


Drought diversification idea at Tambo turns 30

By Newsroom

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 Tambo Teddies have been offering unconditional love, reassurance, security, and companionship for 30 years. Pictures supplied by Tambo Teddies.

A brainstorming session in the middle of a drought, looking for ways to diversify an outback town's economy, resulted in an idea that is celebrating its 30th birthday this year.

Helen Sargood, Charm Ryrie, and Mary Sutherland spawned the idea of creating teddy bears from sheepskin to help the ailing wool industry as well as attract tourists to Tambo, during a government workshop in 1992.

After nearly a year of extensive planning, designing, and trial and error, the first bears were ready for market in early 1993.

Tambo Teddies was the original outback 'start-up', well before the days of the internet and googling were commonplace, and the three local entrepreneurs gave Yellow Pages and the phone a workout sourcing supplies and raw materials.

Promotion was similarly challenging. Helen's main role in the business was the marketing of the bears and she travelled many miles taking them to shows and exhibitions, remarking she wore out at least one car promoting the bears around the countryside.

Working to establish a business from what was considered a quirky idea, their efforts paid off and Tambo Teddies has literally put the central west Queensland town on the map.

Teddies take pride of place in homes all over the world including [royal palaces in England](#) and Denmark, and by 2023, over 68,000 bears had been crafted, all created from Australian and New Zealand sheepskin.

Tammy Johnson and Alison Shaw have been [at the helm since 2014](#) and have implemented new products, ideas and methods including expansion online and into Toowoomba with a [regional sewing hub](#), all while growing from a cottage industry into a substantial small business employing 16 workers while keeping true to their Australian-made origins.



Speaking for the pair, Tammy said they believed they had a great core product that customers adore.

"We continue to build upon this and are working to take our bears further across Australia and overseas, and at the same time helping to promote Tambo and outback Queensland," she said.

To commemorate the significant milestone, a limited edition bear, the Banjo bear, will be released in February.

Some 200 special edition Banjos, a small, jointed bear created with the softest camel-coloured skins with the logo embroidered on his paw, will be made before Banjo joins the crew as an 'on-the-shelf' teddy bear.

Other new releases are planned for the beginning of the year including a new bear family, [the Stewart Bear](#), created in the likeness of a very old heirloom bear called 'John', and owned by the Stewart family from New Zealand.

A line of branded bears, small, medium, and large, will be available on the website very soon together with the largest Tambo Ted, a shaggy Goliath, crafted from long, fluffy sheepskins and the size of a small child.

Besides being cuddly and cute, teddy bears offer unconditional love, reassurance, security, and companionship - these sentiments are shared by Tambo Teddies customers who firmly cite Tambo Teddy bears as favoured friends and companions.

"You've brought so much pleasure to so many people," they comment.
"The lives you have touched throughout this time would be thousands".