

# *PEARL PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION*

P.O. Box 55 Mt. Hawthorn 6915. Phone (08) 9244 2933. Fax (08) 9244 2934

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Pearl Producers Applaud Icon Status for Broome Pearl**

The Pearl Producers Association (PPA) have applauded the community of Western Australia and the State Government for their recognition of the pearling industry through the naming of the Broome pearl as the sixth Western Australian heritage icon as part of the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

PPA Executive Officer, Brett McCallum agreed wholeheartedly that the listing of the Broome Pearl as an icon recognised the pearling industry's important historical, social and economic significance to both Broome and the wider State.

“From the days past of pearl luggers and hard hat divers flocking to Broome from all parts of the world to dive for the pearl shell to the recognition of the modern pearling industry renown for producing the most beautiful pearls in the world, the Pilbara/Kimberley region, with Broome as the epicentre, has been full of mystique and intrigue”

The late 1800s/early 1900s saw the pearl oyster from the 80 mile beach off Broome as the industry focus for its wonderful lustrous mother of pearl used for buttons, jewellery and furniture inlay with exports through out the world. The advent of plastic and overfishing of the pearl oyster resource saw the demise of the luggers and industry through the mid 1900s.

However the technological breakthroughs in pearl culture techniques has seen a new arm of the industry develop over the past 45 years producing pearls of the most wonderful lustre, smoothest complexion, most consistent shape and silver white colour – all attributes that make these Broome pearls the highest quality and most sought after in the world.

In a world where many overseas pearl producing countries use chemical treatments to colour their pearls and mechanical peeling to remove imperfections, the Australian South Sea pearls are totally natural, raised in the unique qualities of the marine environment in the far North of Western Australia.

Here the oysters thrive on the nutrients in the pristine waters and are maintained in prime condition through farming techniques using the latest research and development results from large investments by Australian pearling companies.

The result for Western Australia is an export industry contributing around \$200 million per annum to the economy and employing around 1000 people in the North West of the State based around Broome.

“The industry is carefully managed through catch and seeding quotas to maintain the pearl oyster resource and grow pearl production in line with market demand,” explained Mr McCallum, “This combination ensures there is confidence in the industry to invest in environmental sustainability to maintain the required pristine growing conditions and in technology to maximise the return from every pearl oyster used in the process”.

The industry continues to face the same dangers as the pearl shell luggers of the early days with cyclones especially a major concern. Divers are still used to gather the pearl oysters used in pearl production but improved safety arrangements implemented by the modern pearling industry ensure that divers health remains paramount.

“The industry has invested in research which has resulted in specific dive depth rules and ascent rules for our industry to protect divers’ health,” said Mr McCallum, “The industry donated a recompression chamber to the Broome Hospital and meets all costs of its operation to ensure divers are in reach of full treatment facilities.”

The PPA is proud that the Broome Pearl has joined the Swan River, Fremantle Harbour, Kings Park, Albany Anzac Dawn Service and Rottnest Island as WA Heritage Icons.

**Contact: Brett McCallum, Executive Officer**  
**Pearl Producers Association**  
**Tel (08) 9244 2933                      Mob 0417 908 089**  
**Email           pearler@wafic.org.au**