

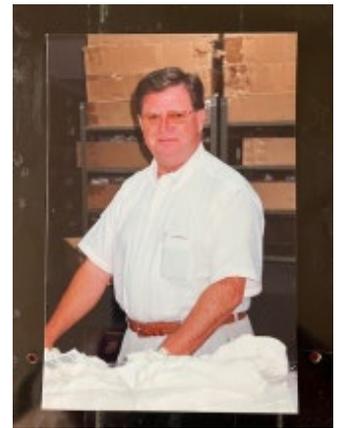
Remembering John Howes: A Legend of the Australian Cotton Industry

“A pioneer, a bridge-builder, and a gentleman of cotton.”

By Eimear McDonagh for ACSA

Introduction

On 8th July 2025, the Australian cotton industry bid farewell to one of its most esteemed figures. John Howes, aged 93, passed away peacefully, leaving a profound legacy that shaped the landscape of Australia’s modern cotton trade.



Industry Leadership

During his career, John Howes helped Namoi Cotton navigate challenges in weather, market fluctuations, and infrastructure. In 1978, he contributed to the formation of the Australian Cotton Industry Initiative (ACII), which later became the Raw Cotton Marketing and Advisory Committee (RCMAC)—the industry’s national marketing and representative body. Here, he advocated for separating Australian cotton from US cotton in terms of colour, promoting Australian standards that better reflected the superior colour grade of local cotton. He strongly promoted Sicala seed as a unique feature of Australian cotton in international markets, a distinction that benefits the industry to this day.

Legacy

John Howes may have been a challenging character at times, but he was a trailblazer and a risk-taker. His generosity and ability to unite people on behalf of Australian cotton are indisputable. He fostered countless careers, educated many, and opened international market opportunities for Australian cotton that few have done since.

John Howes’s legacy endures through his friendships, mentorship, and vision. He was a vital part of a cohort that laid the foundations for a cotton industry that today is recognised around the world as the most innovative, efficient and sustainable cotton industry on the planet. Institutions like CRDC, Cotton Australia, CSD and the Cotton Shippers Association all have John’s fingerprints on them. Our wonderful cotton industry owes him a great deal.

His influence should be remembered and celebrated for generations to come.

Many people contributed to this article, here are some tributes:

“No pantheon of Australian Cotton Industry giants is complete without John Howes as a member”. *Richard Haire, Chair CRDC*

“He was a great man and a great friend and educator to me; John deserves all the accolades he gets, he was a tremendous industry man, and a generous man to all.”
Gordon Cherry – Retired CEO, LDC Australia

"John was a visionary leader who not only played a big role in shaping the modern cotton industry but also in shaping people. He taught me a lot about success through trust and relationships. I regularly spoke to him about the responsibilities of leading a company into the future during my 21 years at Cotton Seed Distributors. I am personally grateful to John for his encouragement and friendship over some 40 years."

Peter Graham - Retired Managing Director, CSD

I began my career in cotton at CTC in the late 1990's. I have fond memories of 'Mr. Howes' open door policy, he welcomed questions, even the most bizarre. Without knowing it he was a mentor to me and I credit his expansive way of thinking, his risk appetite and his love of the industry for instilling in me a lifelong passion for cotton and the global community that it supports.

Eimear McDonagh – Director, Agri Vision Australia Ltd

Contributions from Greenmount Press, Namoi Cotton, Phil Sloan, Cathy Cook, Wayne Clissold, Gordon Cherry, Peter Graham, Richard Haire and Arthur Spellson.

Full article can be downloaded from ACSA website using this link