

## Peter McMaugh AM – Life Member Profile

A professional lifetime devoted to the turf industry began when Peter graduated from Sydney University – 1964 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (B.Sc. Agr) aged 29. Peter took over a moribund company, Grass Research (NSW) Ltd owned by the Bowling and Golf Association and based at the Ryde School of Horticulture. In the space of 5 years the company had outgrown the facilities at Ryde and in 1971 we moved to new purpose-built Laboratories at Concord West. Peter retired as Director in 1978. During this period Peter changed the company name to ATRI which functioned till 1998.



In 1974, together with two partners, Peter bought the Qualturf property at Cornwallis Road, Richmond. It was an abandoned farm and was covered in reeds and Johnson grass.

For the first 3 years, to avoid a conflict of interest with Peter's employer ATRI, he farmed potatoes in partnership with Alan Sherriff who lived where Grech's Turf now operates.

By 1978 when Peter resigned from ATRI he had duplicated a research nursery of 300

couch clones at Qualturf and had built up nursery stock of Greenlees Park couch.

With very close connections to the Ryde School of Horticulture and the nursery industry, Peter targeted the market to the upper 5% of the landscape industry with great success. In 1979 Peter went to Europe for 3 months with his family and left the farm to his partners to manage.

Peter returned in August 1979 with day temperatures running at over 30°C and turf trucks going out the gate at a great rate. Peter's two partners decided that their business interest didn't need a turf farm so Peter bought them both out and became sole owner in 1982.

Peter introduced Wintergreen couch in 1984 before plant breeder's rights came into effect. This grass upset the established leaders and was poo pooped by other leading turf growers. Today over 80% of couch growers Australia wide grow a 'version' of Wintergreen couch.

In 1992, Peter introduced the far superior couch grass Windsor Green which he bred from Wintergreen by irradiation mutation. This was the first couch grass through Plant Breeders Rights in Australia.

The demand for Windsor Green by golf courses led to the design of the Qualturf row planter. This was designed and built at the farm workshop and Peter acknowledges the combined skills of Don Hunt, Steve Smythe, and others for the success of the project. The machine was designed for golf course work and planted and over planted on more than 30 golf course projects that Peter worked on.

This machine has been copied commercially and altered to a long wheelbase design which is not as flexible as the initial machines. This machine has been an industry changer.

During the 1980s a series of severe floods in the Hawkesbury occurred and the industry changed from a small number of growers/suppliers and became much larger with many vegetable growers changing over to become turf growers. At this time Peter set out to form the NSW Turfgrowers Association and this happened in 1983 with Peter as the inaugural President.

Peter had been a long-time member of Turf Producers International or the ASPA (American Sod Producers Association) and Peter brought out Dr Henry Indyk from Rutgers University in New Jersey to help us with this setup. Henry was the first executive director of the ASPA and was fundamental in its foundation. Today Peter is proudly the beneficiary of their highest honour – Honorary Member. Today TPI honours him with three annual scholarships in his name.

Along with the planter Peter's workshop crew also built a neat compact washing plant for turf. There are a few of these in use around the Hawkesbury.

Because Peter could not physically be a fulltime farmer, he had a farm manager right from the early years of Qualturf and Pat Hunt was the man.

Alongside Qualturf, Peter ran a fulltime consulting business as Turfgrass Scientific Services Pty Ltd. This took Peter to many countries worldwide but especially into SE Asia. I introduced commercial turf farming in northern China and spent over 20 years working with the City of Tianjin on its Greening China programme. This led to the Shanxi Government awarding Peter a Greening China award in 2005. It also led to developing an export trade in his grasses into both the middle east and SE Asia.

Peter's scientific interests in turf led him to joining the International Turfgrass Society (ITS) which was formed in 1969. Peter later joined in 1973. This experience led Peter to bring out to Australia the leading researchers from the USA for the AGCSA conferences over many years. These visitors read as a list of who's who in the World Turfgrass industry. Among them were the greats Dr Jim Beard and Dr Jim Watson, Dr Joe Vargas, Dr Arden Baltinsperger.

In 1993 Peter became President of ITS and ran the 1997 conference (ITRCI) in Sydney at Sydney University.

The interaction between Turfgrass Scientific Services and Qualturf was very beneficial for Qualturf and the feedback from Qualturf helped greatly to develop the value of Turfgrass Scientific Services.

In 2003 Peter had a heart attack and by Christmas 2004, had to have bi pass surgery. On doctors' advice I reluctantly gave up my farming career and sold Qualturf in June 2005.

Peter's 30 years of farming was over but his dedication to the NSW Turfgrowers Association of NSW was as strong as ever. Peter spent over 15 years as its secretary. The Association rewarded him with life membership.

Being freed from farming allowed Peter a great deal more leeway and during that time I fought the battle with Sydney Water/NSW Water for the water rights for growers on the Hawkesbury. This led to each grower getting an 11.3 ML/ha water rights allocation. These battles continue still.



In the final phase of Peter's career, he has received many honours including:

2005: Fellowship of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology

2009: The Graham Gregory Medal for excellence in Australian Horticulture

2013: The NSW Weeds Society Medal of Excellence

2017: Membership of the TPA Hall of Fame

2019: Member of the Order of Australia (AM) from the Commonwealth Government

Peter is especially proud to have brought the importance of the Turf Industry into the limelight with the 2019 award.

In the last few years Peter has concentrated on breeding new turfgrass lines which are currently being commercialised but disrupted by Covid 19.

Peter has also undertaken ground-breaking work on mites which was funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia.

Peter is undertaking several writing projects including a Manual for Turf Farming.

Peter turned 86 in October 2021 and has made an outstanding contribution to the Turfgrowers Association of NSW and the turf industry.

Peter McMaugh AM  
B.Sc.Agr.FAIAST