

MERINO LIFETIME PRODUCTIVITY PROJECT UPDATE



Jock McLaren, who was recently appointed as AMSEA Chairman.

FAST FACTS

- The AWI-funded Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project is a \$7 million (plus \$4 million from partners), 10-year partnership between AWI, the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA), nominating stud Merino breeders and site hosts.
- The project aims to increase the understanding of the genetics and economic interactions over the lifetime of a diverse range of Merino types delivering high quality wool, lambs and meat.
- The MLP project runs at five sites where sire evaluation trials operate for the first two years and then continue tracking performance of ewe progeny as they proceed through four to five joinings and annual shearings.
- A full suite of independent visual classing and productivity traits will be included in the assessment.

The focus of the Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project is to gather a lifetime dataset on the F1 daughters of 135 unique and genetically diverse Merino sires across a range of environments. Each year these F1 ewes will be wool sampled, visually scored, fleece weighed, live weighed, carcass scanned, faecal sampled, classed by two independent classifiers and finally, once mature, will be joined to Merino sires and repeat measured until they are over five years old.

This data will be used to better understand how our current selection systems relate to lifetime production, and to fill data gaps so that we can learn more about the lifetime relationships between wool, carcass, disease resistance and fertility.

The MLP project is entering into a new era as the first of the next generation (F2) progeny are tagged and further natural joinings are planned. Meanwhile at some sites, the assessment and generation of the F1 ewes that will be tracked for life remains the focus. The project has also seen some

changes in the leadership team and in this update we meet the newest member of the MLP Executive. For those keen to inspect the project's ewes first hand, and to catch up with the latest in project news, this update features the dates for the 2018 site field days.

WOOLGROWER OVERSIGHT

In view of the growth in the project and the complexities of hosting five sites in diverse environments, woolgrowers play a critical role in project oversight, from involvement and leadership on Site Committees, to representation on the MLP Executive Committee, and finally through the MLP Industry Steering Committee (ISC).

One such woolgrower has been Tom Silcock who until recently was involved in many stages of project oversight as the Balmoral Site Manager and Chairman, AMSEA Chairman (who sits on the MLP Executive Committee), and finally with a seat on the MLP ISC.

After completing a 6-year term as AMSEA Chairman, Tom has recently stepped down from the role and has vacated the Balmoral Chairman's position. Tom's sage advice and passion for the Merino industry has contributed to a solid project foundation. Tom is not lost to the project as he will remain as the Balmoral site manager.

In light of Tom's resignation, the MLP has welcomed third generation woolgrower and stud breeder Jock McLaren of Nerstane Merino Stud as the new AMSEA Chairman and member of the MLP Executive Committee. Jock also sits on the MLP ISC and is a long-term member of the New England Sire Evaluation Association Site Committee.

In his acceptance speech, Jock noted that "Tom has left big shoes to fill", although with his passion for sire evaluation and the Merino industry, we welcome Jock's guidance and insight during his time as AMSEA Chairman.



First MLP drop of **Balmoral** F2 progeny, grand progeny of 2015 drop MLP sires.

UPDATES FROM AROUND THE SITES

The first of the MLP project F1 ewes at the **Balmoral** site (Harrow, Vic) were naturally joined in March this year to Merino sires. Achieving a 93% conception rate and tagging 85% of lambs to ewes joined, the project is eagerly awaiting further results to explore reproduction differences. Whilst the first years of results will be interesting, a full five years of lambing will allow for a robust comparison of the genetics of the 25 sires represented within the drop.



2016 drop **MerinoLink** ewes winter 2017, now set for joining in late December.

The **Pingelly** (WA) and **MerinoLink** (Temora, NSW) sites have weaned an impressive number of lambs in their 2017 drop and are now planning for their first natural joinings of the 2016 drop F1 ewes. The **MerinoLink** site at Temora has identified a late December natural joining to reflect local commercial practices and plan to source Merino rams with a view to use these same rams for subsequent joinings. The ewes were on display at a recent October pre-joining field day and were looking exceptionally good having averaged 65kg at 17months of age.

The **Pingelly** team are emerging from a very dry winter and are in the process of finalising plans for their first natural joining with Merino rams likely to go out with the 2016 drop F1 ewes late in January. The Pingelly site is known for its meat Merino origins and the March field day will be a first chance to hear more about the F1 ewes conception rates and inspect the 2016 and 2017 drops first hand.

UPCOMING MLP SITE FIELD DAYS

SITE	DATE	LOCATION	CONTACT
Balmoral	16 February	Harrow, Vic	Tom Silcock: 0419 882 239
MerinoLink	16 March	Temora, NSW	Sally Martin: 0400 782 477
Pingelly	28 March	Pingelly, WA	Bron Clarke: 0418 957 293

Meanwhile at **Macquarie**, located just outside of Trangie in NSW, the site has experienced a tough dry start for their first drop of 2017 lambs. With weaning behind them, the foundation ewes are being prepped for their second and final AI program which will see 16 sires including several leading industry impact sires entered at the site. Macquarie sets itself apart from other sites with a ewe base sourced from two distinctly different types of ewes on skin type. Each sire will be allocated an equal portion of ewes from each skin type in the hope of exploring any sire by skin type interactions.

The fantastic lambing conditions at the ultrafine **New England** site have seen the number of F1 lambs tagged exceeding by 27% the anticipated numbers planned for the site. While the number of superfine rams in the project is lower than other types, the abundance of lambs tagged this year will certainly make sure the genetics from this type of sheep have good representation in the project.

TAKING LAST SIRE ENTRIES

With the final Macquarie sires selected to generate the 2018 drop progeny, the focus now turns to **New England** who will complete the 10th and final AI program in the MLP project. Ram breeders interested in having their sire's genetics evaluated through life at this ultrafine site are encouraged to nominate during December and January. Of the 15 sires that will be entered at the site, eight spots are available for sire nominations, with the remaining spots taken up by four link sires and three industry impact rams.

Industry impact rams have been identified by the MLP ISC as having met a particular criteria developed by the committee. In short they sell a considerable volume of semen to a range of Australian ram breeders, they may have been winners of major industry shows, or have had progeny that have had success at a major industry show. These impact rams often have progeny in high demand having sold for significant sums of money – and finally may include index leaders in the MERINOSELECT system. For a list of sires

entered into the project visit the project website at www.wool.com/MLP.

DON'T MISS THE MLP SITE FIELD DAYS

MLP field days (see top table) provide a chance for the industry to come together to inspect firsthand the progeny from the diverse range of sires entered at the sites and to grab a copy of the latest results. A focus of the field days in 2018 will be the delivery of project results packaged from their raw data origins through to flock breeding values and indexes.

The Balmoral site is set to boast the biggest ever sire evaluation field day. Some 50 pens will contain the progeny from 47 industry sires (several are link sires and are repeated across the two years of joining). Alongside these ewes will be the first lot of next generation progeny from the F1 ewes.

While the other sites may not have as many sire groups to display, they will certainly make up for it with engaging speakers, material to get the most out of the results, the latest in sheep handling and recording technology, plus a chance to network with fellow Merino breeding enthusiasts. With this in mind, don't forget to jot the field day dates down in your diary.

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 support research, development and marketing of Australian wool.

MORE INFORMATION
www.wool.com/MLP

PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS

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