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Western Australia centre stage in 2012 United Nations Year of Co-ops

The importance and popularity in Western Australia of businesses who put members' interests above the pursuit of profit has been confirmed today at the WA launch of the 2012 United Nations International Year of Co-operatives.

An analysis released at the launch by Co-operatives WA shows co-operative style businesses – co-operatives, credit unions and mutuals – have more than 1.7 million members in Western Australia.

With WA's adult population 1.8 million in 2010, the figures indicates the vast majority of West Australians choose to be members of organisations which put members first, rather than the interests of investors.

Those organisations include leaders in a diverse range of industries including health insurance (HBF WA), motoring and insurance (RACWA), finance (Police & Nurses), the grain industry (CBH Group), automotive repair and service (Capricorn Society), rock lobster processing and exporting (Geraldton Fisherman's Co-op) and lamb processing and exporting (Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative).

In addition, retail co-operatives in regional towns such as York, Katanning, Kojonup and Mt Barker are ensuring that rural communities enjoy access to competitively priced food, merchandise and services.

Co-operatives WA president Chris Enright said the analysis by Co-operatives WA confirmed that Western Australia was at the forefront of successful co-operative business modelling.

"The combined turnover of the co-operative sector in Western Australia in 2011 is over \$6 billion and four of Australia's five biggest businesses in the sector reside in WA including the biggest, CBH Group," Mr Enright said.

"The 2012 United Nations Year of Co-operatives provides us with a great opportunity to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance and success of this business model in Western Australia.

"It is timely to consider why we have such a strong co-operative approach, it may have something to do with the preference Western Australians have for doing business locally and with people they trust to act in their interests. The remoteness of our State has also encouraged a "let's get on with it" approach and the realisation that we can achieve so much more working together."



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Mr Enright said the WA launch by Commerce Minister Simon O'Brien coincided with a national launch of 2012 IYC at Parliament House in Canberra. It is one of a number of similar events held around the world since the official United Nations launch in New York on 31 October.

"It is very timely to be celebrating the enormous contribution made to economic and community development and sustainability by co-operative style enterprises," Mr Enright said.

"While being highly commercial and competitive businesses, they offer a values-based alternative to traditional corporate models at a time when the latter has never been under more scrutiny.

"In the wake of the global financial crisis and continuing global economic uncertainty, consumers, employees and communities are questioning organisations that are focused on share prices and short-term financial returns to investors at the expense of long-term planning which puts the needs and interests of customers first."

Mr Enright said a series of events marking the contribution of co-operative businesses in Western Australia would be held throughout 2012.

They include an international academic conference to be held in Perth in November as part of a major research project underway at the University of Western Australia's Business School investigating the sustainability and competitiveness of co-operative enterprises.

Issued by Co-operatives WA
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