

BURLEIGH HEADS

Peter Nielsen is the Plant Manager for the Burleigh Heads plant, which became part of the Princes Group in 1997, and has recently completed a \$2m upgrade.

Currently processing 70 ton per week this plant supplies both healthcare and accommodation linen to the Gold Coast market, employing approximately 60 fulltime and 10 part time staff.

A new Senking continuous batch washer works parallel to the existing Milnor cbw, there is a new soiled and clean rail system – and conveyers – to transport the work around the plant, and the new Senking Vacutrans takes work from washer extractors on the ground floor to the mezzanine for drying.

They are blessed with a great deal of height at this plant, and have made intelligent use of it. The ground floor is clear of trolleys as all of the sorting and storage is upstairs. The two tunnel washers on the ground floor run parallel and can process either sheets or towels. The dryers are on the mezzanine level. Fresh towels tumble from the dryers onto conveyors systems which run almost the length of the plant to the towel folders at the front of the building, near despatch. The conveyors can also take sheets from the CBW'S to the ironing lines, via the Viking picker.

Apart from the movement of incoming soiled work via overhead baggage system, the plant also has a clean line, where sheets may be stored, before dropping to the Viking picker.



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MAROOCHYDORE

Maroochydore became part of the Princes Group late in 1998. This plant is managed by Gary Connell, and currently processes around 65 ton each week of a mix of healthcare and accommodation, servicing both the Sunshine coast and the Brisbane area. Fluctuations of hospitality levels on the Sunshine Coast means it is difficult for this plant to keep a constant tonnage figure from week to week and they are more actively seeking healthcare work.

Princes - Maroochydore had a major upgrade this year with the installation of a new bag rail system which feeds the sheets into a Jensen Viking picker, and then via conveyors to the feeder operators at the Jensen Quickfeed and Jenroll EX ironer line, completed by a Caroline folder, which cuts out a huge amount of labour.

The benefits of 'picker' technology are well documented, with operators protected from the old fashioned ways of wrestling with skeins of heavy wet sheets in order to separate them. Now the Viking does it all for them, delivering single sheets to the feeders, for vastly improved efficiency and safety.

The Ecolab Acquamiser and Optimiser installations are keeping down water usage levels, so important with rising costs of water, while reclaiming heat to reduce energy costs which just makes good sense.



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PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The Viking picker works hard
2. The two station Jensen Quickfeed
3. The Caroline Folder
4. A view of the plant through the ironing line and finished work

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AQUAMISER AND ENERGY OPTIMISER INSTALLATION INTO PRINCES LAUNDRY GROUP – BRAESIDE PLANT

Two of the major cost issues within the Braeside plant were water and energy. Another factor creating a problem for Princes Laundry Group and the local water authorities was the shortage of water and the need for all major water users to reduce consumption.

Jeff Peterson, Managing Director of the Princes Laundry Group had seen a presentation of Ecolab's water and energy recovery system – Aquamiser and Energy Optimiser, and asked for expected savings at the Braeside plant. The savings were good enough for him to ask Ecolab to install their first system onto two continuous batch washers in Australia, the system would include an Energy Optimiser and an Aquamiser.

The Energy Optimiser is a non-fouling self cleaning heat exchanger that does not need pre-filtration and can reduce energy on a continuous batch wash by up to 50% and in excess of 15% throughout the plant. The Aquamiser is a fully automated water filtration system capable of filtering up to and over 12MI/hour. It can help reduce water consumption by up to 40% throughout the plant depending on application.

Installation of the system took ten days and did not require any down time on either of the continuous batch washers. Commissioning of the system took three days but Ecolab technicians monitored the system for a further three days. The water consumption



At left, Mr Jeff Peterson, Managing Director Princes Laundry Group with Garry Lowe, Ecolab Textile Care Sales Manager Victoria

and quality were continuously checked to ensure that the system was working.

The system has been running now for over 16 months and water and energy use within the plant has reduced by over 40%. The next stage is to use some of the spare filtered water produced by the Aquamiser system onto the washer extractors in the plant. A reduction of approximately 50% on water use in the washer extractors is expected.

The Princes Laundry Group's Braeside plant has been recognised by the water authorities as a leading business in fight to reduce water consumption in the area. They have been highlighted in several newspapers for their work in water reduction.

Jeff Peterson is so pleased with Ecolab's Aquamiser and Energy Optimiser system that he has had two more systems installed in the Queensland plants – and has ordered another system for the plant in Preston, Victoria.

Stan Kam, National Textile Care Manager at Ecolab told the 'NATIONAL': "The system is giving major water and energy

reductions throughout the plant and because of its design, needs minimal servicing. We now have over 25 systems installed around Australia and with over 400 units installed throughout Europe, we have a system we know can help our customers reduce water and energy use – that means saving money. I would like to thank Jeff Peterson and his team at the site for their effort and also to his team of technicians who worked on installing and commissioning the system at Braeside. I would also like to wish 'Princes' a happy 100th birthday for this year and looks forward to enjoying some of the festivities that will be happening later this year.

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JEFF PETERSON: A PERSPECTIVE ON LAUNDRY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

The new history of Princes Linen Services commenced in 1995 when Brambles, who had purchased the three Melbourne plants in 1987, put them all up for sale. A consortium went a great way down the track towards buying it, but couldn't find the final money required. As they had already done the due diligence etc. it wasn't a hard decision for Safecorp to put up the <\$7m to buy the healthcare and commercial work, while AlSCO bought the industrial work.

Jeff Peterson has been involved in the company for ten years come November, and said of all the industries they have been involved in, the laundry is the most competitive in terms of pricing. Indeed, Ivan Prince had said he was getting better prices for his linen in 1987 before he sold it to Brambles than in fact they were getting in 1995.

Certain things like not being able to charge a decent price for money that is tied up in linen which sits on shelves is a little hard to adjust to when your previous business history includes say, pallets, which are subject to a flat week-in-week-out charge, regardless of whether they are in use.

Other challenges such as water costs, which on the Gold Coast have risen by 100% in 24 months. It is very hard to factor that type of increase into work that is subject to contract. The company has invested \$750K in water recycling equipment. The Aquamiser and Energy Optimiser are ensuring a quicker payback than might otherwise be expected.

Jeff noted the mix of work has changed over 10 years. Originally



Jeff Peterson, CEO

it was about 55% health and 45% hospitality, whereas today it is around 65% health, and 35% hospitality in Victoria. In Queensland, the Sunshine Coast/Brisbane/Gold Coast it is the reverse, with healthcare at 35% and accommodation industry at 65%. The Queensland accounts also tend to be smaller, and can hang onto linen too, in the apartments.

Jeff said Princes Linen Services are the largest player in Melbourne, the Victorian market is estimated at 1700 to 1800 ton per week of which Princes has a marketshare of around 15%, in the Australian market Princes is third behind Spotless and AlSCO who dominate the marketplace. They have been fortunate to pick up new hospitals in Victoria that have opened in the past two years, one as recently as May.

On the question of Disposables, Jeff believes storage and disposal will continue to inhibit growth. They may always be a threat to laundries, but any smart CEO will see that the requirement to buy in bulk would mean such a great deal of storage and distribution facilities that any imagined savings would quickly be eaten up. And of course, disposal continues to be a huge problem for hospitals.

Jeff added with quiet satisfaction that all of their plants currently operate at only 50 - 55%

capacity, "We have spent money to ensure we are poised to pick up work as it becomes available," he told the "NATIONAL".

He didn't see any real future in drycleaning for the company, as it is not a core business and is provided mainly as a service to existing laundry customers who require it, such as hotels.

I asked about expansion plans for other states, and Jeff said that they have looked at laundries in every state. The problem he has found repeatedly is that the privately owned laundries are over priced by sentimental owners who don't appreciate that the capital investment required to bring their laundry up to speed makes it unlikely that they will be bought by any of the larger players. Perhaps by another like sized laundry, but where they don't have tunnel washers, or modern ironer lines, and will require significant investment, they are less attractive.

We appreciate Jeff and his team letting us look inside Princes Linen Services, and wish them a very Happy Birthday for November 20th, when staff and customers will celebrate 100 years in business. ❖

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