged fruit was salvaged and made into banana bread, sustaining growers until production could be re-established. The overall effect of value-adding has seen crop wastage reduced from 60% to 4%.

The co-operative's member-producers are able to view weekly production volumes online, and the co-operative's management of packing, handling and marketing allows for members to focus on banana production. Share-holding is roughly proportionate to the amount of trade each member does with the Co-operative, so that the larger members contribute more capital. The costs and benefits that each member receives are aligned with the costs and profits that each brings to the Co-operative. A key value of the Co-op is to support local businesses, and all banana bread ingredients are sourced from Western Australian producers.

Metropolitan Markets Trust Board, outside the banana ripening rooms
at the Metropolitan Markets in Perth,
Walter Harper on left, 17 February 1953
Illustrations Ltd Collection, 242295PD, courtesy State Library of Western Australia

Reflections on One Hundred Years

The Co-operative Federation of Western Australia has proved to be a remarkably resilient organisation. Its demise has been pronounced on several occasions, by the Wheatgrowers Union in the 1930s, after the deaths of Harper and Bath in 1956, after Britain abandoned its Western Australian producers in 1973, and after Westralian Farmers' listed on the stock exchange in 1984, but in each case the Federation was able to adapt and survive.

Back in 1894, a quarter of a century before the Federation's formation, colonial parliamentarian Alexander Richardson posed a question of whether it would be Western Australia that set the example for other colonies in developing the co-operative movement. He was thinking specifically of adapting the German Raiffeisen system of co-operative banks, but was also well aware of the Rochdale system of consumer co-operatives in Britain. In the event, the system of co-operation that did develop drew upon both Rochdale and Raiffeisen to create what might be called Westralian co-operation, not a copy of either but an adaptation to the specific historical circumstances of rural development in Western Australia between the 1920s and the 1980s. The subsequent development of the co-operative movement from the 1980s to the present day has been less about a distinctive Western Australian form of co-operation and more about continental co-operation. It draws specifically upon Rochdale within a more deregulated and globalised economic system than anything known to the pioneers of co-operation. In that sense, Western Australia did not develop as a model emulated by others but as something more idiosyncratic but, nevertheless, something successfully attuned to its environment.

What were the principal features of Westralian co-operation, and what of those features survive in today's Western Australian co-operation? John Sandford, chronicler of the early years of the Federation, described Westralian co-operation as a loose, untidy arrangement between the Central Organisation (Westralian Farmers' Ltd) and the autonomous local units, an arrangement that would not please a co-operative purist who would want a more unified structure with cleaner lines. This 'loose fit' was able to accommodate a persistent tension within the Federation between local autonomy and central authority, tensions that came to the fore, among other moments, in the 'amalgamate or stagnate' arguments of the late 1950s and the parliamentary debates over State sovereignty and national consistency in the mid-2010s. The establishment of local co-operative units coincident with the formation of the wheatbelt from the early twentieth-century inevitably made co-operation a force in the creation of local district and shire identities. This somewhat irked the co-operative leaders such as Harper and Bath, but they accepted it as part of the lived experience of co-operation for many country people, especially as it helped forge a sense of loyalty between local producers and the centre. The significance of member-owned enterprises such as co-operatives in engendering a sense of belonging, of community and common purpose, was identified by the UWA Business School in 2012. There is a long historical basis to this aspect of co-operation in Western Australia.

Co-operation was largely based in the wheatbelt, but there are regional variations in the co-operative experience. Albany has been the home to serial co-operatives since 1868,

and in a sense is the historical heartland of co-operation. Guildford was the seat of co-operative thinking and its 'academy' from the 1890s to the 1950s. The Goldfields was once the home of numerous consumer co-operatives until migration to the metropolitan area and the coast fatally undermined their customer base. Collie was the centre of industrial co-operatives, including a co-operative coal mine, that largely remained outside the ambit of the Co-operative Federation but has a rich history still to be brought into the broader co-operative story. Geraldton was a base for some of the larger industrial co-operatives, again largely outside the Federation, where they connected to maritime trade routes as well as sharing with Fremantle a claim to be the birthplace of the fisher's co-operatives. Fremantle, along with several other older centres in the metropolitan area, shares with the Goldfields a history of consumer co-operatives which, similarly to those in Collie, were significant in the broader co-operative movement although less-so to the Co-operative Federation. The South West was crucial to the story of dairy co-operation, a story that has faded with that industry. The north, especially the often criticised Ord River scheme, also has a history of co-operation that is as yet little appreciated. These regional or district distinctions draw attention to the geographic, economic and social diversity in the story of co-operation, and the important role the co-operative movement played in the development of local identities.

The period from the 1890s to the 1950s was dominated by several charismatic leaders, mainly mature and experienced men who devoted most of their working lives to the co-operative movement. Charles and Walter Harper, Thomas Bath and William Johnson, were all members of a small and compact group within informal networks that shared most of the directorships of the co-operative boards between them, knew the pathways of influence and patronage through Perth's political and economic worlds, and socialised with each other. Although they nominally displayed some partisan differences, the real cleaving between them was Rochdale purists versus Westralian adapters. People knew where each stood, and each attracted their acolytes. Their dominance is all the more pronounced by the stark difference from the later period to the present. No such singular leaders have since emerged in the Federation. Leadership has become more collective and perhaps more obvious in the local co-operatives, such as Mt Barker's determined change from producer to consumer co-operative in the 1970s, and the nation-wide growth of Capricorn in the 1990s.

Training and education have long been important in the Federation. One of the earliest services it provided to local co-operative stores was an audit scheme with professional auditing of store accounts by, ironically, public auditors registered under the *Co-operatives and Provident Societies Act 1903*. This experience led to a realisation that the local stores could only survive if their staff could be trained in good bookkeeping and accounting practices, and local directors could understand the importance of financial planning and properly running board meetings. Over the years the training became more varied in its content and objectives, responding to different issues as well as new business models like 'self-serve' and 'supermarket' shopping. The programs became more professionalised through Perth Technical College and more recently The University of Western Australia. Another aspect of education that is a consistent theme throughout the Federation's history is an oft-stated need for members to know more about co-operative principles

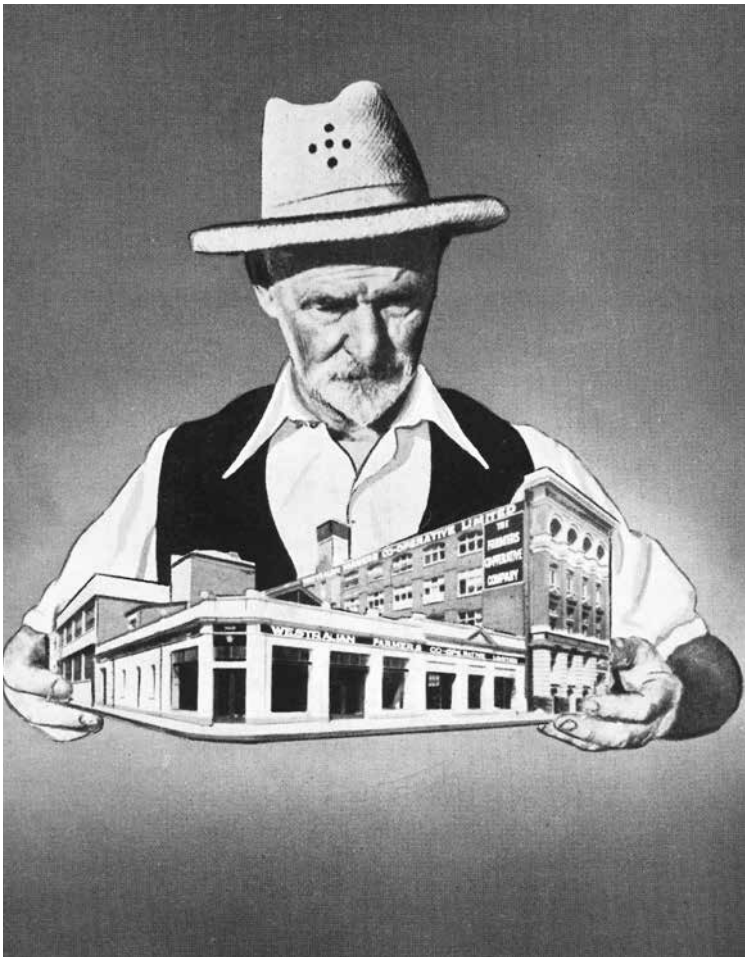
and ways. Thomas Bath was a constant advocate of co-operative education, and almost all training programs included some element on co-operative philosophies and history. Its continuing importance is evident in the relationship with the University and the broader academic research interest in mutual enterprises.

Western Australia's co-operative movement was overwhelmingly producer-oriented. This led to the development of co-operative behemoths like Westralian Farmers' and Co-operative Bulk Handling which, although not unique to the State, dominated the co-operatives movement in ways not seen elsewhere. The withdrawal of Westralian Farmers' from the co-operative movement had an impact that may not have been so severe in other states with a larger range of co-operatives. However, with the benefit of hindsight, that withdrawal either provided opportunities, or forced the Federation and the broader co-operatives movement in Western Australia to adapt, albeit with some difficulties, in ways that made the movement more able to respond to, and even take a leading role in, the rejuvenation of co-operation on a national scale in more recent years. There was once a view that saw the states as 'colonial relics' getting in the way of inevitable modernisation, but the history of local versus central tensions within the Federation runs deep, and when the same dynamic was seen on a bigger stage, it induced innovative and creative ways of adapting co-operation to a newer age and finding a co-operative middle way (as Thomas Bath might have said) that enabled those tensions to be productively harnessed.

A consistent theme in the chairman's annual report to federation conferences has been some commentary on the weather and climate. Over the years, droughts and floods have featured along with more or less rainfall, bushfires, storms and cyclones, and other events. However, neither the Federation nor any of its members ever really sought to respond to these comments. They were always presented as a part of country life, part of the background struggle with which every farmer or producer had to simply deal and get on with things. Co-operative leaders had often pointed to the historical basis of Western Australian co-operation being in rural producers and the countryside, rather than urban consumers and the city, and that this was the principle characteristic that distinguished the Westralian and Rochdale forms of co-operation. Trent Bartlett, Deputy Chairman of the Federation between 2002 and 2011, observed "it was an overwhelming sense of the collective character and part of the DNA, the connection to the land and agribusiness, even fishing, that was the true feel of the co-operative movement here, it always had a deep sense of connecting with the land".

Bartlett was also inducted into the sense that co-operation was a matter of the heart as well as the head, as his predecessor Frank O'Connor told him: "You've got to be a student of co-operation … if you don't invest time to understand what it means to be in a co-operative and a co-operator then the flame is going to go out with you holding it." Co-operation, as a matter of the heart and spirit, of the flame, also draws attention to the role of the Westralian Farmers' Building in Wellington Street, in that part of the city closely linked with the railway station and its connections to country towns and sidings. The large Co-operative Bulk Handling silos in country towns have been described as cathedrals, and the Westralian Farmers' Building had a similar aura

with its size, accessibility, vast (and draughty) interior spaces, its nooks and crannies, as well as being the seat of governance for the co-operative movement. Co-operation, as an emotional investment made by every co-operator, is not often captured in annual reports and financial accounts, but it is clear in the dedication and pride, often life-long, of many men and women to the co-operative movement that remains in evidence to this day. It is also clear in the heritage of buildings and places that grew out of co-operation.



'The House That I Built', featuring the Wellington Street complex, was widely used in advertising during the 1950s, and was an iconic image for Westralian Farmers' members and co-operators generally. This image was adapted by Ronald Bocking, an artist in the WA Education Department's Publications Branch, for use in Westralian Farmers' advertising of the period.
Image in John Sandford 1955: 298

The annual recital of the year's weather conditions also points to another 'silent' partner in co-operation, especially a rural producer based co-operative movement, the physical environment on which the producer both depends and manipulates. The engagement of

the fisher's co-operatives in the maritime Exclusive Economic Zone negotiations in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought to the Federation some awareness that environmental issues could be managed, could be influenced through human activities and could be measured through scientific study. However, the shock of Westralian Farmers' withdrawal in 1985 knocked such issues off the table just at a time when the Federation could have most productively become involved to advance its producer-members' interests. The potential for co-operative approaches in environmentally-responsive enterprises is signalled in some of the post-2009 registrations of new co-operatives, such as Organic and Biodynamic Meats Co-operative (2007), Fremantle Wind Farm Co-operative (2013), the Sandalwood Growers' Co-operative (2017), and the Australian Sandalwood Co-operative (2018). Australia-wide, co-operatives involved in environmental services account for 1.4% of all co-operatives, suggesting that despite an un-even but reasonably long history of environmental awareness in some co-operative sectors, it remains a potential yet to be fully realised.

The founding of the co-operative movement during the Great War harnessed a new social formation in Western Australia, the small wheat farmers or cockies, who were clearing the woodlands and creating the wheatbelt. They were a mix of second and third generation settlers from the old districts, former miners drifting out of the Goldfields, and new migrants drawn to the opportunities to hold land. By the 1960s and 1970s, new social forces were at work, and there was a gradual increase in participation by women in co-operatives at management and executive levels. Eliza Brierley was the first woman to join the original Rochdale co-operative as an individual member in 1846, and although the Westralian movement did not go out of its way to encourage female memberships, nevertheless women participated from the earliest days. There were moments when the Federation did explicitly look at women's participation, but it didn't actively engage with a new social movement as it had done in its own formation. In 2017, the directors of co-operative and mutual enterprise boards across Australia were approximately 40% female and 60% male, suggesting that despite signal changes there remains scope for greater engagement for women in co-operatives management in Western Australia.

The same can be said of the development of Aboriginal co-operatives, with the push to engage with Aboriginal communities coming from the metropolitan consumer co-operatives as a social initiative rather than the producer co-operatives. That was notable in a movement dominated by rural producers, and when the first Aboriginal co-operative did join in 1978, it had social rather than producer objectives. The Federation did seem interested but it also lacked the capacities to engage in a meaningful way with Aboriginal communities to develop a new area of co-operative enterprise. In 2018, 9% of co-operatives and mutual enterprises in Western Australia were owned and operated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, mostly in the medical and community services fields.

Other historical and technological trends that have shaped the development of Western Australian co-operation are also clear. Co-operation brought many technological advances to the production and transportation of rural produce, most notably the bulk handing of wheat that required the invention of new rail stock and storage facilities and

fundamentally changed harbourside work practices. Others include the development of standardised fruit and vegetable crates and packaging, more efficient cool and cold storage and transport for dairy products, and the spread of farm machinery by providing local agencies to the country stores for manufacturers such as Case tractors. Similar trends are evident in the fishers' co-operatives through the development of frozen and then live export technologies for crayfish.

The Wheatbelt population reached a peak in 1927 when it accounted for 41% of Western Australia's population. However, rural depopulation commenced during World War Two and by 1947 the majority of the State's people were living in the metropolitan area. The centralisation debates within the Federation took place against a background of continuing and rapid rural depopulation, and while much effort was expended on training co-operative store managers and staff, the relentless depletion of local communities drained many local co-operatives of their vital force. In tandem with depopulation was the transition from railway to road-based transportation in country districts, with State investment increasingly in new roads and away from existing railways. This change was made explicit in 1979 when it became State policy that government railways would have to compete with private road transport operators in an 'open' market, and railways would have to fund their own future. But transport changes were also evident in other ways after the war as private motor cars became ever-more affordable and allowed farm and village households to easily travel longer distances to larger towns for shopping, as the Dangin & South Caroling Co-operative had found by 1953. At the same time, the mechanisation of farm labour rapidly increased, and facilitated the amalgamation of smaller farms into larger farms with less demand for human labour. The closure of many rural co-operatives was probably inevitable in such a context, and every closure had its social consequences. Trent Bartlett was told by a co-operative director that after they had closed one of their outlets in a country town, "the community would cross the street rather than be on the same side, I could see the pain in his [the director's] eyes … it is a very transparent form of governance, [a co-operator] can't hide from their community".

These factors formed something of a vicious circle, each responding to the other and reinforcing a feedback loop that devastated the economic and social base for many smaller co-operatives. The post-war emptying of the shires closely correlates with the closure of many rural co-operatives across the wheatbelt in the 1960s and 1970s, and although the Federation generally had some awareness of these issues, its proximity seemed to prevent it really drawing them all together and developing a cohesive response. Tom Bath's emphasis in the 1930s on the research and study of the larger environment in which co-operation worked, the connection to the micro-level of individual stores and enterprises, and implicitly the scale needed for successful co-operation, had it been retained, may have been able to give the Federation the tools to ameliorate these conditions somewhat. It is no accident that the experience in the Capricorn Society, firmly based in urban retail automotive services, is the opposite of the rural co-operative stores.

Gary Lewis' comprehensive history of co-operatives in Australia placed the Western Australian co-operative movement within an Australia-wide framework. However,

although Western Australia participated in the national movement after it was formally established in 1943, it was with varying degrees of enthusiasm at different times, even with the passionate advocacy of a national approach by William D Johnson. The view from Wellington Street looked just as much, if not more so on many occasions, to Britain and then to Indo-Pacific Commonwealth ties and markets, as well as to those outside the Commonwealth in South East Asia and Japan. This book has only lightly touched upon these larger frameworks, and that history of looking northwards and westwards could be profitably explored in future research.

The most recent renewal of the Co-operative Federation and the co-operatives movement is evident in the registrations of all the operating co-operatives over 2013 and 2014. In some ways the story resembles a reiteration of 1917 and 1918, although now moving towards a more diverse mix of co-operatives than rural producer co-operatives alone. Critically for Western Australia, there is no 'parent company' in the background as there was then, although perhaps Co-operative Bulk Handling, Capricorn and Geraldton Fisherman's could be considered the 'big siblings' of the Federation membership. Is this a longer-term pattern for co-operation in Western Australia – not a story of rise and fall, but of a continual adaptation to changing circumstances and environments, sometimes gently, sometimes with difficulty? That's really a matter for co-operative members of the present and future to decide and enact. As with any member-based organisation it is only the members, leavened by time, who can really make sure the Federation is around to celebrate its bicentenary in 2119.

Snapshot | The Hon Thomas Bath and Coming of Age

"Successful co-operative effort has a beneficial influence on the character and morale of participants who understand and practice its underlying principles, which are mainly ethical in aim.

Reduction in prices to the consumer, increase of prices to the producer, democratic management of industry, education in self-help in the capacity of community action, and in the ability to manage business, are all within the reach of the masses, both in the country and in the city, if they are willing to use the methods that have been tested and approved in the co-operative movement. The practical and sane alternative to the excesses of capitalism is not socialism or collectivism, but co-operative enterprise. Individual freedom, initiative and development will not only be preserved, but vastly increased.

But these results can not be achieved in a day nor in a year, nor by government subsidies, nor through any easy formula or recipe. They must necessarily come about gradually and through the action of men and women who are willing to exercise patience and make sacrifices which are indispensable to any important or lasting reform."

The Honourable Thomas Bath, 'A Coming of Age', 1935

Appendices

A1 | The Seven Co-operative Principles

1. Voluntary and open membership
A cooperative is a voluntary organisation, open to all persons able to use its services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic member control
A cooperative is a democratic organisation controlled by its members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Members serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In cooperatives other than cooperative groups members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote). Cooperative groups are organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member economic participation
Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. Usually, at least part of that capital is the common property of the cooperative. Usually, members receive limited compensation, if any, for capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members of a cooperative allocate surplus to be used for any or all of the purposes of —

- developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, at least part of which are indivisible; and
- benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and
- supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and independence
A cooperative is an autonomous, selfhelp organisation controlled by its members. If a cooperative enters into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raises capital from external sources, it does so on terms that ensure democratic control by its members and maintain its autonomy.

5. Education, training and information
A cooperative provides education and training for its members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of the cooperative. A cooperative informs the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.

6. Cooperation among cooperatives
Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for the community
Cooperatives, while focusing on member needs, work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

Co-operatives Act 2009, section 6

A2 | Federation Chairmen, Officers and Conferences, 1919 – 2019

Chairman

1919	1952	Walter Harper (Chairman, Westralian Farmers' 1921-1953)
1953	1964	Sir Thorley Loton (Chairman, Westralian Farmers' 1953-1965)
1965	1968	Walter J Crosse (Chairman, Westralian Farmers' 1965-1975)
1969	1972	Maurice Clayton (Chairman, Westralian Farmers' 1975-82)
1973	1981	Robert G Sutherland
1982	1983	A Trevor Poustie
1984	1985	E Peter Anderson
1986	1987	Colin Pearce
1988	1989	Jack Lundy
1989	1993	Colin Pearce
1994	1996	
1997	1998	John W Carstairs
1998	2000	Frank O'Connor
2000	2001	Warren York
2001	2003	Anthony Wray
2003	2006	John W Carstairs
2006	Present	Chris Enright

Executive Officer (title varies)

1945	1963	William Blackwell
1964	1974	William W Rawlinson
1975		Ian F Packham
1975	1982	Brian C Cooper and Aileen Brentnall
1983	1985	Robert G Sutherland
1985	1996	Donald F Munro
1996		John W Carstairs
1996	2003	John G Booth
2004	Present	Peter Wells

Office premises

1919	1979	Westralian Farmers' Building, 569 Wellington Street, Perth
1980	1983	21st floor, Allendale Square, 77 St Georges Terrace, Perth
1984		Co-operative Bulk Handling Building, 22 Delhi Street, West Perth
1985		Grain Pool Building, 172-176 St Georges Terrace, Perth
1985	1995	Donald F Munro & Assoc Office, 789 Wellington Street, West Perth
1996	1999	The Business Centre, 37/328 Albany Highway, Victoria Park

2000	2004	Capricorn Co-op Soc Office, 172 Burswood Road, Burswood
2004	Present	Peer House, 1/2 Canning Highway, South Perth

Annual conferences and themes (not all conferences have a theme)

1920 to 1959	Westralian Farmers' Building, 569 Wellington Street, Perth	
1960	Chesterton Lodge, South Perth	After 40 Years, What Next?
1961	Chesterton Lodge, South Perth	
1962	Chesterton Lodge, South Perth	New Frontiers for Co-operatives
1963	Chesterton Lodge, South Perth	
1964	Chesterton Lodge, South Perth	Co-operation in the Developing Areas of Western Australia
1965	Cottesloe Civic Centre	Co-operation Today and Tomorrow
1966	Cottesloe Civic Centre	Co-operative and State Development
1967	Cottesloe Civic Centre	This Business of Co-operation
1968	Cottesloe Civic Centre	
1969	Cottesloe Civic Centre	
1970	Cottesloe Civic Centre	The Next 50 Years
1971	Cottesloe Civic Centre	Co-operatives in Times of Change
1972	Cottesloe Civic Centre	Meeting the Co-operative Challenge of the 70s
1973	Cottesloe Civic Centre	Co-operatives Serve
1974	Freeway Hotel, South Perth	Meeting the Challenge
1975	Freeway Hotel, South Perth	Balancing the Changing needs of Consumers with those of Producers
1976	Freeway Hotel, South Perth	Community Needs and the Co-operative Contribution
1977	Freeway Hotel, South Perth	Co-operation: Balancing the Economic Forces
1978	Sheraton Hotel, Perth	Resourcefulness and Co-operation
1979	Belmont Race Course Function Centre	Co-operation Looking in the 80s: Fishing-Economics-Transport
1980	Sheraton Hotel, Perth	Co-operation Tomorrow: A Fundamental issue
1981	Sheraton Hotel, Perth	Focus on the Future
1982	Sheraton Hotel, Perth	Co-operatives Role in Western Australian Development
1983	The Kings, Perth	Opportunities for Co-operatives

1984	The Kings, Perth	
1985	Merlin Hotel, East Perth	ACCECC 87 is Co-operation Down Under
2002	Metro Inn, South Perth	Co-operative Governance
2003	Pagoda Hotel, Como	Co-operatives and the Triple Bottom Line
2004	Olive Farm Winery, Millendon	The Way Forward Through Co-operation
2005	Ascot Quays, Ascot	Making Co-operation Work
2006	Australian Grain Centre, Forrestfield	
2007	Royal Perth Golf Club, South Perth	
2008	Tomkins-on-Swan, Attadale	
2009	Technology Park, Bentley	
2010	Technology Park, Bentley	
2011	Technology Park, Bentley	Turning Co-operative Values into Good Business
2012	Royal Perth Yacht Club, Crawley	Cooperatives Build Successful Businesses
2013	Royal Flying Doctor Service, Jandakot	Co-operatives in the Fourth Sector: The Role of Member Owned Businesses in the Global Economy
2014	Burswood on Swan, Burswood	
2015	Burswood on Swan, Burswood	
2016	Perth Markets, Canning Vale	
2017	Hartfield Country Club, Forrestfield	
2018	Burswood on Swan, Burswood	
2019	UWA University Club, Crawley	Centenary Dinner

A3 | Registered Co-operatives in 2019

List of registered co-operatives trading in Western Australia, as at 30 April 2019

Name	Location	Number	Registered
Accredited Grass-fed Beef Co-operative Ltd	South Perth	C2018002B	C
Albany Organised Primary Producers Co-operative Ltd	South Perth	C2000012U	B/C
Ausiken Co-operative Ltd	Balga	C2000068W	C
Australian Sandalwood Co-operative Ltd	Cunderdin	C2018003C	C
BKW Co-operative Ltd (in liquidation)	Katanning	C2000038N	B/C
Badimia Trading Co-operative Ltd	Ellenbrook	C2000064Y	C
Bauble Collective Co-operative Ltd	Canning Vale	C2000053M	C
Beacon Co-operative Ltd	Beacon	C2000010N	B/C
Boyup Brook Co-operative Company Ltd	Bridgetown	C200005O	B/C
Bunbury Taxis Co-operative Ltd	Bunbury	C2000027Q	C
Caxton Co-operative Ltd	Osborne Park	C200003G	B/C
Contractors & Self-Represented Workers Co-operative Ltd	Mosman Park	C2000055X	C
Co-operative Bulk Handing Ltd	West Perth	C200001R	B/C
Cocos Islands Co-operative Society Ltd	West Island, CKI	C2017003C	C
Cunderdin Farmers Co-operative Company Ltd	Cunderdin	C2000021L	A/C
Denmark Co-operative Company Ltd	Denmark	C2000008A	A/C
Desert Kitchen Co-operative Ltd	Wickham	C2000059X	C
Design Co-operative Ltd	West Perth	C2000037P	C
Engineering and Manufacturing Industry Co-operative Ltd	Malaga	C2000026O	B/C
Enkel Collective Co-operative Ltd	South Fremantle	C2000058K	B/C
Esperance Organised Primary Producers Co-operative Ltd	Esperance	C2000023G	C
Fremantle Wind Farm Co-operative Ltd	Hilton	C2000054S	C
Fruit West Co-operative Ltd	South Perth	C2000020F	B/C
Gabiny Plum Harvesters Co-operative Ltd	Broome	C2000049V	C
Galactic Co-operative WA Ltd	Welshpool	C2000069G	C

Name	Location	Number	Registered
Gascoyne Water Asset Mutual Co-operative Ltd	Carnarvon	C2000030L	C
Gascoyne Water Co-operative Ltd	Carnarvon	C2000031Z	B/C
Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd	Geraldton	C2000014O	B/C
Geraldton Organised Primary Producers Co-operative Ltd	Moresby	C2000007P	B/C
GNP360 Co-operative Ltd	Albany	C2018006F	C
Kalgoorlie Taxi Car Owners Co-operative Ltd	Kalgoorlie	C2000044D	B/C
Kellerberrin Farmers' Co-operative Company Ltd	Kellerberrin	C2000016A	A/C
Kojonup Co-operative Ltd (in liquidation)	Kojonup	C2000029O	B/C
Kukerin Co-operative Company Ltd	Kukerin	C2000019R	A/C
Liquor Barons Co-operative Ltd	Wembley	C2000034C	B/C
Luminary Entertainment Co-operative Ltd	Craigie	C2018005E	C
Midland Forestry Alliance Co-operative Ltd	Lancelin	C2000048N	B/C
Miling Co-operative Company Ltd	Miling	C2000032S	C
Mount Barker Co-operative Ltd	Mount Barker	C2000004A	A/C
Nannup Truffle Growers Co-operative Ltd	East Perth	C2000066Y	C
Noodle Co-operative Ltd	Cottesloe	C2000067Z	C
Nyungar Trading Co-operative Ltd	Ellenbrook	C2000062S	C
Ord Irrigation Asset Mutual Co-operative Ltd	Kununurra	C2000025U	C
Ord Irrigation Co-operative Ltd	Kununurra	C2000024N	B/C
Ord River District Co-operative Ltd	Kununurra	C2000045P	B/C
Organic and Biodynamic Meats Co-operative Ltd	Donnybrook	C2000033J	B/C
Pilbara Liveable Cities Co-operative Ltd	Cannington	C2018007G	C
Preston Valley Irrigation Co-operative Ltd	Donnybrook	C2000043I	B/C
Quairading Farmers' Co-operative Company Ltd	Quairading	C2000009B	A/C
Sandalwood Growers Co-operative Ltd	Cottesloe	C2017002B	C

Name	Location	Number	Registered
SF Irrigation Co-operative Ltd	Manjimup	C2017001A	C
South West Irrigation Asset Co-operative Ltd	Harvey	C2000035I	B/C
South West Irrigation Management Co-operative Ltd	Harvey	C2000036A	B/C
South West Wine and Food Co-operative Ltd (The)	Perth	C2018001A	C
Sprout Community Co-operative Ltd	Hamilton Hill	C2000052M	C
Sustainable Housing for Artists and Creatives Co-operative Ltd	Hamilton Hill	C2000051A	C
Sweeter Banana Co-operative Ltd	Geraldton	C2000039Z	C
Tambellup Co-operative Ltd	Albany	C2019001A	A/C
Trades Desk Co-operative Ltd	Albany	C2000065B	C
United Crate Co-operative Ltd	Canning Vale	C2000018N	B/C
WA Hemp Growers Co-operative Ltd	North Jindong	C2018004D	C
WA Housing Co-operative (No 1)	Lathlain	C2019002B	C
Wagin District Farmers' Co-operative Company Ltd	Wagin	C2000011D	A/C
Watheroo Community Co-operative Ltd	Osborne Park	C2000042P	B/C
Wesbuilders Co-operative Ltd	South Perth	C2000002R	C
Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative Ltd	East Perth	C2000041T	C
Westonia Community Co-operative Ltd	Westonia	C2000022Q	B/C
Widi Trading Co-operative Ltd	Ellenbrook	C2000063V	C
York & District Co-operative Ltd	York	C2000015I	A/C

Key:
A = registered by end of 1919
B = registered between 1920 and 2009
C = registered (or re-registered) since 2010

Sources: WA Department of Mines, Industry, Regulation and Safety, Consumer Protection Division, Registrar of Co-operatives; registration periods from author's database.

Gnowangerup & District Co-operative Co Ltd, 1920s
Courtesy Co-operatives WA

Currency and Measurements

Measurements

Metrication began in Australia in 1971, before which imperial and specialist measurement systems were used. All measurements are given in metric, unless within a quote, in which case the metric equivalent is given, either in brackets or in an endnote.

Currency

Historical currency references are retained in their original form, with a calculation of their value expressed in 2018 Australian dollars to help readers understand their original purchasing power. Calculations have been made using the Reserve Bank's online inflation calculation tools.

Australian currency was decimalised on 14 February 1966 in the new form of dollars ($) and cents (c). Before decimalisation, currency was more elaborate and complex. It took the form of pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). One pound equalled 20 shillings, one shilling equalled 12 pence, so that one pound was equal to 240 pence. A penny was divisible into half-penny (ha'penny) and quarter-penny (farthing) units.

One guinea, equivalent to 21 shillings, was also used for specialised pricing such as professional fees, prize-animal auctions and luxury goods in which payment was usually made through accounts rendered rather than cash. Wholesale trade and banking was traditionally conducted in gold (guineas), retail in silver (pounds sterling). The price difference provided a commission.

The fee charged by Walter Harper as a director of Westralian Farmers' was reputed to be 1 guinea per meeting.

Glossary

Central Organisation, the: means the operational component of Westralian Farmers', housed in the Wellington Street premises, that carried on the actual business of merchants and dealers in 'agronomic products (any article produced on a farm, station or orchard) and agronomic requisites (all things needed or used on a farm, station or orchard)'. It was notionally under the control of the Co-operative Federation. See also ***unit***.

A **co-operative** is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise (International Co-operative Alliance, 2015).

Co-operatives, contemporary, take several different forms, and terms can be time and place-specific. In Australia, the main contemporary types of co-operative are:

Aboriginal co-operatives provide housing, employment, health, training and outlets for art sales for their members in culturally appropriate ways.

Consumer co-operatives buy and sell goods to members at competitive prices in a variety of sectors.

Employee-owned co-operatives are formed to provide members with employment by owning a business. The members are both the owners and the employees.

Financial co-operatives include co-operative banks, credit unions, building societies and friendly societies, which provide investment, loan and insurance services to their members. In Australia, co-operative and mutual organisations such as credit unions and building societies are governed under different legislation and regulations.

Producer co-operatives may process, brand, market and distribute members' goods and services, or supply goods and services needed by their members, or operate businesses which provide employment to members.

Agricultural marketing co-operatives are formed by members to process, package, brand, distribute and market farm products.

Agricultural supply co-operatives provide members with supply and storage of inputs for agricultural production.

Service co-operatives provide a variety of essential services to their members and communities, such as housing, health care or child care.
(Co-ops NSW, 2017).

Co-operatives, historical, have been known by a variety of terms in Western Australia, sometimes with one co-operative combining aspects of several types, including:

Distributive co-operatives, in which the members are also the customers, operated stores mainly selling food, drapery and other household goods. Examples in Western Australia included the Osborne Park Co-operative Society (1950) and the Gwalia-Leonora Industrial Co-operative Society (1917). They were typically registered under the *Co-operatives and Provident Societies Act 1903*, and often claimed to be the 'true' Rochdale co-operatives in Western Australia.

Industrial co-operatives were a manufacturing co-operative owned, managed and operated by its members. The Narrogin Co-operative Flour Milling Co Ltd (1901) and the Victoria District Co-operative Flour Milling Co Ltd (1908) were examples.

Producer co-operatives were owned by members (farmers, fishers, etc) who sold their individual produce collectively and shared the profits, with the co-operative providing marketing, insurance, transport and other services. Examples were Westralian Farmers' Ltd (1914) and Fremantle Fishermen's Co-operative (1947).

Wholesale co-operatives operated as buyers for a group of distributive co-operatives, and could also be manufacturers and substantial importers. The Wholesale Dairy Farmers Co-operative Co Ltd (1913) was an example, and Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Wholesale Services acted as a buyer for distributive co-operative stores aligned with Westralian Farmers'.

Workers co-operatives were worker owned and managed enterprises, with each worker a shareholder and all shares owned by workers. Collie Co-operative Collieries Ltd (1904) and the South West Timber Hewer's Co-operative Society (1905) were examples in Western Australia.

A **co-operative or mutual enterprise (CME)** is a member-owned organisation with five or more active members and one or more economic or social purposes. Governance is democratic and based on sharing, democracy and delegation for the benefit of all its members (Mazzarol et. al. 2016).

Debentures: documents that either create or acknowledge an unsecured debt (Co-ops NSW, 2017).

Demutualisation: changing a co-operative to a company (Co-ops NSW, 2017). See also ***mutual***.

Dividend: distribution of a co-operative's surplus to its members in proportion to the business transacted by the member through the co-operative. Dividends may be paid in cash, shares, rebates or other forms.

International Co-operative Alliance: the independent co-operative federation representing co-operatives and the co-operative movement worldwide. It was founded in 1895 in London and is based in Brussels.

Manchester Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) was formed in 1863, and descends from the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. It arranged bulk purchases and also organised the production of goods under CWS brands, including foodstuffs, clothing, furniture and hardware lines. CWS lines were sold to local consumer co-operatives in England and Wales, who wholly owned the enterprise as a co-operative federation, and exported overseas. For example, CWS owned and operated tea plantations in India and Sri Lanka, and its tea was marketed in Western Australia through local co-op stores in the 1920s by Westralian Farmers' under the brand name 'Co-op Tea – choicest Ceylon tea'. The CWS operated insurance and legal services, a shipping line and a co-operative

bank. The CWS was a major trading partner of Westralian Farmers' Ltd and there are a number of parallels in the historical development of CWS, Westralian Farmers' and the Co-operative Federation. The CWS merged with the Scottish CWS in 1973, and was re-named The Co-operative Group in 2001.

Member, Active: a member who maintains a relationship with a co-operative in accordance with the cooperative's rules (Co-ops NSW, 2017).

Member, Inactive: a member who has not been an active member of a co-operative or has whereabouts unknown for three years (or less, if stated in the rules) (Co-ops NSW, 2017). An inactive member's shares can be forfeited and their membership cancelled, with any dividends due only payable when payment would not adversely affect the co-operative.

A **mutual** is a company with a constitution that provides a person has no more than one vote at a general meeting of the company for each capacity in which the person is a member of the company. Mutual companies can be limited by guarantee (e.g. not-for-profit), or limited by shares (e.g. able to distribute dividends on shares). (Corporations Act 2001). See also ***demutualisation***.

Raiffeisen

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (1818-1888) was a local politician who pioneered rural credit banks in the Rhineland. He believed there was a connection between poverty and dependency, and came up with the Three 'S's formula: self-help, self-governance and self-responsibility. The Three 'S's remain the guiding principles of the Raiffeisen movement, sometimes now expressed as self-help, sustainability and social solidarity.

Raiffeisen developed credit banks as a response to the indebtedness of small farmers to loan sharks during a period of great hardship known in Germany as the 'starvation winter' of 1846/47. At the time it was almost impossible for small farmers to obtain loans on reasonable terms. After experimenting with several types of benevolent associations, he published *Die Darlehnskassen-Vereine (the Credit Unions)* in 1866 as a guide to setting up small credit unions and other types of co-operative ventures. The key idea was that members' savings were pooled and then made available as low-cost, long-term loans, along with joint purchasing of seed and common storage facilities so that crops could be stored in good years for sale in bad years to even-out and stabilise farm incomes. Raiffeisen established the first rural credit bank, the Rhenish Agricultural Co-operative Bank in 1872, in the town of Neuwied. 'Raiffeisen banks' were formed across Germany, and from 1886 across Austria, followed by co-operative warehouses and then co-operative federations.

'Raiffeisen' is now a generic term for co-operative banks or credit societies, especially those in rural or agricultural sectors, who subscribe to the guidelines of the International Raiffeisen Union, formed in 1968 and based in Bonn.

Rebate: a reduction or refund on a payment already made, typically in the same proportion as the member's proportion of the co-op's income, and distributed annually.

Rochdale

The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was formed in the town of Rochdale, Lancashire in 1844. It was the earliest co-operative, in the contemporary sense, to be formed. Its objects were "to form arrangements for the pecuniary benefit, and the improvement of the social and domestic conditions of its members, by raising a sufficient amount of capital in shares of one pound each". These objects were pursued through:

- Establishing a store for the sale of provisions, clothing, etc
- Building houses for members
- Acquiring land for cultivation by unemployed and low-paid members
- Manufacturing articles to employ unemployed and low-paid members
- Establishing a 'self-supporting colony of united interests' in governance, education, production and distribution
- Operating a temperance hotel

A member could hold a maximum of 50 shares, could pay for shares in instalments of 3d per week, but if instalments were not paid for a period of 6 months the member would be expelled and the shares sold. Interest would be paid at 3½% (later revised to 5%) on paid-up shares, and profits would be distributed to members in proportion to the amount of money they spent in the store. Shares could be inherited provided the beneficiary supported the rules of the Society, otherwise they would be sold. The rules defined members as females and males, and provided for store employees to be elected by the members. All members could attend general meetings, stand for office and elect office holders. The Rochdale pioneers did not include banking in their operations, but in 1867 English co-operatives were authorised to accept small deposits up to a maximum of £20, from those without withdrawable share capital, which led to the creation in Britain and various colonies of penny banks.

'Rochdale' is now a generic term for co-operatives of any type that subscribe to the original Rochdale ideals. These are now expressed in the Statement of Co-operative Identity adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance in 1995, and included in all contemporary co-operative legislation in all Australian and many overseas jurisdictions as the seven co-operative principles. These are set out in Appendix A1.

Share: a share is issued to a member. It is personal property and may be bought at a premium but not a discount (Co-ops NSW, 2017).

Westralian

The formation of Westralian Farmers' Ltd in 1914, and consequent formation of member 'units' in 1917/18 and later, was influenced by Rochdale and, to a lesser extent, Raiffeisen. Westralian Farmers' boosters claimed it operated on a one member one vote principle, nominal interest was paid to shareholders, profits were reserved for bonuses to members or invested, and a minimum shareholding could be attained by all customer-members. It lent money to customers and others dealing with the company. Surplus profits, after making provision for reserves, were to be distributed

as a bonus in either cash, shares or debentures in proportion to business transacted by the shareholder. Shareholders received a standard 5% interest payment on their shares. Westralian Farmers' detractors, however, claimed it and its aligned 'units' diverged from Rochdale because, among other things, members elected delegates who in turn elected office holders rather than by direct election, shareholders votes (in Westralian Farmers') were at first apportioned on a pro-rata basis to the number of shares they held (with up to three votes allowed per member), the parent company and the units engaged in lending money to members (which co-operative societies under the 1903 Act could not), and after 1929 the annual profit could totally be distributed to shareholders, with none going into reserve funds. This 'Westralian' co-operation was presented as a pragmatic adaptation of Rochdale to suit local conditions such as capital shortages and a low level of population thinly spread across a newly-developing countryside, factors not faced in Britain or Germany. At the time the Co-operative Federation was being formed in 1918-1919, Westralian Farmers' strongly supported developing a Raiffeisen bank for rural industries, but conflicting views within the company stymied the idea. Gary Lewis' chapter on co-operation in Western Australia outlines this dynamic in some detail (Gary Lewis 2006: 28-29, 95-128).

Unit: means a local co-operative (usually a mix of producer and distributive co-operative) that acted as an agent and retail distributor for Westralian Farmers', which in turn acted as the wholesale buyer and seller on behalf of each unit and arranged all agencies held by a unit. The Co-operative Federation acted as adjudicator in any disputes between units and Westralian Farmers', and its decisions were binding. See also ***Central Organisation***.

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8 'Editorial', *Perth Gazette*, 24 January 1868: 2. See also 'Local News', *Albany Mail*, 20 October 1885: 2. The co-op was registered under the *Joint Stock Companies Ordinance 1858*, 22 Vict 6
9 'Newcastle', *Fremantle Herald*, 16 May 1868: 3; 'Letter to the Editor', *Fremantle Herald*, 22 August 1868: 3; 'Address from the Residents of the Toodyay District', *Perth Gazette*, 29 October 1869: 2
10 'Perth Co-operative Society Limited', *Inquirer*, 3 November 1869: 3; 29 December 1869: 2. This co-op was also registered under the *Joint Stock Companies Ordinance 1858*, 22 Vict 6. The Society sought to raise £4,000 capital in 2,000 shares at £2 each on a deposit of 10 shillings per share with the remainder paid on monthly instalments of 5 shillings. Expressed in 2018 A$, they sought to raise $867,890 with shares at $432 each on a deposit of $215 and monthly instalments of $108
11 Biographical details from Rica Erikson (ed), *Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol 3 1850-1868, UWAP Nedlands 1979
12 'Perth Co-operative Society Ltd', *Government Gazette*, 27 May 1879: 14
13 'Northam', *Perth Gazette*, 15 August 1873: 3, 'Northam', *Perth Gazette*, 19 December 1873: 3, 'Heads of Intelligence', *Inquirer*, 31 December 1873: 3, 'Northam', *Western Australian Times*, 19 March 1875: 3'Newcastle', *Western Australian Times*, 29 June 1875: 6, 'Country News | Newcastle', *Western Australian Times*, 30 July 1875: 3
14 'Northam', *Western Australian Times*, 13 August 1875: 2
15 FR Mercer, *On Farmers' Service: A short history of farmers' organisation in Western Australia*, Farmers Union of WA, Perth 1955: 'Early Organisations' pp 5-12
16 RT Appleyard, 'Western Australia: economic and Demographic Growth, 1850-1914', in CT Stannage (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, UWAP Nedlands, 1981: 229-229
17 'Swan District Vine and Fruit Growers Association | First Meeting of Members', *West Australian*, 22 February 1893: 3; Editorial, *West Australian*, 23 February 1893: 4
18 'The Agricultural Conference | The Proposed Resolutions', *West Australian*, 13 April 1893: 6; 'The Agricultural Conference', *West Australian*, 19 April 1893: 3
19 'Agricultural Conference in Perth | Premier's Opening Address', *Daily News*, 16 May 1894: 3
20 'Pastoral, Agricultural, Horticultural, and Vince and Fruitgrowers' Associations | Second Annual Conference | Fourth Day's Proceedings', *Western Mail*, 26 May 1894: 1
21 'The Northam Electorate | Mr HJ Cooke Before the Electors', *West Australian*, 21 April 18794: 6
22 'Mr G Randell MLC Before the Electors | His Candidature for Perth', *West Australian*, 28 May 1894: 6
23 'Trades and Labour Council of West Australia', *West Australian*, 11 April 1894: 3
24 'General News', Daily News, 13 June 1895: 2; 'The Price of Meat | Public Meeting in Perth', *Coolgardie Miner*, 26 June 1895: 3
25 'Anglo-Australian Trade | The Delegates' Visit', *The Inquirer*, 28 February 1896: 7
26 'Co-operative Bakery for Fremantle', *West Australian*, 14 April 1896: 5
27 'Fremantle Co-operative Distribution Society', *West Australian*, 25 April 1896: 3
28 'Co-operative Society at Fremantle', *WA Record*, 27 June 1896: 9
29 'Pinjarrah', *Southern Times*, 21 July 1896: 3
30 'Fremantle Co-operative Society', *West Australian*, 16 September 1896: 5
31 Fremantle Co-operative Society', *Geraldton Advertiser*, 25 September 1896: 3
32 *WA Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Legislative Assembly, 23 September 1896: 734; 6 October 1896: 880-881, and 15 October 1896: 1064-1065 (ML Moss Esq, North Fremantle; Hon S Burt, Attorney General)
33 'Fremantle Co-operative Society', *West Australian*, 31 October 1896: 5. The decision to register as a company was influenced by the Attorney-General's remarks in deferring Moss' bill.
34 'The Producers' Conference | Third Day's Sitting | Advocacy of Co-operation', *Western Mail*, 16 April 1897: 5
35 'Co-operation among Farmers |Eastern Districts Farmers Union', *West Australian*, 5 May 1897: 7
36 'Co-operation among Farmers' (editorial), *Northam Advertiser*, 15 May 1897: 2
37 'Companies Registered', *West Australian*, 26 July 1897: 4; 'Companies Act', *Government Gazette* 28 January 1898: 219

38 'Trades and Labour Council', *Daily News*, 24 December 1897: 3
39 'Registered Companies', *Daily News*, 6 August 1898: 4
40 Kim D Weinert, *Reforming Not-for-Profit Organisations in Australia: A Work in Progress*, LLM (Research), Bond University 2003: Chapter 3 'History of Incorporated Associations in Australia and New Zealand': 43-54
41 'Registration of Industrial and Provident Societies | Contemplated Legislation', *West Australian*, 25 September 1897: 2; 'Registration of Societies', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 25 September 1897: 5
42 'Registration of Industrial and Provident Societies | Contemplated Legislation', *West Australian*, 25 September 1897: 2
43 'A Review of 1898', *Western Mail*, 6 January 1899: 29
44 *WA Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Legislative Assembly, 24 September 1901: 1105-1106 and 8 October 1901: 1412 (Hon WH James, Minister without Portfolio, AE Thomas Esq, Dundas, Dr M O'Connor, Moore, Hon FH Piesse, Williams)
45 *WA Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Legislative Assembly, 11 August 1903: 440-443; 13 August 1903: 506, (Hon WH James, Premier, H Daglish Esq, Subiaco, JJ Higham Esq, Fremantle, TH Bath, Hannans, WD Johnson Esq, Kalgoorlie, AJ Diamond Esq, South Fremantle, MH Jacoby Esq, Swan), Legislative Council 20 August 1903: 629
46 These became schedules 1 to 4 and Section 61 respectively in the Act.
47 'Companies Act', *Government Gazette* 13 September and 27 December 1901: 3693, 5156; 'A Defunct Co-operative Society', *Albany Advertiser*, 16 May 1903: 4; 27 May 1903: 4
48 *Co-operative and Provident Societies Act 1903*, 3 Edw VII 2, Royal Assent 8 September 1903, came into effect 1 January 1904. English legislation dated from 1852, with legislation adopted in South Australia in 1864, Victoria in 1874 and Manitoba in 1887, all based on the 1852 English Act. After the updated English Act of 1893 came Western Australia in 1903, then Nova Scotia in 1904, New Zealand in 1907, Quebec (credit unions) in 1907, India in 1912, Saskatchewan in 1914, Queensland in 1920, Ceylon in 1921, Malaya in 1922, South Africa in 1922, New South Wales in 1923 and Straits Settlements (Singapore) in 1924. Note: A Canadian federal co-operatives bill was defeated in 1906
49 *Co-operative and Provident Societies Act 1903*, section 3(1)
50 Registrar of Friendly Societies, 'Register 1904-1906', State Records Office WA, S3011, Cons 1018 17
51 'Random Remarks', *The Truth*, 11 June 1904: 1
52 Registrar of Friendly Societies, 'Goldfields Co-operative Soc Ltd', File FS119/1904; 'Beauty Fishing & Supply Co-operative Soc Ltd', File FS338/1904, 'Collie Co-operative Industrial Co-operative Soc Ltd', file FS219/1904, 'Fremantle Co-operative Soc Ltd', file FS211/1904; State Records Office WA, S3011, Cons 1018
53 Analysis of the registers, 1904-1942, Registrar of Friendly Societies, State Records Office WA, Cons 3011
54 'Companies Act', *Government Gazette*, 10 September 1915: 3145 – the company's registered office was at 332 Murray Street Perth, with Stirling Taylor the Manager.
55 'Commercial', *West Australian*, 27 March 1903: 7; FR Mercer, *The Life of Charles Harper*, Westralian Farmers'' Co-operative Printing Works, Perth 1958: pages 181-187
56 FR Mercer 1958: 177; 'Registrar of Companies', *Government Gazette*, 10 October 1902: 4057
57 FR Mercer 1958: 177
58 FR Mercer 1958: 177-178. A list of co-operative shareholders published in 1907 names 90 Chinese members, mostly men, and 11 other members including Harper: 'In the Supreme Court', *Government Gazette* 29 November 1907: 3906
59 FR Mercer, *On Farmers' Service: A short history of farmers' organisation in Western Australia*, Farmers Union WA, Perth 1955: 109-110
60 From address by Chairman of Westralian Farmers' Ltd, Mr MT Padbury, to the founding conference in 1919
61 John Sandford, *Walter Harper and the Farmers*, Westralian Farmers'' Co-operative Limited Printing Works, Perth 1955: 41-42; 'Cook, George', in Rica Erickson (ed), *Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol 5, 1889-1914, UWAP Nedlands 1986: 182 - Cook was later employed in the Westralian Farmers' Wheat Department.
62 'Co-operatives – Co-operatives laws 1903, 2009'; 'Co-operatives - Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943', author's databases
63 John Sandford 1955: 42.
64 'Situations Vacant | Yilliminning-Kondinin Farmers' Co-op Co Ltd', *West Australian*, 9 July 1917: 8
65 'Co-operative Companies', *Government Gazette*, 23 November 1917: 1892. 49 such notices were published in this issue of the Gazette across four pages.
66 'Co-operatives – Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943', author's database
67 John Sandford 1955: 42; 'Co-operation | The Farmers' Federation', *Daily News*, 4 July 1919: 6
68 'Co-operation | The Farmers' Federation | Annual Conference of Delegates | An Important Decision', *Daily News*, 4 July 1919: 6; 'Farmers' Co-operative Movement | Annual Conference of Delegates', *West Australian*, 5 July 1919: 6

69 'Co-operation | The Farmers' Federation', *Daily News*, 4 July 1919: 6
70 John Sandford 1955: 44-45
71 'Co-operative Notes', *Westralian Worker*, 18 July 1917: 5
72 'Chairman of Federation', *Minutes*, Federation Council, 9 October 1919. £52 equates to $3,300 in 2018
73 *Articles of Association of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia*, 1919, article 7
74 *Articles of Association of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia*, WFL Co-op Printing Works, Perth 1927: articles 34 and 35
75 *Articles of Association … 1927*: article 23
76 *Articles of Association … 1927*: article 22
77 John Sandford 1955: 49-50
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79 *Constitution and Rules of the Co-operative Federation of Western Australia*, WFL Printing Works, Perth 1938: clause 4
80 *Constitution and Rules …* 1938: clause 44. meetings.
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82 Gary Lewis, *The Democracy Principle: Farmer co-operatives in twentieth century Australia*, the Author, Wamboin 2006: 116, 118
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86 H. J. Gibbney, 'Bath, Thomas Henry (1875–1956)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bath-thomas-henry-5154/text8647 , published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 31 January 2019; Members Biographical Register | Former Members, Mr Thomas Henry Bath, Parliament of Western Australia, http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/(Lookup)/5CFB2F1EC0D6D96D482577E50028A517?OpenDocument,accessed 5 June 2019
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88 'Alphabetical', *Wises Western Australian Post Office Directory*, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1914
89 'Companies Act', *Government Gazette*, 13 July 1917: 1109
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92 John Sandford 1955: 112, citing figures from the 1931 Royal Commission into the Agricultural Industry. The Agricultural Bank later became the R&I Bank, and was privatised in 1994 as BankWest.
93 G. C. Bolton, 'Boyle, Ignatius George (1882–1960)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/boyle-ignatius-george-5327/text9001 , published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 6 June 2019
94 Gary Lewis 2006: 114
95 'Correspondence | Mr Bath at Babakin', *Bruce Rock Post*, 28 July 1933: 3
96 'Correspondence | Co-operative Bulk Handling', *Wyalkatchem Wheatsheaf*, 15 August 1933: 3; *Bruce Rock Post*, 18 August 1933: 4; *Merredin Mercury*, 17 August 1933: 6
97 The poetic reference is to Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1, Act 5, Scene 1, and is about being tricked into disloyalty and civil rebellion. Bath was a foundation member of the WA Shakespeare Club in 1930, and given to dramatic Shakespearean quotes.
98 A three-bushel jute sack of wheat, filled, packed and sewn, weighted 80 kgs. Lumpers were the harbour workers who carried or 'lumped' the bags, one at a time, on their backs.
99 The main history of Co-operative Bulk Handling is in Cyril Ayris, *A Heritage Ingrained: Co-operative Bulk Handling Limited 1933-2000*, Co-operative Bulk Handling, West Perth 1999
100 John Sandford 1955: 130, 154-155, 167
101 Gary Lewis 2006: 114-120
102 'Trades Union & Labor Congress', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12 April 1899: 4
103 'Meeting at Boulder', *Western Argus*, 6 July 1899: 9
104 J. R. Robertson, 'Johnson, William Dartnell (1870–1948)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/johnson-william-dartnell-6857/text11877 published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 31 January 2019.

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106 *WA Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Legislative Assembly, 11 September 1929: 690 (Hon WD Johnson, Guildford)
107 *Bruce Rock District Farmers' Co-operative Company Limited, Memorandum and Articles of Association*, 24 March 1917.
108 *Companies Act Amendment Act 1929*, 20 George V, No 25, Royal assent 11 December 1929
109 Gary Lewis 2006: 111
110 Gary Lewis 2006: 111-112
111 *Bruce Rock District Farmers' Co-operative Company Limited, Memorandum and Articles of Association*, 24 March 1917. £10,000 was a large sum to raise in a new wheatbelt community in 1917, the equivalent to A$960,800 in 2018. It is not clear whether that amount was actually raised at the time.
112 *WA Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Legislative Assembly, 11 September 1929: 689 (Hon WD Johnson, Guildford)
113 Gary Lewis 2006: 112
114 'Quairading Co-op | General Meeting', *York Chronicle*, 27 June 1930: 4. £2,452 is equivalent to A$203,000 in 2018.
115 Kevin P. Smith, 'Harper, Charles Walter (1880–1956)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/harper-charles-walter-6568/text11297 , published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 31 January 2019.
116 FR Mercer 1958: page 187
117 John Sandford 1955: 305
118 John Sandford 1955: vxii
119 Walter Harper, *The Co-operative Federation of Western Australia: A brief outline of co-operative achievements in Western Australia with answers to typical criticisms*, duplicated typescript, 1 November 1933
120 Secession refers to agitation in Western Australia during the 1930s for independence, resulting in a referendum in 1933 that returned an overall two-thirds majority in favour of secession. The wheatbelt electorates voted heavily in favour of secession.
121 *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*, 7 George VI, No 31, Royal assent 3 December 1943 (to come into effect 6 months after the cessation of hostilities in the war – in the event, on 29 December 1947: 'Proclamation', *Government Gazette*, 7 November 1947: 2062):
122 *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*, sections 173(b) and 175
123 *Companies (Co-operatives) Act 1943*, section 176
124 'Companies Act', *Government Gazette*, 14 July 1950: 1603
125 Irene Sauman, 'Wheatbelt, heritage', in Jenny Gregory and Jan Gothard (eds), *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia*, UWAP, Crawley 2009: 931
126 'Debate | Mr Kinloch | No 2 Affirmative', *Minutes and Report*, 37th Annual Conference, 1957: 67
127 These debates are captured in some detail in *Minutes and Report*, 36th Annual Conference, Co-operative Federation of Western Australia, Perth 1956; and 37th Annual Conference, Co-operative Federation of Western Australia, Perth 1957.
128 'Unification of Co-operative Retail Trading', *Minutes and Reports*, 36th Annual Conference: 11-13
129 'Address by Mr John Thomson | Rationalisation of Co-operative Services', *Minutes and Reports*, 36th Annual Conference: 16-20
130 'Staff Training and Publicity', *Minutes and Report*, 36th Annual Conference, Wellington Street 1956: 25-34
131 'Report of the Education Committee', *Agenda and Reports*, 44th Annual Conference, South Perth 1963: 28-30
132 Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South 2001; James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton 2010
133 'Address | Professor I Bowen', *Minutes and Report*, 42nd Annual Conference, South Perth 1962: 31-39
134 'Report on Commonwealth Conference on Agricultural Co-operation', *Minutes and Report*, 45th Annual Conference, 1965: 75-81
135 'Co-operation in Developed and Developing Countries', *Minutes and Report*, 47th Annual Conference, 1967: 51-53
136 *Western Australia's changing trade relations - The emergence of China and India*, Western Australian Statistical Indicators (Cat. No. 1367.5), June 2005, Australian Bureau of Statistics, https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/3d68c56307742d8fca257090002029cd/5764196ebeefe319ca25711a0080714f!OpenDocument, accessed 1 July 2019
137 *An Economic History of Western Australia since Colonial Settlement*, Research Paper, Department of Treasury and Finance, Perth 2004: 24
138 *Year Book of Western Australia* (title varies), 1958 - 1988
139 'Co-operatives – Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943', authors database; Irene Sauman 2009: 931

140 'Co-operatives – Companies laws 1879, 1893-1943' and 'CFWA Member Co-ops 1956-2014', author's databases
141 Commonwealth Preference, originally called Imperial Preference, was a system agreed at Ottawa in 1932 whereby Commonwealth countries imposed reciprocal and lower tariffs on imports from other Commonwealth countries than from non-Commonwealth countries. Its slogan was "home producers first, empire producers second, and foreign producers last"
142 'Federation Business | Education and Training – Future Policy', *Minutes and Report*, 51st Conference, 1971: 14-16
143 'Co-operative Retail Storekeeping Advisory Committee', *Minutes and Report*, 52nd Conference, 1972: 38-42
144 RH Ghosh, 'Economic Development and Population Growth in Western Australia since 1945', in CT Stannage (ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, UWAP Nedlands 1981: Table 8.8, page 284; 'Research Topics – Western Australia – Employment', Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Statistics, Canberra, http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/aboutmyregion/wa#employment, accessed 9 April 2019
145 Susan Groom and John Gates, *It Started with Apples: The story of the Mount Barker Co-operative Ltd*, the Co-operative, Mt Barker 2009: 94
146 'How Co-operatives Discharge their Responsibilities to Producers and Consumers', *Minutes and Reports*, 55th Conference, 1975: 48; the original quote is from Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1962 and expanded in 'The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits', *New York Times Magazine*, 13 September 1970
147 'The Changing Needs of Consumers and their Protections', *Minutes and Reports*, 55th Conference, 1975: 51; the original quote is from Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Strahan & Cadell, London 1776. A mercantile system is one in which the extent of global wealth is viewed as static, and consequently a state needs to accumulate the largest possible share of that wealth by maximizing exports and limiting their imports through tariffs and other import controls. Mercantilism underpinned the spread of European colonial empires from the 16th to the 19th centuries.
148 Monetarism and contemporary neoliberalism are often conflated, but the links are not so straightforward: for a discussion see Michael Clune, 'What was Neoliberalism?', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26 February 2013: (https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-was-neoliberalism), reviewing Danial Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2012
149 'Report … For Presentation to Members', *Minutes and Reports*, 56th Conference, South Perth 1976: 17
150 'The Role of Credit Unions in Servicing the Financial needs of the Community', *Minutes and Report*, 56th Annual Conference, South Perth 1976: 62-72
151 'Some Observations on Collaboration Between Co-operatives in Australia and Western Germany', *Minutes and Reports*, 58th Co-operative Conference, Perth 1978: 40-49
152 *Credit Unions Act 1979*, No 54 of 1979, Royal assent 12 November 1979
153 *Credit Unions Act 1979*, section 24 and Schedule 2
154 'Trends and Challenges in Agricultural Production', *Minutes and Report*, 50th Annual Conference, Cottesloe 1970: 67-71
155 UHT (Ultra-High Temperature) processing of milk developed in the 1960s and 70s to prolong the shelf-life of milk and other liquid products, with a flow-on effect of allowing stockpiling of excess production and reducing of prices to producers
156 'Co-operative Marketing | Co-operative Shipping and Export', *Minutes and Report*, 53rd Conference, 1973: 24-25.
157 'China Statement | Wheat sales to be discussed', *Canberra Times*, 21 May 1973: 11; '$7 million sugar agreement with China', *Canberra Times*, 26 July 1973: 3; 'Australia hopes for wheat pact', *Canberra Times*, 7 August 1973: 11
158 There is no mention of the mission in the papers of the 55th Conference (1975), and only a brief reference to the mission have taken place in the Federation's 1973 report to the Co-operative Federation of Australia (*Minutes and Report*, Co-operative Federation of Australia, 1973: Appendix D, p49).
159 RN Ghosh 1981: 280
160 'Report', *Minutes and Report*, 47th Annual Conference, Cottesloe 1967: 1
161 'Co-operatives - Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943', authors database
162 'Making a Cultural and Social Impact', *Minutes and Reports*, 56th Conference, South Perth 1976: 73-79
163 'Conference Conclusion', *Minutes and Reports*, 56th Conference, South Perth 1976: 80-84
164 'Youth in Co-operatives of Today and Tomorrow", *Minutes and Report*, 51st Conference, Cottesloe 1971: 21-24.

165 'Co-operatives in the Economy of Today and Tomorrow', *Minutes and Report*, 51st Conference, Cottesloe 1971: 1-
166 'Federation Business Session | Co-operative advertising', *Minutes and Report*, 49th Annual Conference, Cottesloe 1969: 13-14
167 'Development | Aborigine Co-operatives', *Minutes and Report*, 52nd Conference, Cottesloe 1972: 6-7
168 'Discussion Groups | Co-operatives as communities', *Minutes and Report*, 50th Annual Conference, Cottesloe 1970: 22-23. The Council referred to was probably the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islands (FCAATSI) that operated between 1958 and 1976. Its five key principles were remarkably similar to the co-operative principles: see Sue Taffe, 'Witnesses from the conference floor: Oral history and the federal council for the advancement of aborigines and Torres Strait islanders', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol 25, No 67, January 2001: 9–21
169 'Co-operatives - Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943', author's database; *Government Gazette*, 15 July 1977: 2313; *Minutes and Reports*, 58th Co-operative Conference, Perth 1978: 10
170 Jessie Eileen Lefroy was an original director of the Bassendean Rochdale Co-operative Ltd: *Memorandum and Articles of Association of Bassendean Rochdale Co-operative Ltd*, 24 July 1944
171 'School for Farmers in Perth | Sessions also for Women', *Avon Argus & Cunderdin-Meckering-Tammin Mail*, 1 February 1951: 4
172 'Better Living Committee', *Report and Minutes*, 31st Annual Conference, Wellington Street 1951: 18
173 'Equal Pay', *Minutes and Report*, 41st Annual Conference, South Perth 1961: 10
174 Susan Groom and John Gates 2009: 94
175 Advertising for staff, and historic photographs, suggest this to be the case but much more research is needed.
176 Sally R May, 'Fishing, commercial', in Jenny Gregory and Jan Gothard (eds), *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia*, UWA Press, Crawley 2009: 370-371; WA Fishing Industry Council, History, http://www.wafic.org.au/who-we-are/history/, accessed 24 June 2019
177 The six were The Fishermen's Co-operative Society of WA, founded in Fremantle in 1958 and wound-up in 1963, Esperance in 1978, Mandurah and Shark Bay in 1979 (both wound up in the early 1980s), Blue Wave Fisheries Co-operative (founded as Cray Boats Co-op) in 1985 that folded in 1992, and the Batavia Coast Fishermen's Co-op established in 1995: 'Co-operatives – Companies laws 1879, 1893, 1943, author's database
178 Howard Gray, *The Western Rock Lobster: Book 1 A natural history*, Westralian Books, Geraldton 1992: 6-10, 98-103, and *Book 2 A history of the fishery*, Westralian Books, Geraldton 1999
179 'Co-operatives – Companies law 1879, 1893, 1943', authors database
180 Peter Thompson, *Wesfarmers: The People's Story, 1914-2014*, UWA Publishing Custom, Crawley 2014:
181 Sean Smith, 'The man who made Wesfarmers', *West Australian*, 2 March 2014, https://thewest.com.au/countryman/finance-markets/the-man-who-made-wesfarmers-ng-ya-366675,
182 'Wesfarmers Building (fmr)', InHerit Database, http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/Details/54182fc8-9032-4c5c-8f7a-e030ee63837f, State Heritage Office, accessed 28 June 2019
183 'Financial Accounts', Minutes of Business Session, 64th Annual Conference, Perth 1984 (MSS)
184 The Americas Cup yacht race was run in Gage Roads, off Fremantle, between 31 January and 4 February 1987. The Cup had been won by the yacht of entrepreneur Alan Bond in 1983
185 Co-operative Federation of Western Australia Inc., *65th Annual Conference, Merlin Hotel …* Programme, 1985
186 Co-operative Federation of Australia Inc. Minutes and Report of the Council Meeting held at Master Butchers Ltd., 432 Churchill Road, Kilburn SA, commencing at 9.30am, Wednesday 27th February 1985 (https://archive.org/stream/CFAMinuteKilburnSA27February1985_201704/CFA%20Minute%20Kilburn%20SA%2027%20February%201985_djvu.txt); Co-operative Federation of Australia Inc., Minutes of the Council Meeting held at the offices of the Co-operative Federation of NSW Inc., 363 Pitt Street, Sydney, commencing at 1 pm, 22 January 1986 (https://archive.org/stream/CFAMinuteSydneyNSW22January1986/CFA%20Minute%20Sydney%20NSW%2022%20January%201986_djvu.txt). The value of the unpaid fees in 2018 is $8,000.
187 'Australian National Cooperatives', Australian Co-operative Links, www.coopdevelopment.org.au/natlinks.html, accessed 1 July 2019
188 Gary Lewis 2006: 96, 128
189 Frank O'Connor, pers comm, 11 June 2019
190 Gordon Gekko was a fictional character in the 1987 film 'Wall Street', whose signature line, "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good" has become a popular reference to unrestrained avarice.
191 Peter Thompson 2014: 197-199
192 Federation Trust Ltd, *Minute Book*, Report of the Board of Directors to the 36th Annual General Meeting, 28 February 1979; *Memorandum and Articles of Association*, Wespak Limited, 24 November 1934
193 'Report … Year ending 31st December 1978 | Wespak Pty Ltd', *Minutes and Reports*, 59th Co-operative Conference, Perth 1979: 13; Federation Trust Ltd, *Minute Book*, Report of the Board of Directors to the 36th Annual General Meeting, 28 February 1979

194 Federation Trust Ltd, *Minute Book*, Report of the Board of Directors to the 39th Annual General Meeting, 23 March 1982; 'Report … for the Year Ended 31st December 1982 | Conclusion', *Minutes and Reports*, 63rd Co-operative Conference, Perth 1983: 13. The value is $172,460 in 2018.
195 'Co-operative Federation Report | Questions from Assembly | Mr W York – Mt Barker Co-op Ltd', *Minutes and Reports*, 63rd Co-operative Conference, Perth 1983: 9
196 Gary Lewis 2006: 68, 128, 405
197 'Report …. Year Ending 31st December 1983', Appendix B. The rent equates to $11,448 in 2018, and the 1983 rent of $5,361 equates to $17,182.
198 Federation Trust Ltd, *Minute Book*, Minutes of a Meeting of Directors 6th April 1987 and 3rd May 1988. The resale price was only $820. The values equate to $17,000 and $2,000 in 2018.
199 Federation Trust Ltd, *Minute Book*, Minutes of a Meeting of Directors 14th November 1991, 13th February 1992 and 21st February 1992. Value in 2018 is $238,106
200 'Water Supplies in Western Australia', *Minutes and Reports*, 58th Co-operative Conference, Perth 1978: 76-78
201 '200 Nautical Mile Australian Fishing Zone', *Minutes and Reports*, 59th Co-operative Conference, Perth 1979: 38-51
202 Howard Gray 1999: 'Fencing the common 1962/63 – 1971-72', 175-208
203 'Report …. Year Ending 31st December 1982', *Minutes and Reports*, 63rd Co-operative Conference, Perth 1983: 10
204 Gary Lewis 2006: 128
205 *Companies (Co-operatives) Amendment Act 1994*, No 56 of 1994, Royal assent 2 November 1994, came into effect same day
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Image: Sorrel Wilby

Dr Bruce Baskerville is a public historian who grew up on Western Australia's Batavia Coast with stories of Dutch shipwrecks and convict ruins, midst the windswept awe of the Dongara sandplains and Abrolhos Islands. He has long researched the ways in which old institutions are adapted and naturalised in new places, from the Crown to building styles, shared histories to commonage systems. He has an abiding interest in communal and co-operative models of self-governance and their historical roots.

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