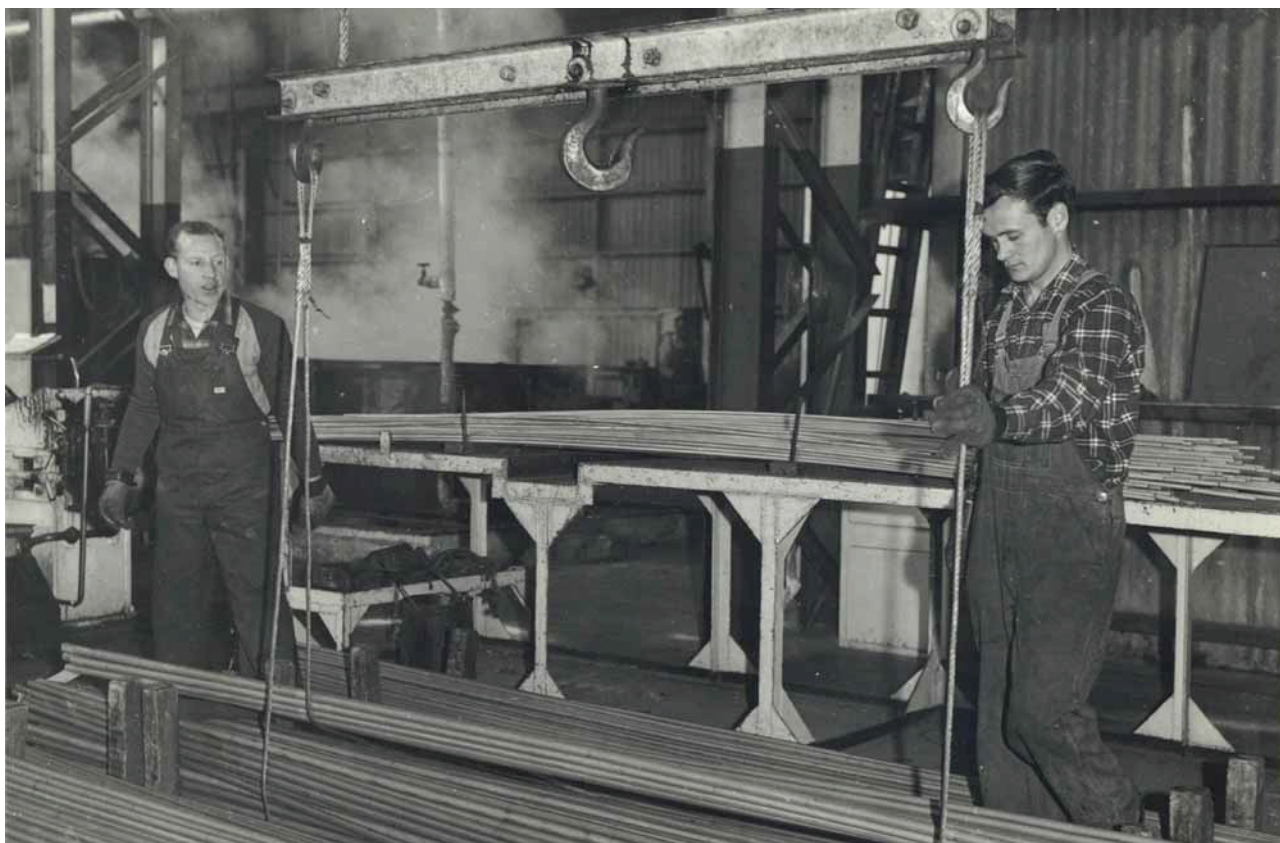




# 100 YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN COPPER QUALITY



NOT MANY COMPANIES HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR A CENTURY, BUT MM KEMBLA SAYS IT'S JUST GETTING STARTED. JOHN FENNELL TAKES A LOOK AT A UNIQUE COMPANY.



**Y**ou may have noticed MM Kembla recently developed a "Quality Reliability Service" company stamp to celebrate its 100 year anniversary based on its founding principles of quality product, reliability and unrivalled customer service. It's a logo that is well and truly earned after 100 years working with the plumbing industry here and overseas.

**“ NO OTHER AUSTRALIAN COMPANY'S HISTORY QUITE SUMS UP HOW IMPORTANT COPPER HAS BEEN TO THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT ”**

In fact no other Australian company's history quite sums up how important copper has been to the country's development or the changing shape of plumbing and construction as our cities keep growing.

## 100 YEARS YOUNG

Copper has always been a hard working, high demand metal, but back in 1916 when on March 16 the original 'Metal Manufactures Limited' company was set up at Port Kembla near Wollongong in NSW it was probably the world's most important.

War, industrialisation, electrification, new forms of transport like trains and cars, and the start of urbanisation all made copper a crucial asset, but while Australia already had a growing copper mining sector, it lacked a local manufacturing base to produce finished products like tubes and pipes.

Metal Manufactures Limited-now known in the tube and fittings market simply as its division MM Kembla-was a joint effort of government and the private sector to not only solve that problem, but start to build the skills and technical expertise Australia was going to need if it was to become a world economy.

The rest, as they say, is history. The company boomed right from the start and kept expanding in the 20s and 30s to produce copper and brass locomotive tubes, copper superheater flue tubes, copper and brass tubes for steam heating or hot and cold water plumbing, as well as oil and gas reticulation.

The company has also closely mirrored the changes going on in Australia over the whole of the Twentieth Century. From the 2nd World War where it faced the risk of Japanese bombing and had one of its mills run entirely by women at the time due to the wars impact on man power, to a rapidly diversifying workforce as migration re-shaped the country.

#### **TAPPING KNOWLEDGE & QUALITY**

As Australia's population grew post war, and industry and infrastructure became far more sophisticated, MM Kembla

increasingly focused on expert knowledge by recruiting metallurgists and other technical staff, and boosting research and development with its own laboratory and analytical facilities on site for investigation, testing and analysis of copper tube.

Through its experience and close relations with a number of overseas companies over time in the production of copper products, MM Kembla has gathered together a substantial bank of technical knowledge at its Port Kembla plant. Today, MM Kembla continues to have a dedicated department to quality and process improvement and its technical support services available to all customers and installers alike.

In the 1970s it also started its own onsite Apprentice Training Centre where all new apprentices would spend their first year under the supervision of an apprentice master and foreman. After learning the basics they were positioned in various departments on a six-month rotation to gain wide experience across all aspects of the Port Kembla works.

A key to the company's success has also been its ability to remain relevant to the plumbing and building sectors in the face of massive changes like rapidly rising copper prices, ➤



MM KEMBLA  
QUALITY  
RELIABILITY  
SERVICE  
100 YEARS





1



2



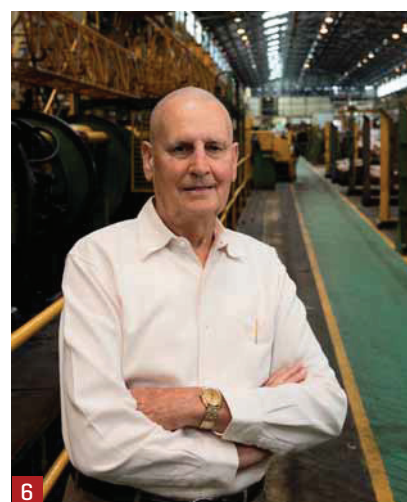
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**1:** 40 years of experience, MM Kembla's Jarvis Fletcher. **2:** A Metal Manufactures delivery truck in the 1960s. **3:** Taking shape, – MM Kembla Port Kembla factory in 1921. **4:** As it stands today – MM Kembla Port Kembla. **5:** The production of Kembla copper tube. **6:** Brian King, 42 years of service. The King family had a combined 248 years of service with MM Kembla.

far cheaper imports from Asia, and the spread of lower cost plastics like PEX or cross-linked polyethylene tubing.

Recognizing the need for plumbers to have access to a complete "behind the wall" system, it has been steadily growing a whole suite of copper plumbing products. Key to the push for simpler, smarter and faster installation has been Kembla's launch of the flame-free copper PressFit system KemPress that's found ready acceptance from plumbers. The uniform common size for all copper tube and fittings suppliers is another major advantage.

Kembla has also never lost sight of the need for quality and performance. For a start copper tubes and fittings are suitable for all potable water applications unlike plastics or other systems which may be compromised by shorter working lives especially when exposed to hot water temperatures greater than 70°C, fire, direct sunlight or ultraviolet light.

#### **STAYING POWER**

It's a strategy that's paying off. Over the past year the Australian building market has seen a growth in the use of copper plumbing in the booming multi-residential building,

infrastructure and development sectors due to performance issues with alternate products.

MM Kembla's Tube & Fittings division continues to ensure the future of copper tube in Australia. Rationalisation and further investment in its copper tube manufacturing has lead to record production efficiency levels in its Port Kembla plant in 2015.

You've obviously got to be doing something right to not only last for a century, but to now be Australia's sole producer and supplier of copper tube to the Australian, New Zealand, Asian and Middle East markets. And I know the company's commitment to product innovation, stringent quality controls, and unrivalled customer support and technical expertise will keep it there for another 100 years.

It's always nice to know you have a tried and trusted company with such history available to service your needs locally; it's like having the assurance of an old friend. Take a look at their website [www.kembla.com.au](http://www.kembla.com.au). ■

**John Fennell**

CEO, International Copper Association Australia.

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