

BACK **Australia** It's good for all of us

# Norman conquest goes rural

Aussies urged to buy local

Ryan Keen

Harvey Norman chief executive Katie Page is urging Aussies to seek out and buy Australian-made goods, not just to support local jobs and communities – but because it's generally better quality.

Ms Page, whose homeware empire co-founded in 1982 in Auburn by partner Gerry Harvey now spans 320 outlets in eight countries, said Australians buying Aussie made was "the right thing to do".

"We are not asking people to buy something for the sake of it – it's still got to stand up to scrutiny and be value for money," she said. "I want Australians to understand you're going to pay a bit more for Australian made sometimes – but it comes through in the quality."

"I think Aussies should support Aussie made because it's a quality product, you know where it comes from, it's employing people and keeps communities happening," she said.

"It's the right thing to do because the product is fantastic."

Her comments come on the back of research by Westpac Economics for News Corp's Back Australia campaign showing if every household redirected \$100 of its existing weekly spend to locally made goods and services the economy would grow \$16m and 40,000 new jobs would be created.

Ms Page, having just returned from a visit to the chain's first British outlet in Birmingham, said 62 per cent of Harvey Norman stores across Australia were based in what were considered rural or regional areas.

Asked if it was a business decision or because of her upbringing as a country girl and commitment to the regions, she said the business had a realisation in the 1990s when people in the regional Queensland city of Toowoomba were driving to Brisbane's Harvey Norman.

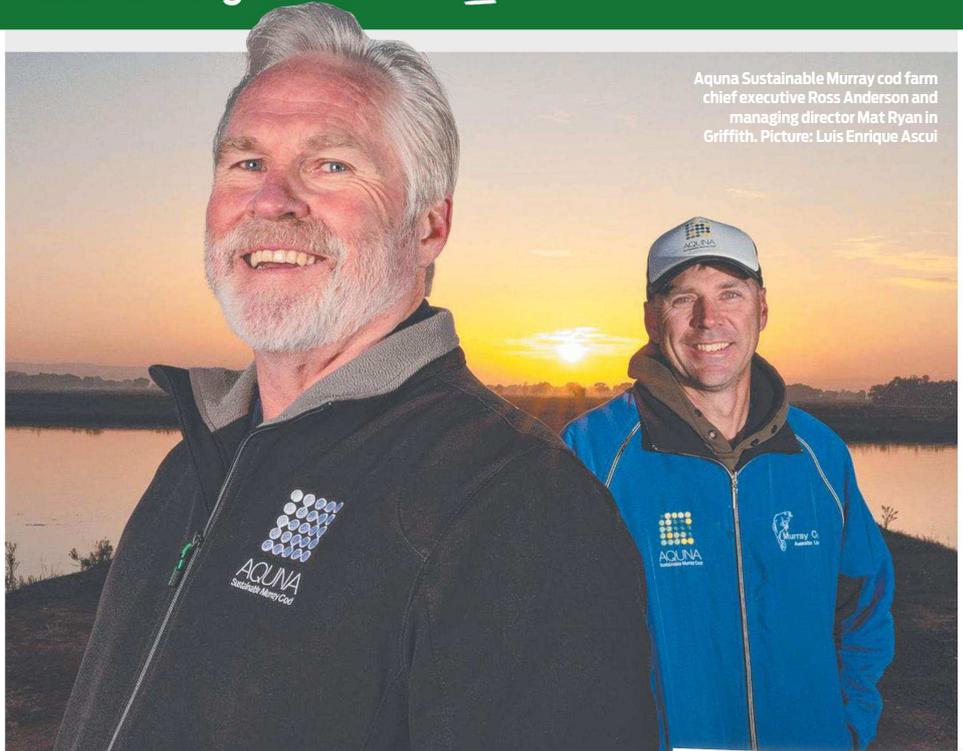
"In the '90s we saw a lot of big retailers come out of those regional areas – and how devastating it was.

"But it was very important to us. We went in Toowoomba – this is the '90s. Toowoomba people were having to drive to Brisbane to get the experience of a Harvey Norman store like this. And it was a light-bulb moment where we said, why are consumers having to do this?"

Ms Page said she and Mr Harvey made a decision in the 1990s that the business was there to support the regions, not just metropolitan centres.

"We are in places as small of Cobar (where) if your fridge breaks down, think about this – are you going to go online and have a chip from Sydney out to Cobar and it's a lemon. What do you do then? So here you have a Harvey Norman.

"We are servicing 96 per cent of Australians by having this (commitment to the regions) and we see it as what you should do as a retailer. Times have changed and it's one of the best decisions (we made)."



Aquna Sustainable Murray cod farm chief executive Ross Anderson and managing director Mat Ryan in Griffith. Picture: Luis Enrique Asculi

## Halal nod gives Murray cod Middle East entree

Anthony Piovesan

King Charles tried it during his last Australian visit.

And chefs Gordon Ramsey and Heston Blumenthal have it permanently in their kitchens.

Now, our native Murray cod is headed to the Middle East, after an Aussie company farming the prized fish secured Halal approval.

The Australian Halal Authority and Advisers granted Aquna Sustainable Murray cod the certification after a six-month audit, opening the door for its premium, pond-grown cod to be served in white-tablecloth restaurants and

luxury hotels across the United Arab Emirates.

Murray cod Australia chief executive Ross Anderson said shrinking supply of the premium species – grown only in the Murray-Darling Basin – put the NSW-based company "in the box seat".

"This is a fantastic opportunity and this will have a very significant impact on us," Mr Anderson said, noting his was the only native Australian fish to have achieved Halal status.

"Chefs like Gordon Ramsey and Heston Blumenthal are the ones who have been using our product and there are a very

large number of quality restaurants across the UAE where our fish will now get sent to which will be huge for us."

Mr Anderson said Murray cod Australia had to clear several "high bars" to gain Halal certification, including strict checks on the fish's feed, their welfare and the cleanliness of the processing plant.

Another selling point in Aquna's Halal bid, Mr Anderson said, was that their fish had been sampled by King Charles and Queen Camilla during their 2024 visit to Australia.

"They even took some



back with them," he said. "It highlights that this is a really high-quality luxury product."

Australian Halal Advisors Association national manager Khalil Esfandiari said Murray cod Australia's Halal certification was "not just a commercial milestone but a demonstration of trust and credibility".

"This is more than market expansion; it's about cultural respect and inclusivity," he said.

Aquna will make its official Middle East debut at the Gulf Show in Dubai in January next year.

# 'Apprentice system in ruins', but foreign labour not the answer

Shoba Rao

More Australians believe skilled immigrants are not the answer to the nation's tradie shortage.

Instead, we need to foster our own homegrown talent.

A Back Australia reader poll found 64 per cent of voters think we need to incentivise Australians to become tradies,

compared to 28 per cent who opted for bringing in more overseas workers.

Eight per cent were unsure and would prefer to consider other options.

The divide comes after Master Builders of Australia said our "people problem" was the biggest challenge with a critical shortage of more than 200,000 tradies could delay

the nation's housing crisis and impact Brisbane's Olympic preparations.

A further 59 per cent of readers said the government should bring back fee-free TAFE for some courses and 35 per cent said they'd support looking at other ways to subsidise those who took up a trade.

Many readers pointed out

the difficulty with young people seeing the benefit of a trade. One said the "apprentice system is in ruins".

Another wrote: "High Schools that provide trade based apprentice training in the final years should receive added support from the federal government to ensure they have the teachers, equipment and industry

contacts to make the transition to the workforce from school a smooth process."

Their reaction comes after Westpac CEO Anthony Mueller said skilled immigrants should be prioritised to address our housing shortage.

"Get the right immigrants in, get the right resources allocated, create enormous

amounts of jobs and create this self-fulfilling outcome over the next five or 10 years," he said. On the issue of Australia's limited fuel reserves and threats to local food supply, 85 per cent said they were very concerned compared to 11 per cent who said they were somewhat worried and four per cent were not concerned at all.

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