

Balmoral Sire Evaluation Group

2016 FIELD DAY EDITION

Trial News

www.balmoralbreeders.com.au

FIELD DAY: FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2016

see inside for details

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From the chairman - Tom Silcock

Never before in the history of our trial, have we had such an intense agenda over the next two months.

With bigger trials and additional requirements related to running the first and largest national Merino Ewe Lifetime Productivity Trial (MPL) our committee commitments are going to be fully extended.

In the week prior to our field day, we will artificially inseminate 2205 ewes to 25 new exciting sires. I again thank all committee members and our great sponsors that enable us to run these extensive trials and then host what will be one of Australia's best displays of merino genetics at our **Field Day on April 8, 2016**.

A full program of the day's activities is contained within this newsletter, but as an overview the day will include a functioning display of the latest and best sheep handling equipment and will provide a unique opportunity to inspect and evaluate it in action.

Speakers during the afternoon will address a wide range of topics including the development and opportunities of virtual fencing, ear tags which have the ability to track animals, provide pedigree and even perhaps give a birth date for progeny.

For the first time we have added an evening element to our day. The **"Future of the Fine Wool Merino"** will be a Merino industry forum held while those at the field day enjoy a cool drink and barbeque. The fine wool industry has been treated as the poor farming cousin by many in recent times. A strong line up of speakers will take a look at it from an international perspective, a wool buyer/ processor perspective and take a look at the economical performances and comparisons for farming operations. This forum that is being sponsored by AWI will help to bring some reality to the factors influencing choices for producers in our industry.

Due to additional analysis required, the first MLP ewe progeny on display at Tuloona this year, will already have post weaner classing and fleece measurement analysis already on display with the sheep at the field day. **Don't miss the 45 groups of progeny being displayed** throughout the day, showcasing the progeny of some of our best national sires selected for their extreme traits in commercial comparison with one another. The excitement and the potential power of the new MLP trials now underway at our site and across the nation, combined with industry innovation will be showcased for all to witness on the 8th of April. I hope to share our excitement with many of you on this day.

Looking forward to seeing you all there on April 8.



2016 Field Day program of events

10am-12pm

On property display of 2015 trial progeny at host property, Tuloona, Harrow.

Property location: 4580 Coleraine Harrow Road.

Display of 25 Sire Evaluation progeny groups of 2015 drop ewe progeny, with post weaner fleece tests, weaning weights and marking scores. These ewes will be evaluated for 5 joinings, in the first Merino Ewe Lifetime Productivity Trial.

Static display of the AWI/AMSEA Merino Ewe Lifetime Productivity Trial. MLP National Project Manager Anne Ramsay will be available at Tuloona to discuss the project.

12pm-7pm

Field day at 'Mepungah', Wannon

Property location: Mepungah Pastoral Company, 112 Falkenbergs Road, Wannon.

Turn right at the woolshed sign through double gates.

12pm: BBQ lunch available

12pm—1.30pm: Display inspections and demonstrations

1.30pm—3.30pm: Speaker program

3.30pm—5pm: display inspections and demonstrations

5pm: BBQ tea and refreshments

5.30pm: 'Future of the Fine Wool Merino' speaker panel

Display of 20 Sire Evaluation progeny groups of the 2014 drop with pre-shearing fleece measurements and classing results displayed.

Static and working displays from sheep industry companies. These include sheep handling equipment, animal health products, livestock health companies and ancillary service providers with a focus on new technologies and enhancing the working environment onfarm when handling livestock.

Please take the time to wander around the sites. Some of these sites will be undertaking demonstrations of equipment throughout the afternoon. Demonstrations will be undertaken prior to, and following, the speaker program being held on site (see opposite).

BELOW: 2015 drop lambs at Tuloona. Ewe lamb average weight 31.2kg (avg 160gm/day from last weighing on January 28, 2016). Ewe lambs condition score average: 2.98.



2016 Field Day program of events

Speaker program:

1.30pm:

Welcome. Tom Silcock, Chairman

1.30pm-1.45pm:

Update on Breech Liquid Nitrogen Process (alternative to mulesing) , John Steinfort

1.45pm-2pm:

National Merino Lifetime Productivity Project, Anne Ramsay, project manager

2pm-2.30pm:

How to track your sheep and why does it matter? Marcus Mojass, AWI

2.30pm-3pm:

Integrating tracking and traceability using cloud-based software, Tim Button and Steve Baker, AgLive.

'Future of the Fine Wool Merino'

Proudly supported by AWI

5.30pm-7pm



A panel discussion from industry experts discussing the influences on the current wool market, its outlook and how the fine wool Merino sheep and its wool fits into the marketplace. It will also include analysis of commercial farming operations and the commercial reality of including Merino wool production in a farming operation.

The session will conclude with a panel Q&A session between one another and the audience.

Panel speakers:

Chris Wilcox

Chairman, Market Intelligence Committee, International Wool Textile Organisation; Executive Director, National Council of Wool Selling Brokers of Australia.

Phillip Graham

NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Chris Kelly

Australian Merino Exports Pty Ltd.

Robert Herrmann

Mecardo - market analysis

MC: Marius Cuming

Communications Manager, AWI

RIGHT: Tru Test's Scott Davis gives committee members a working demonstration of the new equipment purchased this year at 'Tuloona'. Tru Test will be one of the many static displays and working demonstrations at the Field Day on April 8.



Trial property update: 2014 Trial, Mepungah Pastoral Company, Wannon

The disappointing spring at Mepungah has been followed by a long and dry, but fortunately, cool summer.

Mepungah received 16mm of rain in mid January which revived fodder crops and freshened up cut silage and hay paddocks. In the last week of February, we had 16mm which has been the largest recorded rainfall since the rain in January.

The upside of a poor spring and dry summer is no fly strike and no worms. Despite the long extended period without pasture growth, we have had record low weaner mortalities and all sheep are in remarkably good condition.

For the second year running I cannot recall a longer time frame of lambs not requiring drenching. We have managed to maintain low FEC's from the point of weaning until the present.

On the 9th and 10th of March we will weigh, mid side sample, and breach score for urine stain all the trial sheep, of which there are now 674.

The trial sheep are currently receiving 4.85kg/head/week of DM in the form of square bale silage.

The silage has tested 10.6% me, 14.2% protein with a digestibility of 66.0%

The pasture they are on consists of about 800kg/DM of poor quality dry feed and they are stocked at 10.5DSE/ha. The sheep are in CS 2.8 – 3.0.

At this point I'd like to acknowledge and thank Hamish Dickson of AgriPartner Consulting for his animal nutrition advice. Hamish has made himself freely available for recommendations and has made a couple of farm visits.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone else 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, Pete Meham, Duncan Pixley and Michael Craig 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 look forward to seeing and meeting you at Mepungah on Friday the 8th of April.



Nick Falkenberg,
owner, 'Mepungah'



ABOVE: 2014 Trial progeny Mepungah, March 2016, looking remarkably well considering dry seasonal conditions.

Want the latest trial information and can't wait until the next newsletter?

You can find plenty of information on our website including trial results for current and previous years, field day and trial activity images and back issues of our newsletter.

www.balmoralbreeders.com.au

Trial property update: 2015 Trial: Tuloona Pastoral Company, Harrow

Tuloona continues to experience dry seasonal conditions, but a good feeding regime has seen the sheep look very well heading into autumn. The property received a total of 32 millimetres of rain for January and February.

Ewes are currently being fed 1.8 kilograms/head of lupins and wheat each week and canola hay (with 20% protein and 10.5% me). Trial lambs are being fed a 8 kilograms a week of a mix of canola hay and silage (14.5% protein and 9.5% me) and 1.6kg of lupins and wheat/head/week.

We are currently undertaking investigation into some liver toxicity issues which has caused some deaths in the lambs. It would appear the tough seasonal conditions have contributed to this and post mortem examinations are looking at the possibility of lupinosis or blue green algae poisoning. These autopsies will hopefully give us some answers, sooner rather than later and actions have already been taken to eliminate all potential problems.

Weighing and condition scoring of the 2320, 2016 trial foundation ewes returned pleasing results on March 2 and 3.

After scanning, Tim Leeming commented: "The condition of this group of ewes was as good as you would possibly have coming into March, after yet another challenging Spring. Sean, Mick and staff at Tuloona should be congratulated on the way the stock have been presented and from my point of view they could not be better placed for a successful joining program."

Very few ewes were under CS 3 with all selected ewes for the program averaging 3.17 at an average weight of 51.6 kg.

Looking forward to welcoming visitors to Tuloona on April 8 for the annual field day which should be a great opportunity to discuss the future of our industry.



Michael Craig, owner,
"Tuloona"



ABOVE: 2320 foundation ewes at Tuloona were condition scored and weighed on March 4 and returned excellent results. The ewes had an average weight of 51.6kg and an average condition score of 3.17.



LEFT: Tim Leeming (left) and Sean Harvey weigh and condition score foundation ewes and 2015 trial lambs at 'Tuloona' Harrow.

Merino Lifetime Productivity Project Update

So what's this project about?

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA) have teamed up to deliver the Merino Lifetime Productivity Project (MLP).

The project offers a unique and exciting opportunity to understand lifetime Merino productivity, the trade-offs between lamb and wool production and the role that genetics plays in generating lifetime returns.

Four independent sites located across Australia will be involved in collecting and recording this data. The sites will operate like standard sire evaluation sites – following the rigorous and independently assessed measured and visual assessment protocols. In total 120 sires will be joined to 90 ewes each to generate the 3,600 F1 ewe progeny that will form the basis of the project. At the conclusion of the standard sire evaluation (generally once progeny are 18 to 24 months of age), AWI will support the ongoing measurement and visual classing of all F1 ewe progeny through 4-5 joinings capturing reproduction records and annual shearing data.

The sites involved in the project are located in diverse environments and vary in sheep type, lambing dates, seasonal challenges and shearing dates. The first site "Elders Balmoral" at Harrow, Vic, joined in 2015 with 24 sires entered and have an additional 24 sires entered in 2016. Two new sites have commenced in 2016 with 13 sires joined at MerinoLink, Temora (NSW) and 15 sires joined at Pingelly in Western Australia. It is hoped that a fourth site will be established for a joining in 2017.

The project has been designed to answer many questions frequently discussed in the Merino industry. What is the impact of selecting for growth, reproduction and carcass traits on Merino Lifetime productivity? Why do some animals consistently perform year in and year out whilst others fade with time? Are there any factors that might help us to better predict superior lifetime performance? And can animals selected at very young ages have superior lifetime productivity?

The broader aims of the project are to:

- Where necessary, provide the evidence and data that the current systems can be enhanced to more accurately predict lifetime productivity.
- Demonstrate to the industry in a commercial environment the cost benefit relationship of measuring multiple adult traits throughout the lifetime of an animal.
- To validate the current breeding value technology across sheep types and environments.
- Provide a substantial amount of reproduction records to the MERINOSELECT database, allowing the industry to more accurately assess the relationship between all the components that make up lifetime productivity.
- Provide a common focus for a wide range of ram breeders with differing breeding philosophies.

The project has attracted considerable interest to date with ram breeders eager to assess sire lifetime performance through their daughters. Over 90 nominations were received from ram breeders wishing to fill the 52 spots available in 2016.

We are looking for sires for the 2017 joining and are keen to attract interest across all breeding philosophies and from a range of Merino types.



ELDERS BALMORAL SIRE EVALUATION GROUP COME TALK TO US!

Our group will be supporting a number of upcoming industry and local events. Come along and visit our display site and have the chance to win a great prize thanks to Elders with an onsite competition.

**Balmoral P&A Society Show
Bendigo Sheep and Wool Show
Hamilton Sheepvention**

**March 19, 2016
July 15-17, 2016
August 1-2, 2016**

MLP sires entered 2015 and 2016

Sire name	Sire name	Sire name	Sire name
Elders Balmoral 2015	Elders Balmoral 2016	Pingelly 2016	MerinoLink 2016
Billandri Poll, 130087	Anderson Poll, 120096	Billandri Poll, 130641	Bella Lana, 130296
Bogo, 111424	Centre Plus Poll, 707115	Boolading Blues Poll, 120708	Boyanga, 145112
Bundaleer Poll, 13V741	Glen Holme, 141077 (Dohne)	Claypans Poll, 130597	Glen Donald, 120014
Bundilla, 111265	Grass, R4	East Mundulla (Jonty), 090137	Greendale, 120012
Centre Plus Poll, 207316	Greendale, 120012 *	Ejanding Poll, 145096	Leahcim Poll, 090918 *
Darriwell, 130941	Greenfields Poll, 140345	Haddon Rig, 2.715	One Oak No.2, R56 *
Glenpaen, 120042	Greenland, 2.366	Hazeldean, 11.43 *	Pastora Poll, 082893
Greenfields Poll, 130599	Hannaton Poll, 120048	Ingle Poll, 130387	Poll Boonoke, PB2020
Hazeldean, 11.43	Hazeldean, 11.3542	Leahcim Poll, 090918 *	Pooginook Poll, 140632
Kurra Wirra, SR5681	Koorngal, 130519	Merinotech WA Poll, 100081 *	Roseville Park, 140611
Leahcim Poll, 090918 L*	Kurra Wirra, SB5585	Moojepin, 140377	Trigger Vale Poll, 140477
Leahcim Poll, 123153	Leahcim Poll, 090918 *	One Oak No.2, R56 *	Wattle Dale, 140754
Merinotech WA Poll, 100081	Melrose, 12UGB060	Rhamily Poll (Benny), 110330	Wurrook, 130149
Mokanger, 120092	Mumblebone, 140026	West Plains Poll (Mercenary), 110004	<div>PLEASE NOTE LINK SIRES:</div> <div>L= Funded link sires, * = Between MLP site linkage sires</div> <div>Link sires act as a genetic connection between years and sites and allow the direct comparison of sires between linked sites.</div>
Moojepin, 100248 L	Nerstane, 100919	Wyambah Poll, 140141	
Mumblebone, 130389	One Oak No.2, R56 *		
Nareeb Nareeb, 130380	Stockman Poll (Stilts), 090853		
Nerstane, 130467	Terrick West Poll, 122220		
One Oak No.2, R56 L*	The Mountain Dam, ESA004 *		
Roseville Park, 140019	Trefusis, 110482		
The Mountain Dam, ESA004	Tuckwood Poll, 131026		
Tuckwood Poll, 121021	Wallaloo Park Poll, 120912		
Yalgoo, 120043	Woodyarrup, 120175		
Yiddinga, 130374	Yiddinga, 141989		

Would you like more information?

MLP Project Manager Anne Ramsay **M:** 0400 368 448

Sally Martin, MerinoLink Site Manager **M:** 0400 782 477

Tom Silcock, Elders Balmoral Site Manager **M:** 0419 882 239

Beth Paganoni, Pingelly Site Manager **M:** 0448 241 320

The Merino Lifetime Productivity Project is being undertaken in partnership between the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association Incorporated (AMSEA) and Australian Wool Innovation (AWI). AMSEA and AWI would like to acknowledge those entities who also contribute funding, namely Woolgrowers through sire evaluation entry fees, site committee in-kind contributions, and sponsors of AMSEA. A special acknowledgement is also made to the Australian Government who supports research, development and marketing of Australian wool.

SPONSOR ADVERTORIAL

Leader Products

Leader Products provide the largest range of electronic sheep tags available

Jumbo EID tags (LEFT)



The most popular tag is the Jumbo EID this tag has the highest retention and very strong read distance

This tag however will not be NLIS accredited until or if Australia adopts eid NLIS
As the tag is not deemed tamperproof it could be removed and reused when there is no reason to do that they may accredit it



Multitronic tags (LEFT & RIGHT)



This tag has the features of the long used Multytag but has an imbedded transponder this tag is Fully NLIS accredited and is provided through the vic DPI online and is the lowest cost EID tag available



Leadertronic Sheep tag (RIGHT)

Again this tag has very high read distance and retention it is a two piece tag
With a male button



Multi Race Reader (RIGHT)

This new tag has similar properties to the Multitronic sheep tag but has the transponder fully encapsulated in the pin this ensures that it maintains full read distance for the life of the tag

It is critical that sheep tags can be read by race readers at speed if they are to be used in a national system where sheep are read in high volume in saleyards

Tags with poor read distance will not read in that environment



Leader Sheep Bolus (BELOW)



Again High performance transponder and ideal to help prevent stock losses
These are not NLIS accredited but can be used for proof of ownership
With All the range of both leaders Visual and EID tag options Leader offer a retention Guarantee we will replace any lost or non performing tags with your next order
this applies to our NLIS cattle tags also

Leader have been supplying livestock identification products and a wide range of veterinary products for 65 years and are proud to be an Australian family business

AMSEA update

After 25 years in business, Merino Sire Evaluation Australia continues to grow in popularity with 2016 shaping up to be the biggest yet. With sites operating in 10 individual locations, currently evaluating over 250 sires, ASMEA affiliated sire evaluation sites are setting the benchmark in independent progeny assessment in livestock industries worldwide.

Along with the Elders Balmoral Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) site, the Merino-Link site at Temora, NSW and a new site established at Pingelly, WA have also commenced MLP trials. A fourth site is planned to commence in the MLP project in 2017.

A new Merino Sire Evaluation site has also commenced at Muresk, WA in 2016 and discussions are underway for potential other sites to commence in 2017, including one on the Monaro in NSW.

Outside new sites and trials, AMSEA continues to focus on its core business of delivering value to entrants and in 2016 will be focusing on undertaking a review of the Visual Sheep Scores, which will deliver more accurate and user friendly visual assessment information, as well as undertaking a complete rewrite of the protocols for how sire evaluation trials are run in order to ensure they are up-to-date and ready for new sites to use to get up and running quickly.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the field day on April 8.

Ben Swain, Executive Officer



ADVERTORIAL

B a r k

break apart raised kennel

fully portable quality raised dog run in 8 pieces

ph. nick 0407 559 680



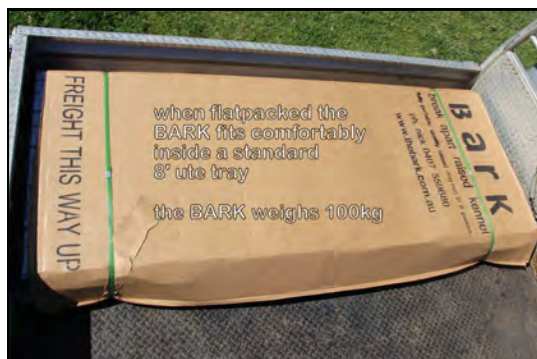
The BARK (break apart raised kennel) is a quality built portable raised dog run that flat packs into 8 pieces. It can be assembled by 2 people in less than 2 minutes without requiring any tools. 2 people can dismantle the BARK in less than 1 minute.

The BARK is a 2013 Sheepvention prize winning design that is now being professionally fabricated and built in Western Victoria.

All materials are sourced locally, and only quality components are used, including C3 galvanised fasteners, 316 grade stainless steel nuts & bolts, .42mm thick zincalume low ridge roofing, galvanised RHS and mesh. All welds are cold galvanised. Arsenic free treated pine timber decking is used on the floor.

The BARK is sold flat packed in recycled cardboard offering protection whilst in transit.

Over 65 units have been sold in 4 different States of Australia over the last 18 months.



Flat packs for easy freight options

Fully rust & corrosion resistant components

Gate access at each end for easy cleaning

Fits comfortably inside an 8' ute tray

Sold with an optional "PetPal" quality poly kennel

Raised dog runs protect animals from fleas, snakes and their own waste.

Safe haven for bitches on heat

The BARK will be on display and available for sale at the Field Day at "Mepungah" on the 8th April 2016.

SIRE EVALUATION FIELD DAY SPECIAL!

FREE delivery 50km radius Hamilton,

BARK with poly kennel \$1050 inc GST

BARK without poly kennel \$990 inc GST

2 x BARK's with kennels \$1990 inc GST

Australian wool - is it all doom and gloom?

Robert Herrmann , Managing Director

Ag Concepts Advisory | Mecardo – expert market analysis

Ph: 0417 564 898 www.mecardo.com.au



In his iconic 1975 song “Slip sliding away”, Paul Simon most certainly wasn’t talking about the merino sheep industry. However, the lyrics could easily relate to the direction that flock numbers and wool production has taken, especially since the 1990s (see Figure 1, right)

In fact, this trend isn’t confined to Australia: the number of sheep worldwide have also fallen over this period.

Usually, the cause of such a decline would be readily understood: low prices, diminished demand, or a combination of the two are the usual culprits.

BUT WOOL PRICES AREN’T LOW!

If you look at the price percentiles (see table 1, below), wool is trading at the top end of its range compared to recent history. In other words, except for 18 MPG & finer, prices have been lower than the current market for 90% of the past 20 years.

And the push to renewable and clean green products should have provided marketing opportunities.

So is there more to this?

To complete the scenario, lamb marking contractors are commenting on the reduction in merino lambs and the rise of prime lambs this season. And in Western Australia, farmers are having to sell sheep because of water shortages, so merino wool production looks to be still on the decline.

IS IT ALL JUST TOO HARD?

I don’t think anyone would have said that merino sheep were ever easy to manage, and always involved a commitment from growers prepared to deal with live animals and all that goes with that concept.

So what are the key indicators?

Wool losing the ‘fight for acres’

There are no more nor no fewer acres/hectares being farmed, so when one enterprise loses numbers it is generally taken by another enterprise. In a general sense prime lamb and crop production are the replacements for merino sheep. It is more difficult now than ever to source labour when needed for sheep work. Young farmers are more easily drawn to the grain industry, where advancement in technology has really impacted. Basically, bigger “toys” are attracting future farmers. A show of hands at Ag Colleges indicates a clear preference for cropping with merino sheep currently running a distant third place.

Prime lambs in demand

The recent rally and demand in the prime lamb industry has impacted. More and more merino ewes are being joined to terminal or maternal sires. By definition, this results in fewer sheep retained for wool production.

In the Western Districts of Victoria, Hamilton proclaimed it was the ‘Wool Capital of the World’. This was probably right 20-30 years ago when wool was the major commodity in the area. Now, the Hamilton market sells 1 million sheep and lambs annually.

REST EASY - IT’S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM!

We regularly hear from farm analysis and farm monitors that wool enterprises perform well, with a number of entrepreneurs having built huge flocks based on Merinos in recent years.

These producers are more than pleased with their wool enterprise, and demonstrate that wool production is a profitable business. Unfortunately, these positive stories in wool are not promoted widely; why not?

Despite the push to grain acres, the risk of a failed grain crop is a different prospect compared to the impact a drought can have on a wool enterprise. Being well adapted to Australian

TABLE 1: Southern MPG Spot Price Percentile (1996-Current)								
	18u	18.5u	19u	19.5u	20u	21u	22u	Card
Min	811	810	693	732	560	476	416	236
10%	1005	967	884	860	717	596	538	334
20%	1080	1018	935	898	760	670	651	410
30%	1147	1084	973	958	811	737	711	440
40%	1199	1136	1025	999	861	787	743	459
50%	1257	1186	1076	1087	916	864	825	497
60%	1317	1236	1141	1156	974	956	928	563
70%	1400	1297	1207	1204	1067	1027	1007	625
80%	1501	1381	1275	1289	1171	1157	1143	717
90%	1765	1460	1384	1381	1280	1268	1244	810
Max	2308	1932	1778	1681	1590	1531	1475	1156

MPG's at 09/03/2016								
MPG's	1473	1446	1400	1384	1367	1366	1354	1122
Decile	77.2%	88.0%	91.4%	90.2%	95.2%	97.3%	97.9%	99.0%

conditions, Merino sheep exhibit a resilience that allows them (a) to survive a wide range of seasonal conditions; and (b) to at least produce a wool clip and possibly to even a lamb!

Contrast this with the financial risk of a failed crop should a season prove disastrous.

Moreover, grain is harvested somewhere in the world every day of the year, and if prices rally it is only six months until your newly planted crop is harvested.

This means that reaction to price is quicker, and often results in sudden price moves as the supply/demand relationship is impacted and over-supply occurs resulting in volatile markets.

It is often quoted that the world has to have food, but it can choose whether or not to use wool – and that wool has many competing fibres.

While this is true, it also should be noted that fewer countries are serious competitors with Australia in the wool production field.

Figure 1. Australian sheep flock



WHERE IS THE INNOVATION?

Grain growers are now planting and harvesting huge acreages with even less labour. And modern piggeries and egg producers have replaced the traditional farmer with sophisticated operations that use much less labour per pig or hen as a result of technological advances.

If you stepped into a wool shed 50 years ago, it may not look a lot different from today's wool shed. The wool press would have a hydraulic motor on it, the shearers may be working on a raised board and the combs are slightly wider. But the wool bale is still the same dimensions – it was designed this way so a camel could carry one bale on either side – and the in shed wool handling system still represents a time when staff were plentiful.

If we look to the future, will it be possible to employ shearers to bend over all day? Who will wade through a race full of sheep administering vaccine and drench? What happened to chemical shearing trials; and the robotic shearer development?

One (negative) response from wool growers is “if they paid us enough we could invest and innovate”!

Perhaps this is the wrong approach or attitude, but importantly what can be done? At the moment, the negative sentiment permeates across the industry. Wool exporters are confused: the wool price is higher year-on-year, yet the decline in production continues (granted in some part as a result of the dry conditions). Wool exporters are wondering where their future business lies.

Ag colleges have few graduates with a passion for wool, and those in the later stages of their working career with merino sheep seem to be just biding time.

SO WHAT IS MY RANT ALL ABOUT?

The renewable aspect of wool, its intrinsic properties of breathability, fire resistance, softness and handle - surely these characteristics are just the characteristics today's discerning shopper is looking for?

Let's promote the positive stories: not to “guild the lily” and hark back to a previous golden age, but importantly to talk about the role modern Merinos can play in the harsh pastoral country, and how important they are for the prime lamb industry. Explain the enjoyment from selecting, breeding and finally producing merinos and soft, fine, beautiful wool. Celebrate the innovation in breeding, management and production. Talk about how some grain producers use merino sheep to spread their seasonal and market risk and to add value to the cropping enterprise.

What about the merino wether lambs that are making slaughter weights after producing a weaner fleece? We need to advocate for an animal that was bred specifically for Australian conditions.

If nothing else, we as wool industry members must encourage – no, we must excite others to buy into the wool story, get involved in merino sheep and positively talk up an industry that not only has been good to a lot of us, but contributed enormously to the Australian way of life.

The first landmark will be to stop the decline and to see merino sheep numbers build again. To do this though we need positive advocates from those in the industry: growers, brokers, exporters and processors. And we need to embrace innovation so that we can find new ways to increase productivity and performance.

What should we do?

The wool industry needs to promote the positive stories! It needs to “pump up its own tyres”, “blow its own trumpet”, sell itself not to the committed but to the un-committed. Promoting the merino sheep should not be left to the stud industry, it is the responsibility of all wool industry participants. Failure to do so will result in continued “leakage” to other competing interests for the acres; and that will mean that there will also be less exporters, processors, retailers and consumers of wool.

Come on wool producers, give us all a good merino wool industry story, talk up the success, the suitability of merino sheep for Australian conditions. Let those that are undecided about the future of wool know about the innovation that is happening, as well as the financial success the modern merino is capable of generating.

The alternative is we will follow the Paul Simon song lyrics to where finally he says - “You know, the nearer your destination, the more you're slip slidin' away”.

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

Thank-you to our Sponsors

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