

# Herald Sun Business

## MARKETS

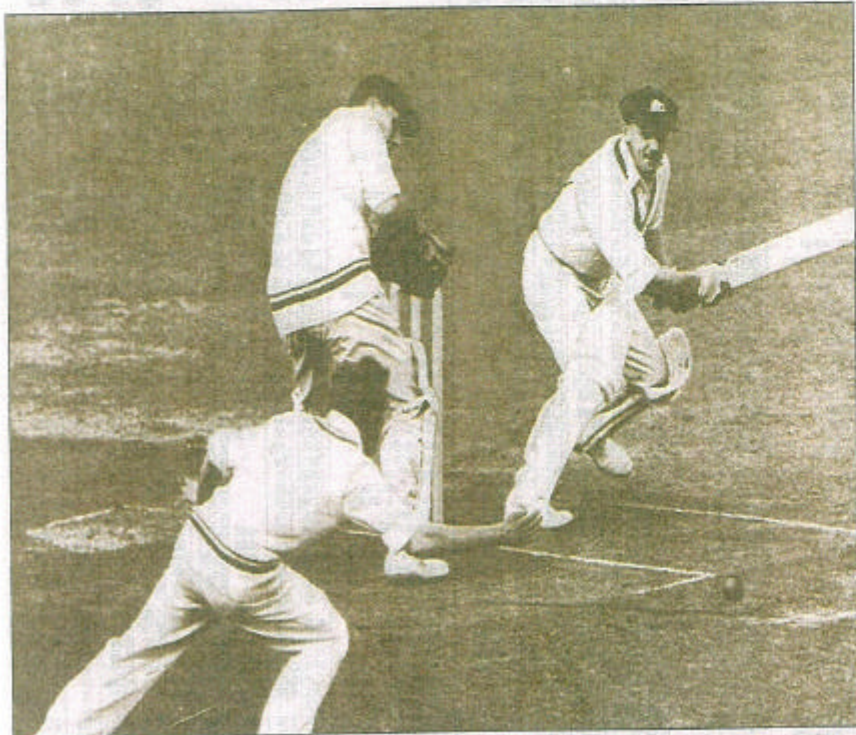
All Ordinaries ▲ Up 31.3 to 2967.0 pts

Dollar ▲ Up 0.15 to US65.63¢

10-year bonds ▼ Down 0.06 to 4.87%

Edited by JOHN BEVERIDGE

## The thwack of willow on tax bills



**Glory days:** but by the late 1950s the local bat industry was all but gone.

TAX Commissioner Michael Carmody has shown himself to be a strong supporter of Australian cricket.

One of the few product rulings granted by the Australian Tax Office this year has been handed to the Australian Cricket Willow project, which wants to extend its willow plantations near Swan Hill.

Former MCC secretary and SA state player Dr John Lill was able to convince the tax office this year of the merits of his group's attempt to revive the once-famed Australian cricket bat industry, which was subject to a multinational takeover and died out in the 1950s.

With Australia dominating the world cricket scene, Dr Lill argues that it is only natural that Australia should be growing the world's best timber to make the world's best bats.

"We have the best team in the world and Kookaburra cricket balls are world's best. Why not bats as well?" he

by Geoff Easdown

told the *Herald Sun* this week.

Dr Lill and directors Andrew Buckle, Craig Cook and Kent Lovell are seeking to raise \$7.5 million to expand the company's existing plantations at Wood Wood on the Victorian side of the Murray and on another site nearby, on the NSW bank.

The plan is to grow the specially grained and superior Salix Alba v Caerula variety used in top quality English bats.

Potential investors are told that top Australian bat making ended in 1956 with the takeover by Slazenger of Britain of the Crockett cricket bat company.

Crockett bats gained worldwide recognition when used by leading Test cricketers, Dr Lill said.

Former Australian captain Lindsay Hassett insisted on playing with a Crockett bat.

The Crockett willow was

first grown at Daylesford from a single seedling sent to Australia at the turn of the 20th Century.

Out of that were grown 5000 trees, most of which were felled by Slazenger as non-core assets in the late 1950s.

But Dr Lill said some were saved, and they provide the foundation for the Swan Hill venture.

The ACBW project has high-level and independent backing by two other leading figures in Australian cricket.

Former Australian Cricket Board chief executive Graham Halbish and one-time international and state player Dean Jones point out that interest in cricket is growing worldwide, creating increased demand for top-quality bats.

"Expressions of doubt about the long-term supply of English willow are made regularly," they said.

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They added: "Millions of bats are made each year in India from Kashmiri and poplar willow. They are all at the bottom end of the market."

Kashmiri willow is grown in the wild and randomly harvested. The ACBW timber would not be competing in that area.

The company has no plans at present to make completed bats, but will supply rough bat-shaped clefts for finishing elsewhere.

The willow trees to be planted in the latest stage three offering are expected to be ready for harvest 10 to 12 years after planting.

Investors are being offered a share in the 3000-tree project, buying units of 75 sq m each.

Each investment will be for a minimum of two units, costing \$5445 with management fees.

Part of the investment will be tax deductible, courtesy of the product ruling from the tax office.