

MERINO LIFETIME PROJECT UPDATE



A mammoth **50 pens of ewes** on display at the 2018 **Balmoral field day**.

FAST FACTS

- The AWI-funded Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project is a \$7 million (plus \$5 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 better understand how current selection approaches relate to lifetime performance and to learn more about the genetics and economic interactions, across a diverse range of Merino types delivering high quality wool, lambs and meat through life.
- The MLP project runs at five sites where sire evaluation trials operate for the first two years and then continue to track the 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 assessed annually.



BALMORAL FIELD DAY HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY

The first drop of F1 Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project ewes to have completed a full production cycle were on display at the Balmoral field day on 16 February at Harrow in Victoria. Along with the 2016 drop, these 2015 drop ewes were held in 50 pens representing the progeny of 46 diverse industry sires. The Balmoral ewes along with 4,000 others will be tracked through life across five differing environments capturing lifetime fleece, carcass, reproduction and visual records.

The data will be collated into a unique and important Merino dataset that will be used to review our current selection systems and the ability to select for lifetime performance at a young age. It will also create an opportunity to explore the drivers and the economics of lifetime productivity and better understand the lifetime relationships between wool, meat, disease resistance and reproduction performance.

The MLP Balmoral Site Committee, and site hosts Tuloona Pastoral, put on an excellent display for their annual field day with sheep in good commercial condition. In a first for the project, a unique MLP field day booklet was created that packaged results in a range of formats including raw data, adjusted sire means plus breeding values and indexes.

It was AMSEA Executive Officer Ben Swain's role to walk the crowd of 140 people through the newly created results booklet. Ben emphasised that although the early results were interesting, we need repeat records before we can draw too many conclusions.

"We have our first set of reproduction results in the project, which are 500 records of what will be 25,000. For a trait like reproduction, we need be patient, we need depth of data to be confident in the results," Ben said.

"Something we can talk about now are the results of the first syndicate joining.

"The site joined the 2015 drop F1 ewes to a syndicate of rams and used DNA to establish the parentage of the F2 progeny. The results from this first joining showed that of the 11 rams joined to the 580 ewes, one ram sired 33% of the progeny and 30% of twins were actually sired by two different rams," Ben said.

Although the outcomes of syndicate joinings are not a key focus of the MLP project, the project may gather new practical joining knowledge following the 45 natural joining programs.

The reports from the day are on the AWI website at www.wool.com/MLP and will be updated following the Balmoral site shearing in April.



AMSEA's **Ben Swain** addressing the 2018 **Balmoral field day** attendees.

PRODUCTIVITY



UPCOMING FIELD DAYS

The MLP field days are a great way of seeing first-hand the diversity of sires and sites involved in the project.

Three field days are planned for the coming months that will feature a mix of sheep displays, guest speakers, the new MLP report and other local demonstrations.

Visit the MLP page on the AWI website at www.wool.com/MLP for more details:

| Date | Site | Contact |
|----------|------------------------|---|
| 16 March | MerinoLink Temora, NSW | Sally Martin 0400 782 477 |
| 28 March | Pingelly, WA | Bron Clarke 0418 957 293 |
| 11 July | Macquarie Trangie, NSW | Kathryn Egerton-Warburton 0429 943 708 |



The **Balmoral field day** gave woolgrowers an opportunity to inspect first-hand the progeny from the diverse range of sires entered at the site.

FINAL MLP AI PROGRAM (NEW ENGLAND)

The tenth and final artificial insemination (AI) program in the MLP project will take place in April at the New England site (Armidale, NSW). At the conclusion of the AI program, a total of 15,000 ewes will have been AI'd to 135 unique sires in order to generate the 5,000 F1 ewe progeny that form the basis of the project. This is a huge feat by the five sites involved.

At each of the five MLP sites, industry sires are joined for two years having been selected to provide a balance of different types, performance, sire age, horn status, industry impact, and breeding philosophies. A stocktake of sires involved in the project mid last year showed that the sire listing was close to being industry representative, although there was a need to involve greater ultra-fine genetics.

The project received a total of 40 industry sire nominations for the New England joining, including a good representation from the ultra-fine sector. The planned list of sires selected for AI in April 2018 is outlined on the right. We look forward to following their progeny through life and learning as much as we can about the drivers of productivity in a summer rainfall, worm-challenged and mules-free environment.

- Alfoxtton, 150430 (Industry Impact Sire)
- Avington Poll, 160047
- Bungulla, 160350
- Clovernook Poll, 160095
- Cressbrook, 140055 (Link Sire)
- Eilan Donan, Harvey (5145) (Industry Impact Sire)
- Europambela, 120101
- Hillcreston Park Poll, 120143
- Hilltop, HT Poll 156
- Karori, 150222
- Nerstane, 150073 (Link Sire)
- Petali Poll, 160849
- Tallawong (Poll), 150280
- Wurrook, 130149 (Industry Impact Sire and Link Sire)
- Yalgoo, 160070

A complete list of sires for the MLP Project can be found on the AWI website at www.wool.com/MLP

MORE INFORMATION
www.wool.com/MLP

PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS

| Date | Site | Contact | Email |
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