

FABRIC OF SPORT

A PUNT FOR FOOTY FANS

Elissa Doherty

It was a bold punt in the age of fast fashion.

But a retro range of football jumpers to support Australia's wool industry is still making its mark - more than a decade after the idea first took flight.

A small Melbourne-run family factory produces between 8,000 and 10,000 of the AFL-licensed merino wool jumpers each year, utilising manufacturing techniques from yesteryear.

The old-style supporter apparel is sold through the AFL, and was launched by The Vintage Football Jumper Company with industry body Australian Wool Innovation in 2014.

Ever since, the sport's heritage has been stitched back to life for dyed-in-the-wool fans - many who are undeterred by their \$249 price tag. Among the biggest sellers are replicas of jumpers from Melbourne teams such as Carlton, Essendon, Richmond and Hawthorn, said Dean Grimster, from The Vintage Football Company.

Nostalgia was also fuelling demand, from the colours of long-vanished teams, to the



Dean Grimster, Cath Mellis and Hugh Lyon, from The Essentials manufacturing Co. Picture Rebecca Michael

There's almost a spiritual connection between these beautiful old jumpers and the fans' emotions and memories

guernseys worn in historic clashes like the first ANZAC Day match. "There's almost a spiritual connection between these beautiful old jumpers and the fans' emotions and memories," said Mr Grimster.

"There are so many examples of these products engaging with fans. The Sydney Swans (jumper) in South Melbourne is really popular, and the Brisbane Lions in Fitzroy is still really popular.

"If you go into Fitzroy today, it's like they still have a footy team, despite the fact that it's based in Brisbane. These are the things that fans love."

Behind the apparel lies a deeper push to shine a light on

the sport's deep roots in Australia's wool-growing communities. Players wore wool on the field from the game's inception in the 19th century until the 1980s, when the natural fibre was muscled out by cheaper, synthetic alternatives.

The Fibre of Football campaign, run by the AWI-owned Woolmark, has recruited a suite of AFL legends with farming backgrounds as wool ambassadors, including Brownlow medallists Patrick Cripps and Nat Fyfe, and Geelong's Tom Hawkins.

Footy stars have even paid a visit to Lyon Sportswear, where a tiny team - led by 73-year-old patriarch Hugh Lyon - meticulously crafts the jumpers in a labour of love.

"We really wanted to re-engage fans with a truly retro product that was made of Australian wool, made on the old machines... the way it was done back then," said Mr Grimster.

"Some of our machines are 70 years old, and Hugh's the only guy who can fix them. So when they break, Huey has an ability to find a piece of cardboard or do something to make them keep going."

Mr Grimster said 98 per cent of Australian wool was exported, and it was a boost for growers to see their fibre being used on home soil "in a product that they can relate to".

"The wool industry is tough," he said.

"It's a competitive industry, and one of the challenges is that everything used to be 100 per cent wool, but now people mix synthetic and cotton with their wool. This is a passion project for us, but we don't foresee a reason why we can't sustain it going forward."

Scott Carmody, head of domestic operations at Woolmark, said the campaign had played an important awareness

role, even though it was "never going to sell millions of jumpers".

The range was regularly evolving and has expanded into beanies, gloves, scarves and knitting kits.

"It gives growers something to be proud of... that's hopefully what we are achieving to some degree," he said.

"Pride in what they are growing, pride in what their skills are on farm, and... the product that it ends up in."

Businesses go for gold with Games contracts

OPPORTUNITY

The Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games are six years away, but the starting gun has already fired for businesses ahead of a "once-in-a-generation" economic boom.

Traders are racing to share in \$2.5 billion worth of contracts that could catapult local brands onto the world stage, with Queenslanders poised to win the majority.

Business Chamber Queensland chief executive Heidi Cooper said the 2032 Games

would be a "transformative opportunity" for the state.

"All eyes will be on us, and we have that opportunity to showcase who we are as a city, as a state, but also as an economic powerhouse," Ms Cooper said. "It's a once-in-a-generation chance for the state of Queensland, and for our businesses and communities to really grow."

Athletes would be competing in venues in the city and across regional areas - attracting thousands of tourists who could be looking for somewhere to stay, eat, destinations



to explore and souvenirs. To take home. Ms Cooper said the economic benefits would be widespread, with the Games predicted to generate over \$8 billion for the hosting state and \$17.6 billion nationwide.

To achieve the forecasted gains, Australians could be

called on to deliver tourism, branding, and construction of 17 new or upgraded venues.

They could also fill security roles, run accommodation, and supply the essentials that make the Games come to life - from the technology that powers them, to sports equipment, uni-

forms, and even the gold, silver and bronze that make up athletes' medals.

The procurement policy favours Queensland business owners, who have won the majority of more than 50 contracts awarded so far.

Organisers have also committed to engaging social enterprises, businesses that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned and run, those led by women, people with disabilities and diverse groups, and those producing environmentally friendly products.

"Hosting an inclusive, sus-

tainable Games starts long before the opening ceremony - and it's not just about the athletes, but who we work with on all levels of Games delivery," organisers said in their procurement advice.

Just as Olympians are already in training, business owners were urged to lodge their interest in the Games and start preparing - by building networks, teaming up with supply chain partners, improving sustainability credentials and learning how to tell the stories that would showcase their brand.

1.

Bloke Soaps

Soaps, skincare and candles. This natural, cruelty-free soap and skincare collection may be named after different types of Aussie blokes, but the ladies love them too. Handcrafted on the NSW South Coast with "no fake stuff", the range includes bar soaps infused with plant-based ingredients like lime, peppermint and Kakadu plum, along with face foam, hand cream, moisturisers and more. "My father and I have always loved handmade soaps, so we decided to put an Aussie spin on our own range of soaps and skincare," said founder Will Kent. blokesoaps.com.au



Paper & Bloom

Plantable cards: Daisy (left), Frida (right). Calendars and cards that bloom into wildflowers? These are the gifts that truly give back. Perth-based Paper & Bloom makes plantable seed products and gift tags, with 1 per cent from every purchase donated to tree planting projects. "There is no Planet B, and Paper and Bloom is on a mission to shake up the Australian gifting industry," said owner Sarah Rebut. paperandbloom.com.au

5.

My Nook Nook play sofa.

Play sofas that turn into rockets, racing cars and UFOs? That's got the kids' attention. But parents are also fawning over these handmade modular sofas that come in ten pieces and are high quality, hardy and boast a top design award. "My husband and I started My Nook as we were looking for quality play furniture for our own children," said co-founder Olivia Rudomino. "Prioritising Australian Made construction was a way that we could ensure a sustainable business generating jobs in our local community. We still work with the same local small businesses today that we started with back in 2020!" mynook.com.au



LIEF toys

(Living Infancy Eco-Friendly) Ollie the koala. Not only do these cute critters put a smile on children's faces, they are a tick for the planet. Made from merino wool felt, the kangaroos, koalas, platypuses, penguins and wombats are devoid of plastics, synthetic glue and harsh chemicals, and boast biodegradable stuffing. Founder Karla Ortega Garcia said each piece was ethically made in Australia, "supporting local makers and embracing a circular economy". livinginfancyecofriendly.com.au

2.

State of Escape

Meridian large tote. From a Sydney studio to the streets of Chile and Norway, these neoprene bags are making a global sustainability splash. The functional fashion accessories with rope handles are made to order and hand-cut to minimise waste. One range even features rubber made from oyster shells. "Manufacturing in Australia has always been fundamentally important to us," said co-founder Brigitte MacGowan. "We collaborate daily with our makers - quality is always paramount - leaving nothing to chance." stateofescape.com



3.

My Little Love Heart

Christmas baby gifts. Nothing says made in Australia quite like a bub sporting a kangaroo-print burp bib, or a Snugglepote headband. The eco-friendly range of baby gifts, stitched by a former wedding dress designer, can be bundled into a 'build your own' hamper. The Perth-based Colombian maker Luisa Figueroa was inspired to make her own baby range when her daughter was teething and suffering from reflux. "I couldn't find products that were functional and stylish". mylittloveheart.com.au



10 WAYS TO AN AUSTRALIAN MADE CHRISTMAS



10.

Eco art and craft

Biodegradable product range. Slime, playdough, exploding volcano kits... kids have all the fun! Best of all, these art and craft supplies are made from vegetables, roots, flowers and seeds, so all the parents need to worry about is the mess. The couple behind the award-winning business is walking the walk, developing the range from their off grid, solar-powered forest home in the NSW Northern Rivers. "Our daughters' love for craft led us to create safe, plant-based alternatives that nurture creativity while honouring the earth," said co-owner Megan Townsend. ecoartandcraft.com



8.

Buttonworks

Australian Christmas tree. From gum tree trivets to carved Christmas ornaments, these durable wooden gifts celebrate Australia's flora and fauna. A family of makers craft the collection from Australian timber including Tasmanian Oak, Jarrah, Blackwood and Myrtle - using sustainable materials and practices - on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. "As a family business we are committed to employ local people, prioritise local materials, work with like-minded suppliers and support the protection of our natural environment and native wildlife," said one of the founders, Liza Murray-Clarkson. "Being an Australian made business allows us to keep that commitment." buttonworks.com.au

Harrison Australia Tan leather belt. Make a sartorial statement with wallets, belts and accessories cut from locally sourced cowhide and kangaroo leather. With 50 years in leathermaking under their belt, the Bexley family is pushing back against mass-produced imports with their boutique, Melbourne-based brand. "All of our products are made by hand using traditional techniques and hand tools," said director Jake Bexley. "This attention to detail produces a more refined and superior product." harrisonaustralia.com.au

Elume Candles Australian Escapes soy candles and reed diffusers. Whether it's the Barossa Fig, Blue Mountains Mist or Daintree Lime, you'll be transported to another place with these heavenly candles and diffusers. Husband and wife duo Mark and Joelle Lavender have been capturing the scents of Australia since 1999 after the business idea was brewed up in a coffee shop. Mr Lavender drew on his science background to create the candles, including developing the distinctive "snowflake effect" in the brand's pillar range. "We're proud to keep that Australian-made craftsmanship alive," he said. elume.com.au

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