

Balmoral Victoria Sire Evaluation Group

Trial News

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In this edition:

- Chairman's report Page 1 & 2
- MLP update Page 3
- Tuloona update Page 4
- Mepungah update Page 5
- Trial nutritional update Page 6
- Benefits of booster shots Page 7
- Committee & Sponsors Page 8



Above: tagging, marking and DNA sampling the 2015-drop lambs.

From the chairman - Tom Silcock

On behalf of the wide group involved in running our Elders Balmoral Victoria Trials, I wish everyone a joyful and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous new year.

New faces on board

It is with delight we welcome Liz Mecham as secretary of our committee. Liz hails from the NSW Riverina with a wool and rice growing background. After 10 years working for The Land Newspaper as a regional reporter based in Albury and as a freelance contributor covering all agricultural and social issues, she now works from home in Hamilton writing for national agricultural industry magazines (citrus and turf growing) and PR for local government and agricultural businesses. She tells me she can often be found at her computer with either a coffee or wine beside the keyboard, trying to avoid the housework.

Again we welcome new committee members to our group and we always offer a welcoming open door approach to others. I am eternally grateful for the support our committee provides throughout the year and the sharing of knowledge and camaraderie; it is a privilege to be part of.



Tough seasonal conditions

Having travelled the length of drought ravaged Queensland during the year and then to see and hear of the fire ravaged areas of Australia recently, I respectfully preface my next comments.

For the second year in a row we have experienced a range of seasonal conditions depending on your location, from a poor to a failed spring. We are fortunate to have the guidance given by Hamish Dickson to ensure our trial sheep are meeting industry expectations and guidelines. We also thank host properties that are meeting the nutritional needs in these trying seasons.

We are also very grateful to Nick Falkenburg and his team at Mepungah, along with Michael Craig, Sean Harvey and the team at Tuloona, for the way they have all managed trial stock and been prepared to meet the, sometimes demanding, needs of the trials. The Tuloona trial has imposed some real demands this year and Sean's willingness to tackle the challenges head on with us, has been fantastic.



Chairman's report continued ...

We all look forward to receiving some of Michael's knowledge he has gleaned from participating in a Nuffield Scholarship this year.

Having the offer of Tuloona – under the pressures of short notice, Michael away for a big chunk of the year, joining more sires than ever committed to before, and the trial being a pilot for all the other Merino Life Time productivity Trials (MLP) – has been particularly generous. We have had to develop systems on the run to cope with DNA sampling as ewes were being inseminated, cope and promptly deal with an arthritis infection challenge, and still work on further development of the auto Walk Over Weighing (WOW) crate.

Trial updates

We have just received DNA pedigree results to be able to allocate this year's lambs to sires. Once again it has highlighted the value in using DNA, as it has identified a few results that need further investigation. Until we get a more complete result, we need to be careful about offering incomplete data but offer some raw weaning weight information. There are certainly some interesting lambs on the ground, but include a few extreme for wrinkle that could be challenged in this non-mulesed flock.

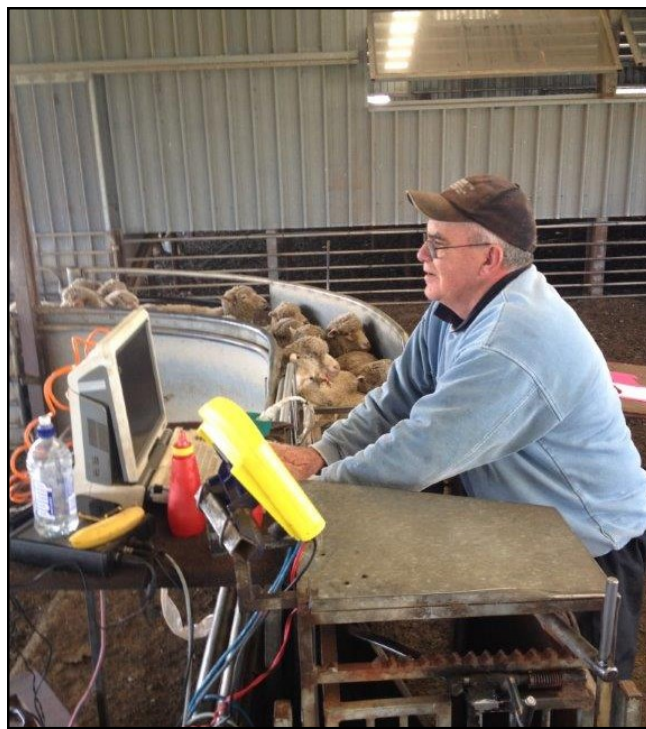
It will be fascinating to see these 24 groups drafted up for the first time at our next **Field Day on April 8, 2016 at Tuloona**. For the first time this year, these weaners will be presented with comprehensive fleece testing and classing results. The last display of **2014 drop will be seen at Mepungah at this Field Day**.

The Tuloona ewe portion will go onto be joined for five natural joinings, with comprehensive individual ewe assessment repeated every year and their progeny monitored through to weaning annually. It will certainly be interesting to track the performance of the different types over the trial.

Our next joining is about to be finalised and will have an intriguing array of genetics to monitor over the same life time period. You can see the anticipated entries on a later page.

I continue wearing a number of hats including: AMSEA chair, Merino Lifetime Productivity Trial (MLP) executive and committee, MLP site manager and chair of our site. It is rewarding to participate in the challenges of the various projects and exciting to witness the knowledge gained, as we strive to do things better, then watch and encourage industry adoption.

Chairman Tom Silcock.



Lambs at Wando Estate running through the Walk Over Weighing set up (above, left) and EMD and Fat scanning of 2014 trial lambs being undertaken by Steve Milne at Mepungah.

SAVE THE DATE: APRIL 8, 2016

Elders Balmoral Sire Evaluation Group annual field day 10am-6pm

AWI / AMSEA Merino Lifetime Productivity Project Update



The Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project is set to expand with a second year of joining to take place in three locations and ewe bases in Australia.

In 2016 we will see 24 sires joined at Elders Victoria, Harrow, 13 joined at MerinoLink, Temora (NSW) and 15 joined at Pingelly in Western Australia. It's hoped that a fourth site will be established for joining in 2017. The MLP project offers a unique and exciting opportunity to evaluate lifetime Merino profitability and the role that genetics plays in generating returns. The MLP sites will operate like a standard sire evaluation site – following the rigorous and independently assessed measured and visual assessment protocols. At the conclusion of the standard sire evaluation (generally once progeny are between 18 to 24 months of age) AWI will support the ongoing measurement and visual classing of all ewe progeny through 4-5 joinings and annual shearings. The number of ewes joined to each sire will be increased to 90 ewes to ensure that there will be sufficient ewe progeny numbers throughout life.

The project team, site committees and industry advisors are currently finalising sire listings for each site. The project received 90 nominations from sire owners to take part in the project, but with only 52 spots to fill in 2016 we will be encouraging those that missed out to nominate again for the 2017 joining.

The MLP project has recently appointed Anne Ramsay to the role of project manager. Anne is an agricultural service provider and has spent the last 18 years working in the area of sheep genetics and project management. Anne can be contacted on **M:** 0400 368 448 or **E:** stenhouseconsulting@bigpond.com

Elders Victoria Merino Lifetime Productivity Trial 2015 Drop Weaning and Breech Results

DNA Pedigree results have just been returned for the 2015 drop, so for the first time we are able to publish information on each sire's progeny. Some lambs require resampling in order to assign a sire. Therefore, progeny numbers and averages listed in the below table will change as more pedigrees become known.

Sire Name	No. Progeny	Weaning Weight	Breech Wrinkle	Breech Cover
Billandri Poll 130087	43	23.7	2.7	3.1
Bogo 111424	52	23.0	2.4	3.1
Bundaleer Poll 13V741	55	22.8	2.3	2.7
Bundilla 111265	38	24.7	2.6	3.1
Centre Plus Poll 207316	45	22.6	2.3	2.8
Darriwell 130941	52	24.4	2.6	3.3
Greenfields Poll 130599	50	23.0	2.4	3.2
Glenpaen 120042	53	23.3	3.0	3.3
Hazeldean 000043	58	24.2	2.8	3.2
Kurra Wirra SR5681	56	22.3	2.9	3.2
Leahcim Poll 090918	65	23.6	1.6	2.8
Leahcim Poll 123153	42	23.4	1.9	3.1
Mokanger 120092	37	23.6	2.9	3.5
Moojepin 100248	48	24.3	1.8	2.8
Merinotech WA Poll 100081	55	22.1	2.3	2.9
Mumblebone 130389	30	22.7	2.3	3.4
Nareeb Nareeb 130380	47	24.1	2.3	3.1
Nerstane 130467	53	23.2	3.0	3.7
One Oak No2 R56	63	22.7	3.4	3.8
Roseville Park 140019	34	23.1	2.0	3.0
The Mountain Dam ESA004	55	23.4	2.2	3.2
Tuckwood Poll 121021	48	25.2	2.3	3.0
Yalgoo 120043	55	23.1	2.7	3.2
Yiddinga 130374	50	22.8	2.1	3.1
Average	49	23.4	2.5	3.2

Trial host property reports

‘Tuloona’ 2015 trial property

The 2015 Tuloona Sire Evaluation progeny were weaned on the 9th November at 11 weeks of age.

The average weaning weight was 23.4kg on the singles and 23.2 kg on the twins. Considering the seasonal conditions both ewes and lambs had progressed well, despite testing barley grass conditions.

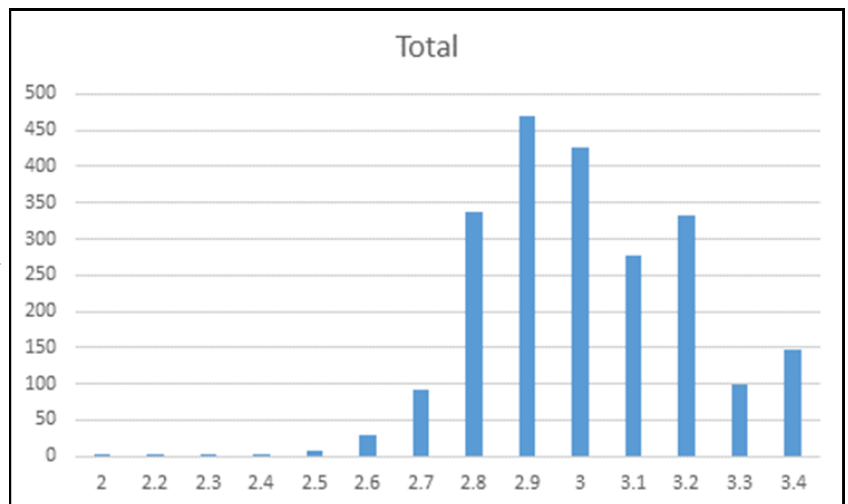
The foundation ewes were all weighed and condition scored on the 22nd November with an average condition score of 3, as shown in the graph (*below right*). The intention is to lift the foundation ewes condition score to 3.2 by the commencement of the AI program in early April through the use of lupins and barley.

The goal with the lambs is to continue on a rising plain of nutrition with a target condition score of over 3 and a minimum weight of 30kg at next years autumn break. This will be achieved through daily monitoring and real time data capturing with Walk Over Weighing technology.

The nutritional supplements of both the ewes and lambs will be carefully monitored by a comprehensive feed testing program by Livestock Logic and feed supplement requirements assisted by Hamish Dickson. (*pictured, below, with Tuloona Manager, Sean Harvey, inspecting pastures at Tuloona in October, 2015*).



Michael Craig, owner,



Trial host property reports continued...

Mepungah Pastoral Company 2014 trial property

The Winter this year at “Mepungah” was very cold but generally kinder to livestock in that it was not a wet Winter. Livestock came into the Spring in good condition and we got good pasture growth in the early part of the Spring.

The dry Winter meant little runoff for water catchment was achieved and all Western Victorian farmers had their fingers and toes crossed wishing for at least an average Spring.

This did not happen, and once again we have had little rain since September. We only measured 4mm for October which on average is a 60mm month.

One of my next door neighbours did not measure any rain for 50 days which included all of October!

Once again I have found myself weaning Spring drop merino lambs on to dry grass and imprint feeding has continued into supplementary feeding without a break.

Trial-wise there is not a great deal to report since the last newsletter.

In early June the trial mob was monitored for worm egg counts every 7-10 days until a sufficiently high enough worm burden was reached to conduct individual worm resistance tests.

In mid- September the sheep were scanned for fat cover and muscle depth, and weighed. Average fat cover at this time was 2.6mm which suggested that the sheep were in good condition, however the average body weight was 34kg which left us with a target of 11kg of bodyweight gain to achieve before joining in mid-March.

Trial nutritionist Hamish Dickson visited Mepungah on December 10, 2015 and inspected the trial sheep, (which are now looking very good!).

He has formulated a feed ration for them which will commence on the 1st January. He plans a follow up visit in early February.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the sire evaluation trial and those who have helped collect data and process the stock.

I would like to particularly thank Tom Silcock, Tom Waldron, Amy Tierney, Andrew Howells, Hamish Dickson and Pete Mecham who are consistently on hand for help and advice. I also ask that you take time to read the list of sponsors on the rear page of this newsletter and consider using their services as without them the cost of running the trial would be significantly higher.

Finally I wish everyone a happy, healthy, safe and prosperous Christmas and 2016.



Nick Falkenberg,
owner, 'Mepungah'

Below: Mepungah 2014-drop lambs in December 2015



Trial nutritional update

Hamish Dickson, AgriPartner Consulting, Clare SA

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Mepungah

The 2014 drop hoggets are in good condition and on track to meet our liveweight target of 45kg by April 1, 2016. A check weight will be collected in January to monitor this progress. Tight spring conditions have not provided much carryover feed for stock through summer so these hoggets will be supplemented with pasture silage to ensure they meet the minimum growth rate target of 90g/hd/day.



*Above: 2014 drop hoggets at Mepungah.
Below : 2015-drop lambs at weaning at Tuloona*

Tuloona

Ewes: The trial ewes have recently been condition scored and the results are positive as the ewes are an average BCS of 3.0. Lighter condition ewes have been separated and will be provided additional feed to ensure that condition score prior to A.I. is as consistent as possible across the entire group. Feed tests have been collected from paddocks where the ewes will be grazing and rations are currently being formulated for the 'light' and 'heavy' groups of ewes to target an average condition score of 3.2 by A.I. next year. The feed tests have reflected the typical decline in pasture quality as the season progresses showing pasture at 8.2MJ ME/kg DM, 9.8% CP, 65% NDF and 68.5% DM. With recent hot weather since the feed samples were collected the last of the green has disappeared and feed quality, in particular protein, will have declined again.

2015 drop weaners: The 2015 drop weaners at Tuloona are performing well. Their recent weaning weight on the 9th of November showed an average liveweight of 23.4kg, which is right on target of 45% of mature weight at 12 weeks of age. Supplementary feed will be provided to these weaners over summer to ensure that they continue to gain weight with our target set at achieving an average liveweight of 33kg by April 1st 2016. The Walk over weigh (WOW) trial can provide a hugely valuable resource to help ensure weight targets are being achieved.



2015/16 Season Update

With such reduced rainfall through our important growing months it is not surprising to see many paddocks with lower amounts of feed on offer and lower quality than we would typically expect in December. Given the conditions it is important to be proactive in managing both the feed availability and quality to minimise the chances of being caught with stock that have dropped in condition or short of feed at a time when supplementary feed is often at its most expensive to purchase.

Feed availability: A feed budget that can determine your stock requirements, feed availability and accurately highlight any shortfalls that will need to be addressed in the coming months is a critical step for being confident in your position before the real pinch hits. Unfortunately doing a feed budget is often easier said than done. It requires an understanding of stock requirements and DSE ratings, as well as pasture availability and decline, and then it requires calculations for expanding the numbers across the farm and all classes of stock. If you aren't 100% confident doing your own feed budgets there are a range of online tools that can help in the process, or alternatively contact someone that can assist you to do it, or do it for you.

Feed quality: It is no surprise that feed quality generally declines during the summer months, however the important aspect this season is to recognise that this will be occurring earlier than 'normal' and that providing some supplementary feed [where required] before condition is lost will be far more cost effective than letting stock slip and trying to catch up later. Feed tests are a great way of assessing the quality this year and remember to select what the stock are eating when you collect a sample.

Why Bother with Boosters?

Peter Mecham, Zoetis

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The basis of any vaccination program is to provide long lasting protection prior to exposure to a disease. Disease challenges can happen all through an animal's life. To provide long-term protection, most vaccines require two shots. The first vaccination (or priming dose) stimulates the immune system for a particular bacteria, virus or protein. With the second vaccination, antibodies are produced in a far greater scale, and this may give up to 12 months protection.

To maintain a protective level of antibodies in the animal, annual boosters are required. These annual booster shots are only effective if the animal has had its two primary doses of vaccine (for vaccines with a two shot protocol). If they have not had two doses 4-6 weeks apart (as lambs), this will need to be done first and then can be followed by annual boosters.

The benefits of these boosters are two-fold. Firstly, the dam is continually protected from the effects of the diseases you are vaccinating against, including clostridial diseases or Erysipelas arthritis. Secondly, when given 4-6 weeks pre-birth, antibodies are put into the colostrum to provide protection from these diseases to the new-born offspring.

Why vaccinate pre-lamb?

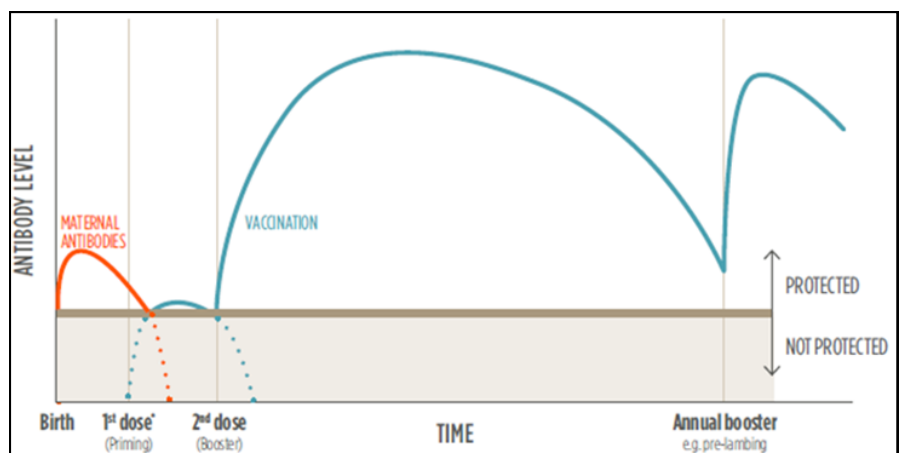
Lambs are born without an immune system. The only protection they have is a passive immunity provided by their dam through colostrum.

Colostrum (also known as "first milk") not only contains proteins, vitamins and minerals but also protective antibodies from the ewe and is the only source of disease protection for the newborn lamb. To maximise the amount of antibodies in the colostrum, ewes must have adequate antibody levels themselves. This is done by vaccinating the ewe 4-6 weeks pre-lamb with a vaccine that will provide protection from the diseases that will put the lamb at most risk – the 5 fatal clostridial diseases: pulpy kidney, black leg, black's disease, tetanus, malignant oedema, as well as production diseases, cheesy gland and erysipelas arthritis.

This passive protection, provided by the colostrum, will only last for about 6-8 weeks in which time an active protection can be provided by vaccination at marking. In the case of Erysipelas arthritis, the new-born lamb can contract the disease from the ewe.

The ewe can carry the Erysipelas bacteria on their tonsils and in their mucus membranes. When the ewe is cleaning the lamb, the umbilicus, or umbilical cord, provides an entry point into the body.

When the bacteria enters the body it will move through the body and lodge in joints causing swelling and inflammation. In these cases, the arthritis will present prior to lamb marking. A booster shot pre-lamb will provide the protection the new-born lamb needs to survive and thrive.



ELDERS BALMORAL SIRE EVALUATION GROUP

ANNUAL FIELD DAY

APRIL 8, 2016

10am-12pm Inspection of 2015 trial lambs at *Tuloona, Harrow*

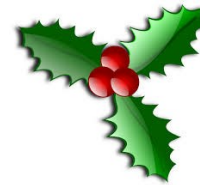
12pm-6pm Inspection of 2014 trial sheep, static displays
and speakers at *Mepungah, Wannon*

BBQ and refreshments to follow

For more information: Tom 0419 882 239 or Liz 0407 015 059



Australian National Merino Sire Evaluation Association Executive Committee (AMSEA)

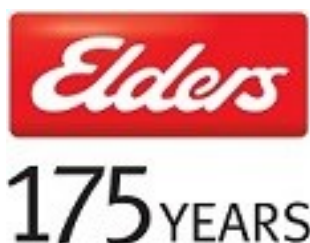


Tom Silcock (Chairman) – Elders Victoria
Jock McLaren (Deputy Chair) – New England (NSW)
Matthew Coddington – Macquarie (NSW)
Sally Martin – MerinoLink (NSW)
Phil Toland – North East Victoria
Flea McShane – Tasmania

Bill Sandilands – Yardstick (WA)
Brett Jones – Muresk (WA)
Geoff Lindon – AWI
Richard Apps – MLA
Ben Swain – Executive Officer

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