Esteemed leader in SA commerce

Alan Gordon McGregor, AO
Businessman
Born: August 29, 1936; Adelaide
Died: February 19, 2005; Adelaide

Alan McGregor was one of South Australia’s most respected businessmen of the past three decades. His interests were wide and varied, with accomplishments achieved in business, sport and the arts.

He was a chairman of numerous public and private companies, while also owning significant farming interests.

Mr McGregor also found time to hold a number of public offices, including Adelaide Festival of Arts chairman, Wilderness School Foundation chairman and Adelaide Polo Club captain and president.

Close friend Ian McLachlan said Mr McGregor’s outstanding contribution to the business world saw him become chairman of almost every public company board of which he was a member.

“Obviously, he was well respected and his ability to try and do what was right in a governance sense was nationally accepted,” Mr McLachlan said.

“He was a decision maker, that was the great thing about Alan McGregor and many of those decisions turned out to produce very successful results for a number of companies such as Fauldings and Burns Philip when that company was in dire trouble. One after the other he was appointed chairman of these companies because people respected his judgment and his ability to quickly articulate the board’s view. He was respected enough at a quite young age to be chairman of the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Mutual Community.”

Mr McGregor received his schooling at St Peter’s College and Geelong Grammar School before studying Economics and Law at the University of Adelaide and Cambridge University in England. He spent his early working life in the Crown Solicitor’s office, working mostly in the Central Criminal Court as a prosecutor.

In 1965, he joined Thomson Muirhead Ross & McCarthy as a partner. When the firm divided in 1973, he formed von Doussa McGregor & Co with John von Doussa. He became a consultant to the firm in 1978 and subsequently retired from law in 1983.

Mr McGregor was one of the last non-executive directors at Elders IXL where he had to deal with that company’s difficult financial problems in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was also chairman of numerous companies including FH Faulding & Co Ltd, James Hardie Industries, Burns Philip and Minelab Electronics. He was also chairman of Intercast & Forge Pty Ltd, the Australian Wool Testing Authority and a number of family companies.

Mr McGregor was a director of cattle company S Kidman and Co Ltd from 1992. Kidman chairman John Ayers said he had known Mr McGregor personally for many years and would greatly miss his friendship and knowledge. “He was a great asset as an independent director because of his knowledge of the agricultural industry and in particular the pastoral area in which we were involved,” Mr Ayers said. “His vision and support in moving the company forward has been invaluable to both management and shareholders.”

Mr McGregor’s own farming interests included the Willalooa property in the South-East which ran the renowned Willalooa Murray Grey cattle stud and a commercial herd. His pastoral interests over the years included cattle stations in the Alice Springs region and a substantial property on the Nullarbor Plain. His longstanding manager and friend at Willalooa, Malcolm MacDonald was with him for 49 years, a sign of the loyalty that Alan McGregor commanded.

Mr McGregor also found time to be a director of numerous community-related organisations. These included the Centre for Independent Studies, which became one of the most eminent think-tanks in Australia under his chairmanship, the University of Adelaide’s finance committee and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

He is survived by his wife Skye, sons Stirling and Thyne and daughter Iona.

Nigel Austin