



# Engagement Education Exploration Exchange

December 2018

MerinoLink Limited Newsletter

Issue 9

### In this issue....

- New Board Director Profiles
- Reviewing your 2018 ram purchases and your 2019 ram team
- Mentoring opportunity at Wyvern Station with PWS
- DNA testing sheds light on parentage
- 2019 MerinoLink Conference Hour of Power
- Tracking trends of genetic gain in Merinos

### Dates for the Diary...

- ✓ **March 15<sup>th</sup> (Friday)**  
Merino Lifetime Productivity Annual field day - Temora
- ✓ **March 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>**  
Sheep CRC Conference and Sheep Genetics Leading Breeder Forum - Dubbo
- ✓ **June 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>**  
MerinoLink Annual Conference and Field Day Armidale venue TBC

### Welcome to the ninth edition of MerinoLink Limited Newsletter

As I take the time to look back on the last year I feel a real sense of positivity for MerinoLink and our members. The organisation continues to build depth in its operations, expand into new projects and maintain a good level of growth.

2018 has certainly given our members some challenging times and it will be a year to remember, however I believe the feeling amongst members remains positive. I believe that drought teaches us how to become better managers, we focus on the animals that are driving our business forward and ensure we manage them. There have been many positive stories this year of intensive feed lotting young Merino lambs from weaning, hitting growth targets and producing top quality wool. This type of management, in most cases, is not common and this year has forced growers to adopt new strategies, with a rewarding payoff. It's a great story to tell in what is often seen as a dark time, but we cannot complain, sheep meat and wool prices for 2018 have been keeping the negativity out and the ability for growers to be resilient continues.

Here at MerinoLink we too have been working hard on our key projects. The Merino Lifetime Productivity project funded by AWI and entrants continues to keep us busy. As the project continues, the dataset collected will provide ongoing answers to industry and our members by evaluating the lifetime performance of the Merino. The DNA Stimulation Project, a joint project with UNE, MLA and project participants. Key aspects of the project will assist project participants, ram and commercial breeders, make better use of genetic tools to make more informed breeding decisions.

I would also like to take the opportunity to formally thank Sally Martin, who has been the CEO of MerinoLink since conception and has worked day and night to make sure this organisation was successful. Late this year, Sally decided to step down from the role of CEO for MerinoLink, so she could focus more on her passion, which is the research projects. Sally will continue her role as Project Manager for MerinoLink and also be contracted as the Technical Advisor for current and future projects. As Sally steps aside, MerinoLink has recruited Jason Letchford as the new CEO for MerinoLink. Jason commenced work with MerinoLink in the start of December and as Sally and Jason work through the hand over period, I would like to welcome Jason to the MerinoLink team and look forward to working with him.

I wish all our members a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I encourage everyone to take some time out, spend time with your families and relax and get ready for an exciting year ahead in 2019.

*Richard Keniry*  
MerinoLink Chair



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**“MerinoLink Limited aims to facilitate sheep breeders and service providers with information, knowledge and research.”**

MerinoLink’s founding members are from a wide range of sheep businesses with varying production systems. The members have been brought together by a common enthusiasm for profitable Merino sheep and a desire to continue to build their businesses, client businesses and the sheep industries profitability.

MerinoLink is committed to assisting our members make better use of past and current research. In addition, MerinoLink aims to build networks and add value to existing and future research and development.

MerinoLink recognises the opportunities to work together to develop research projects for the future improvement of the Australian Sheep industry.

MerinoLink aims to provide all members with access to industry organisations and facilitate a two-way dissemination of information.

MerinoLink consists of ram and commercial producers, and service providers wanting to move our industry and members forward as fast and effectively as possible. This is made possible by MerinoLink’s engagement with members and industry, education of members, exploration of research ideas and exchange of the results.



## MerinoLink CONTACTS

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**Chair:**  
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**Vice Chair:**  
Matt Crozier (*Ram & Commercial Breeder*)

**Board of Directors:**  
David Davidson (*Commercial Breeder*)  
Greg Sheather (*Commercial Breeder*)  
Jen Medway (*Commercial Breeder*)  
Jock Nivison (*Ram Breeder*)  
Lexi Cesnik (*Service Provider*)  
Michael Field (*Commercial Breeder*)  
Michelle Humphries (*Service Provider*)  
Rick Baldwin (*Ram Breeder*)

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## New MerinoLink Board Directors and CEO

MerinoLink would like to welcome 5 new board directors to the team. Below is an introduction to the new board directors, existing board directors and recognition of the outgoing board directors.

### New Board Directors



**Jen Medway** is a fifth-generation farmer from Gunning, NSW where she helps run a successful commercial merino sheep enterprise in partnership with her husband and three children. Jen sees a strong future for quality food and fibre production and is introducing new technologies and management practices to ensure they continue to grow their fine wool and first cross lamb operation.

In 2003, Jen graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics (Hons), starting her career with the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Jen is currently Manager of Research and Innovation at AgriFutures Australia where she is responsible for delivering AgriFutures' National Challenges and Opportunities Arena, which invests \$7m annually in strategic research, innovation and collaborative partnerships.

Previously, Jen managed AgriFutures' Investing in People Program, including the Rural Women's Award and Horizon Scholarship Program and was the Executive Officer of Tablelands Farming Systems. She is also actively involved in a number of local community groups in the Gunning region.

Jen is passionate about increasing the profitability of Australia's agriculture sector and is keen to ensure **MerinoLink** is a future-thinking organisation, providing sound information, resources and results for its members. It is important for **MerinoLink** to continue to build its strong foundation in providing objective, technical knowledge on all aspects involved in improving Australia's commercial merino breeding performance.



**Jock Nivison** is a third-generation owner/manager of "Yalgoo" and has an Advanced Diploma in Rural Business Management from Marcus Oldham. Yalgoo is a diverse seedstock and commercial livestock business consisting of 33 000 DSEs. Yalgoo is situated on the northern tablelands and consists of 5 enterprises. All Yalgoo enterprises are managed with commercial discipline and genetic gain is driven by objective measurement and scientific enhancement. Jock is a firm believer in maximising and capturing genetic gain in livestock enterprises in an effort to assist clients achieve target EBITs/DSE.

Jock has been involved with industry and technical roles in both the wool and beef industry. Jock was a nominee for NSW Farmer of the year in 2016. And was awarded 2017 Australian Sheep farmer of the year.



**Michael Field** is proud to be a fourth-generation wool grower, and particularly proud to be a part of **MerinoLink**. He was a founding member of **MerinoLink** and continues to support all of the organisations aims and to-date achievements. Michael feels that **MerinoLink** is one of the few organisations he can go to for reputable and practical research.

Michael and his family run 3 large wool growing operations across 3 very different climatic regions in which each present their own challenges. Support is vital to the ongoing success for **MerinoLink**, and the Field family will continue to sponsor such events as the "Hour of Power" at the **MerinoLink** annual conference.

"The Merino ewe is a wonderful animal, and we need to continually look after her, and continue to increase her productive capacity through further genetic development."

Michael has 3 children who may decide to come back to the family business, and one of his aims is to increase the value of the family holdings in an environmentally sustainable and financial manner, whilst continually looking after and attracting good staff.



***Michelle Humphries*** graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science from the University of Sydney in 1984 and has since worked in the commercial field of sheep artificial breeding. She established Livestock Breeding Services Pty Ltd, an advanced reproduction technology company in 1985. Michelle also runs a Merino breeding enterprise at Jerilderie, NSW.

She has a keen interest in practical Merino genetics and management, and all facets of R&D in the sheep industry. She collaborates with RDCs and universities as a commercial partner in research projects.

Michelle is a Board Director and member of many industry groups and associations including the Murray Local Land Services, Australian Veterinary Association Sheep Veterinarians and the Ruminant Genetics Trade Advisory Group for the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. This list also now includes MerinoLink Limited.

Michelle's role in the sheep industry is currently being extended into the area of Emergency Animal Diseases with Foot and Mouth Disease training in Nepal and training for the Consultative Committee in Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) with Animal Health Australia (AHA).

Michelle's vision for MerinoLink is for an expanding role in project delivery and data collection and to be a conveyor of relevant information to members in a succinct and accessible format. Michelle has a strong belief that genomic technologies (for example targeted genome editing of CRISPR-CAS9) will play a significant role in the development of a modern Merino which is both productive and resistant to disease, and that MerinoLink is well positioned to be an important contributor in the collection of genomic data. Michelle sees MerinoLink as a valuable network for like-minded Merino breeders and service providers and encourages an increased collaboration with other industry bodies and universities.



***Greg Sheather*** Greg, who is married with 3 grown children, was born and spent his first 46 years on a small family farm in the high rainfall area of Tooma in the Upper Murray region of NSW. From a small base of only 120ha of purchased land, and with strategic leasing he was running up to 7,000 fine wool merinos.

In 2006 he accepted a management position in Tasmania and spent 8 years there before returning to the mainland. He now manages a 1600ha commercial merino breeding enterprise based at Bookham NSW for commercial investors under the CACM umbrella. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the use of ASBV's in a targeted breeding program without losing the valuable visual assessment of animals.

He has a passion for merino sheep and genetics and sees ***MerinoLink*** as being at the leading edge of profitable merino breeding and an ideal vehicle to disseminate this information to the wider merino breeding industry.



## New MerinoLink CEO - Jason Letchford



Jason Letchford (MerinoLink, CEO 2018 to date) – spent his formative years growing up in shearing sheds. As the son of a shearing contractor (and woolclasser), he spent most of his senior school holidays and university holidays working as a rouseabout and presser. He was discouraged from staying in the industry and enrolled at Queensland Ag College and later graduated from Queensland University with a Degree in Business.

After his studies, Jason initially spent a couple of years working for the London based Foreign Exchange Broker, MW Marshall but the recession 'we had to have' in the early 90s, saw him driving a truck for the next year and a half before starting on the Sydney Futures Exchange trading floor. Jason was a 'local' trader on the Trading Floor until it closed at the end of 1999. This led him to the accounting industry where he spent 5 years working for a Chartered Accounts Page Harrison & Co. This experience took him to the role of Financial Controller for IT firm Clear Lead Pty Ltd. From there he progressed to being a CFO for business consultants WDScott Ltd and then Finance Director of sports brand-licensing agency, Velocity Brand Management Pty Ltd.

In 2004, he 'completed-the-loop' and took on a part-time committee position of Secretary-Treasurer of the shearing industry's peak body, the Shearing Contractors Association of Australia. He still holds this position.

Jason lives in Sydney, with his wife and three daughters.

## Existing Board Directors



***Rich Keniry*** (*MerinoLink Chair*) is a commercial wool breeder currently managing the family business, Kildara Pastoral Company, based in Cumnock NSW. Kildara is a 2500 ha grazing property where he runs a mixed wool and sheep meat operation with approximately 250ha of grazing cereals each year.

Originally from Sydney, the purchase of the farm in 1998 gave Rich an opportunity to explore & learn an unknown field, he worked on and off the property for several years until 2005 when he decided to make Agriculture his career. Rich completed a Bachelor of Agriculture at the University of New England, Armidale and has an Advanced Diploma of Marketing. In 2008, he spent 3 years with Virbac Animal health as their Sheep Product Manager and in 2011 he returned home to the family property with his wife Belinda.

"I am extremely passionate about the sheep industry and believe that with the advances in technology and the availability of quality information sheep breeders can access to assist in decision making on farm, the future of the sheep industry is exciting."

"I believe that commercial breeders should have access to relevant data and research that stud breeders do, to help them make informed decisions and **MerinoLink** is a fantastic opportunity for commercial breeders to access this information."



**Matt Crozier** (MerinoLink Vice Chair) is the General Manager of Cavan Station and Bogo Merino and Poll Merino Studs based at Yass. Cavan Station operates a large commercial flock of approx. 35,000 merino sheep joining around 15,000 ewes and a self-replacing Angus cattle herd of 1400 breeding cows. Bogo produces productive, commercially focused, balanced merino rams for an array of clients throughout NSW and VIC.

Matt cut his teeth jackerooing at F S Falkiner company properties Boonoke, Wanganella, Zara and Barratta before heading off to study Agriculture and Farm Management at Wagga and Orange Ag colleges. After managing his family grazing operations at Bungendore throughout the 1990's Matt turned his hand to futures trading speculating on interest rate, currency and agricultural commodity futures. After a 5 year stint in the financial markets Matt returned to the Southern Tablelands to manage various grazing and mixed farming properties for various clients before settling at Cavan 7 years ago.

Matt has been a member of **MerinoLink** for 6 years and is passionate about promoting the merino industry as a profitable and rewarding enterprise and career choice. Matt is a sponsor and advocate of the Peter Westblade Scholarship program and actively assists young people in the development of their careers in the sheep and wool industry.



**Rick Baldwin** was the founding chair of **MerinoLink** Limited 2012-2014 and is the Co-Principle of Bundilla Merino Stud. Rick has been actively involved in all aspects of production-based merino breeding and assessment for the last 20 years.

The **MerinoLink** Group allows Merino breeders to network and drive industry issues that the forum believes will have a positive impact on the future profitability of Merino enterprises, and that is why Rick is very excited to be part of **MerinoLink**.



**David Davidson** is a commercial merino breeder whose contribution to the board is from a farm perspective.

David is managing a mixed farming family business, west of Young, NSW, with his wife, Belinda and son, Sam.

"The business is 50% cropping and remainder Merino wool, merino breeding, first cross and second cross lamb production and some cattle. We rely heavily on grazing crops for continued provision of fodder to maintain year-round production. Cropping also allows us establishment of excellent pastures for our grazing enterprises."

David is involved at a local level with the NSW Farmers' Association, but more-so with the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW as a Councillor, where he is a member on a number of committees, including Sheep and Fleece.

"MerinoLink has developed the unique ability to participate in and manage sheep industry research activities and disseminate that important information to it's members, be they woolgrowers, stud breeders or service providers, as well as the industry at large."





**Lexi Cesnik** grew up on a commercial farm at Tarcutta, NSW on which her family run Merino Sheep. She completed an Undergraduate course in Agriculture at Charles Sturt University in 2014, and also the Post-graduate certificate in Agricultural Consulting through University of New England in 2017.

During her time at university she was a part of the Australian Wool Innovations, National Merino Challenge (AWI NMC) for 2 years. The AWI NMC presented many sides of the Merino industry include new and emerging technologies within the sheep industry, which was the main factor in her choice to pursue a career in the sheep and wool industry.

In 2015 Lexi received a position within MLA donor Companies Livestock Consulting Internship Project (facilitated by Meridian Agriculture) as an employee of Sally Martin Consulting (Young) and Moses & Son Woolbroking (Temora). Lexi's Role within the Livestock Consulting Internship was extremely dynamic and flexible. Through the internship Lexi had the opportunity to make meaningful contribution to the sheep and wool industry by running an Industry Supported Project (Vitamin and Supplement trial), as well as a project for the MLA Donor company (benefits and Barriers to the adoption of Precision Sheep Management). Lexi's passions lie in the areas on increasing on farm efficiencies through the use of Precision Management and helping the next generation of industry specialists make it happen.

Lexi Joined **MerinoLink** to increase her knowledge and skills and also to be surrounded by likeminded people who are passionate about sheep and wool production and increasing the productivity, profitability and sustainability of this amazing industry. Lexi wishes to become a **MerinoLink** board member to help ensure the future of quality independent sheep research and also the adoption of technologies that are available to stud and commercial producers.

## Outgoing Board Directors



**Craig Wilson** operates a Merino Sheep Genetic Consulting business (Craig Wilson & Associates) reaching across 3 states. Craig assists some of Australia's most progressive and influential stud and commercial Merino businesses. Craig is a commercial woolgrower and also facilitates the Peter Westblade Memorial Merino Challenge. Craig is the current Chair of the Peter Westblade Scholarship Inc.

"My goal in business is to help clients reach maximum levels of genetic gain in their flocks, this progress will ensure their financial sustainability into the future. **MerinoLink** can play an important role in arming the Merino industry with precise and current information to help its members make great decisions in their businesses".



**Sally Martin** is passionate about rural communities, agriculture and more specifically the Australian sheep and wool industry. Sally has a vision for a united wool and sheepmeat industry. Unifying these production systems via measurement and reason will provide a clear direction for sheep producers and the industry as a whole.

Sally was awarded the inaugural Australian Wool Industry Medal 2017, recognising exceptional and sustained contribution to the Australian wool industry. Sally was named amongst the [100 Women of Influence](#) in 2013 an initiative of The Westpac Group and the Financial Review and in 2011 was the RIRDC NSW Rural Women's Award Runner-Up. Sally has been using these opportunities to promote **MerinoLink** and the many programs she is involved with.

Sally grew up on a grazing property on the Monaro, NSW, Sally studied Agricultural Science at University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury and completed Post Graduate studies at University of New England and Sydney University . Her career has taken a number of paths, working with NSW DPI to now running her own consultancy business based out of Young NSW that services commercial and stud sheep producers and service providers to the industry.





**Robert Mortimer** – Robert was instrumental with friends in creating the Centre Plus ram breeding group in 1981 and has managed the Centre Plus breeding nucleus for over 35 years.

Centre Plus was part of the Australian Merino Society (AMS) for eight years. The AMS was a 3-tiered group breeding scheme, involving 1,200 commercial farmers across Australia running over 3,000,000 breeding ewes.

Robert was instrumental in causing the first merino across flock genetic evaluation in Australia to happen, going on to become MGS (Merino Genetic Services.) This was followed with involvement with Merino Benchmark, (which began as an alternative to MGS) and the merging of the two databases into MERINOSELECT under Sheep Genetics, with the establishment of a common language for the whole sheep Industry.

Robert is driven by a fascination in, and excitement for research and genetic progress, and its role in the future profitability of the Merino Industry.

Robert believes **MerinoLink** is perfectly placed to help lead the Merino Industry to greater prosperity.



**Steve Jarvis** After coming home and running the family property at the age of 18, and having the strong influence and friendship of the Late Peter Westblade, Steve has stuck with Merino sheep for 30 odd years. He is a passionate commercial Merino breeder, now developing a Poll Merino stud in partnership with his wife Lydia. They run around 1500 breeding ewes on their 500ha property, Heathfield at Boorowa. Steve knows being in Merinos is a very profitable business and is continually striving to improve the profit drivers of fleece value and flock fertility within their operation.

Steve has been heavily involved in grass-roots community groups over the years such as Landcare and the Rural Fire Service and enjoys that point of difference MerinoLink has in the sheep industry. Sharing the passion of Merinos with other like-minded people through MerinoLink is something Steve thoroughly enjoys. He feels the integrity, independence and good will of the membership of MerinoLink will lead to even greater things in the future and is very proud to be a Board member.



*Celebrating the transformation*



## Sheep CRC Final Conference

12:00pm 19 March – 12:30pm 20 March 2019

Dubbo Regional Theatre and Convention Centre

155 Darling Street, Dubbo, NSW

This is your last chance to tap into the minds of the Sheep CRC's research team about new and innovative ways to improve your sheep business. After 18 years, the conference marks the final public event of the Sheep CRC before it ceases operations at the end of June 2019. Don't miss this unique opportunity to celebrate the innovation, impact and transformational technologies the Sheep CRC has delivered.

DAY 1 - 19 MARCH 2019		
Time	Session	Speakers
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	
1:00pm – 3:00pm	<b>Sheep CRC—meat and wool—from concept to impact</b>	Speakers TBC
	Introduction—18 years of innovation	
	Importance of CRC for industry	
	Innovation—don't stop	
	<b>Meating the market</b>	Speakers TBC
	Moving to a quality-based value chain	
	Transformation for processors	
	Involving the whole supply chain	
	New opportunities for Coles	
	<b>Wool - going beyond touch and feel</b>	Speakers TBC
Understanding next-to-skin comfort		
Wool comfort for mothers and babies		
3:00pm – 4:00pm	Afternoon tea	
4:00pm – 6:00pm	<b>Making the possible practical—the on-farm tools</b>	Speakers TBC
	From WormBoss to ParaBoss	
	From CRC Phd to industry leader	
	<b>Precision Sheep Management</b>	Speakers TBC
	From e-sheep to apps	
	Lifting reproduction efficiency	
	eID - transforming the stud	
	Monitoring and sensors - where next?	
<b>Celebrating Success - out history in print</b>	Speakers TBC	
How well did the Sheep CRC perform?		
The book - telling our story		
6:00pm – 8:30pm	Drinks and dinner	
8:30pm	Day 1 concludes	

<b>DAY 2 - 20 MARCH 2019</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Speakers</b>
<b>8:00am</b>	<b>Day 2 commences</b>	
<b>8:00am – 10:00am</b>	<b>Foundations of future innovation—digital forecasting</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
	What can ASKBILL do now?	
	ASKBILL—making a difference on the farm	
	How accurate are the forecasts?	
	Predicting lamb turnoff	
	<b>Changing the conversation</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
	If people don't know—then it didn't happen	
	Using CRC communication and social media	
	<b>Empowering our future researchers</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
Postgraduates—preparing the future leaders		
Undergraduates—teaching the essentials		
<b>10:00am–10:30am</b>	<b>Morning tea</b>	
<b>10:30am – 12:30pm</b>	<b>From genetics to genomics</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
	Transforming genetic selection	
	New tools for a breeder in a hurry	
	DNA—where is it going?	
	Using genomics to make money	
	<b>Simplifying ram selection</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
	RamSelect training program and app	
	Buying the right rams for increased profit	
	<b>Life after the Sheep CRC</b>	<b>Speakers TBC</b>
	MLA's plans for post-CRC cooperation	
	Capturing the next innovations	
Closing comments		
<b>12:30pm – 1:30pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>Sheep CRC Final Conference concludes</b>	

## **NOTE**

### **Sheep Genetics Leading Breeder Forum**

begins immediately after the Sheep CRC Final Conference at the same venue

Please contact [SHEEP GENETICS](#) to attend this forum





# sheep GENETICS

## 2019 LEADING BREEDER CONFERENCE



Dubbo Regional Theatre & Convention Centre  
*"Breeding Sheep for a Future Environment"*



AGENDA

20-21 March 2019, 2pm

### SESSION 1 - What does the future hold for the sheep industry and breeding programs

1. The genetics landscape
2. The challenges and opportunities with sheep breeding in the future
3. The genetics scene and future outcomes from current R&D

### SESSION 2 - Breeding within an integrated supply chain

1. Connecting the customer to the farmer
2. Data capture and feedback - The ALMtech Project
3. Breeding for consumer outcomes - An on-farm experience

**DINNER** - Birthday celebrations: 30 years of LAMBPLAN and 21 years of a Merino Genetic Evaluation

### SESSION 3 - Breeding for welfare and reproduction

1. Reproduction and welfare in the industry - where are we now and what genetic tools are available
2. Enabling genetic improvement of reproduction in other species
3. The new reproduction analysis and analysis updates
4. Breeding for improved survival - An on-farm experience

### SESSION 4 - Creating opportunities through genetics

1. Adapting to a changing environment and industry using genetics
2. Efficiency of livestock enterprises
3. Selecting sheep using indexes for the future
4. A resource flock of the future
5. Breeders role in the National Genetics Adoption Plan

### Further information

For further information or issues registering please contact us on 02 8055 1818 or [info@sheepgenetics.org.au](mailto:info@sheepgenetics.org.au)

## Reviewing your 2018 ram purchases and your 2019 ram team

Tom Granleese, Animal Breeding and Genetics Researcher, University of New England

If, on average, 30% of your sheep's performance is controlled by genetics (other 70 percent by management, environment, age of dam, single or twin raised etc), are you spending 30 percent of your stock management time on the genetic makeup of your flock? By genetic makeup we mean the ram team that will sire your next drop of progeny.

The answer could be no, but given the significance that genetics plays in the performance of your animal, sheep breeders should be putting in more time than simply turning up to a sale and looking at rams. Knowing where last year's ram team benchmarks and what rams to cull and potential ram buying decisions you need to make can significantly alter your bottom line in sheep production.

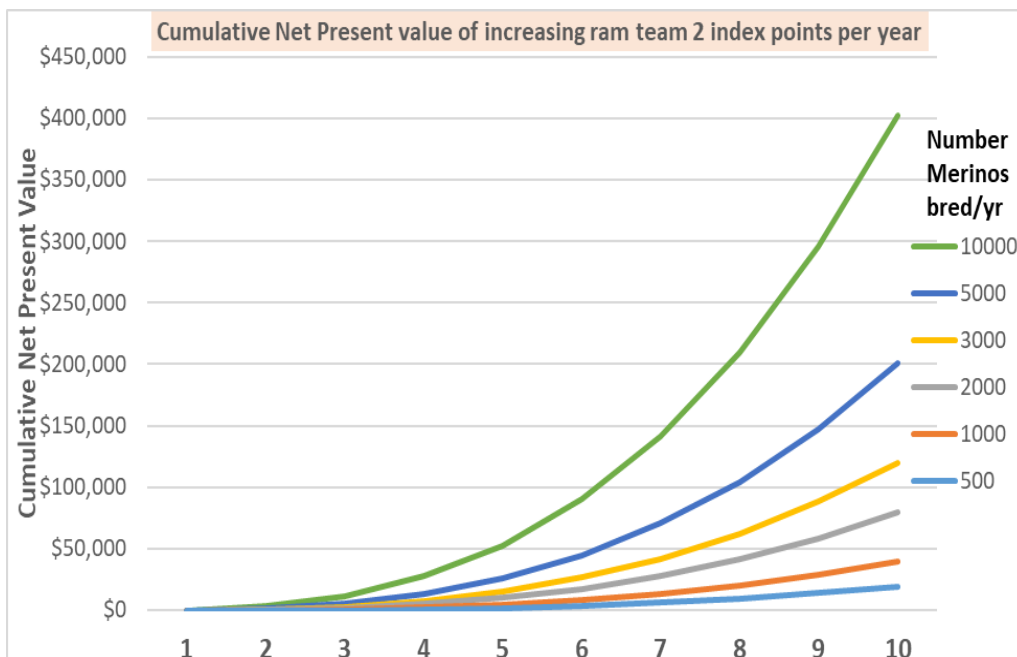
Buying rams with ASBVs is essential to making informed decisions to increase productivity via genetics in your flock. *Just because sheep have ASBVs does not mean they are good.* ASBVs are simply a ranking of first to worst in the objective measured sheep population.

It is important to have an understanding of where your ram team benchmarks so each year you can improve your ram team battery. There are several tools to do this. We should remember that if we achieve genetic gain each year that it is permanent and cumulative. A bit like compound interest on livestock.

If a commercial flock of 10,000 Merinos improves its ram team by two genetic index points each year, which is very modest, over a 10 year period we conservatively estimate that an extra \$400,000 of net income can be generated through increased performance via genetic gain alone (Figure 1).

It is well worth you paying \$1,000 each year to a genetics consultant (which can be recommended via the MerinoLink network and one that does not run on a commission based incentive from ram breeders) to help you not only review potential ram purchases, but also look at the existing ram teams on-farm and how the entire ram team can be improved.

It is OK to remove a ram after a year of service. If the ram has low ranking genetics, what is it costing you keeping his genetics (and then his daughter's progeny's genetics) in your flock?



**Figure 1:** Cumulative net present value of improved performance from genetics alone in differing sized flocks increasing their ram team each year by 2 index points per year

With all of this in mind, let's review your 2019 ram team decision making and give yourself a ranking out of 5...

### Do you know your breeding objective?

- Is it defined? (e.g. I want to cut 7kg of 17 micron wool in mature ewes, be mules-free and turn off 50kg wether lambs after shearing at 12 months of age, by 2023 with 110% weaning)
- Do you select for traits at ram buying that have ASBVs that take your flock forwards in your breeding objective? (e.g. ycfw-fleece weight, yfd-fibre diameter, ebwr-breech wrinkle, pwt,ywt-growth rate, nlw-reproduction)
- Is it achievable? Do animals actually exist to get you to your target?
- Genetic service providers can help you define one if you need help.

### Do you know where your ram team benchmarks?

- You wouldn't crop steering by eye anymore. You use GPS and autosteer to make the most efficient decisions. Do you do this with livestock?
- How can you know that you are buying rams that take your flock forward if you don't know where the rams on your property currently benchmark?
- There are tools available such as RamSelect (Figures 2) and MERINOSELECT to help you benchmark your ram teams if they have ASBVs
- If you are sourcing rams from non-ASBV flocks, you have a ram battery of raffle tickets. They may be winners and they may be losers. You probably don't know. Can you afford not knowing? Flock Profile is a (\$770) tool to help estimate genetic merit via DNA relationships. You can then use these results to buy rams with ASBVs to take your flock forwards
- Genetic service providers can help you with this and is money well spent

### Shortlist potential rams that would improve your ram team *prior to sale*

- Do the rams have ASBVs? How do you know you are buying low-ranking or high-ranking rams? (Remembering that ASBVs are simply a ranking of highest to lowest)
- Is your stud measuring traits that are in your breeding objective? It is hard to make genetic progress if traits are not measured at stud level
- Prior to attending a sale or paddock buying session, shortlist all the rams that will help you reach your breeding objective E.g. if you need 5 rams, you shortlist 15-30 rams that will help you reach your breeding objective. You need extra rams on the "potential" list as some will not meet your visual appraisal and some you will be out-bid on (at sales)
- Genetic service providers can help you with this and is money well spent

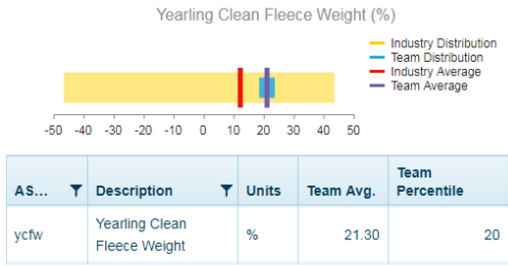
### Rams on-farm are structurally sound and future purchases also meet your visual assessment

- Structural soundness is important for ram and progeny functionality
- Furthermore, there are some traits that are not captured in ASBVs at most studs such wool texture, wool dryness, colour, structure and conformation
- When attending sales or paddock sales, it is important to have a shortlist as defined in checkpoint 3 above. If a sale has 150 rams on offer and you have not got your shortlist of say 30 rams, it can be a very daunting to go through all 150 and potentially lead to bad buying decisions. Checking your 30 pre-listed rams is much more manageable and you might end up with 20 that you would potentially bid on

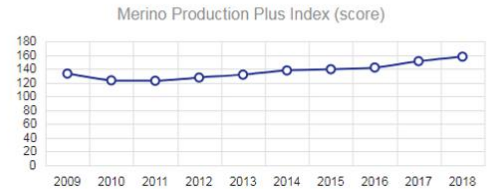
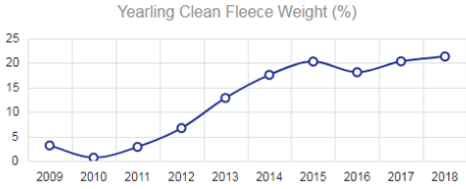
### Have you improved your ram team average post-sales?

- Did you record which rams you bought? If not, studs can help you find historical purchases
- Buying one good ram out of ten may not improve your average
- The **average of the ram team** is most important as most of the rams will contribute to the next generation
- Make sure you cull any existing rams (even if fit and healthy) that are holding your team average significantly back
- Enter all new rams and "retire" all departing rams on Ram Select's "Ram Team Tracker" (Figures 2)
- Genetic service providers can help you with this and is money well spent





**Figures 2: Examples of A)** RamSelect.com.au Ram Team Tracker for yearling clean fleece weight trait for ram battery over years and **B)** Ram Team Tracker for Merino Production Plus Index



**How did you score?**

You should be aiming for a minimum of 5 out of 5. If you are not scoring 5 then it is an easy fix. Give genetics of your flock the respect it deserves, and it will pay you back handsomely.

If you feel like you do not have the time and/or knowledge to reach a score of 5, look to upskill and/or pay a genetic service provider to give you the advice you need. You use agronomists for your cropping, why not spend \$1,000 a year on advice for your flock to help you generate thousands of dollars a year extra?

Something else to consider - If you are a volume buyer each year and happy with your sourcing stud, have you considered contract buying rams? State everything you want your rams to benchmark in a contract at a discount rate (to sales) and ram breeders have security know they have a market. (e.g. next year you buy 20 rams at \$1,500 each that have ASBVs above 17% ycfw, 5.0 ywt, 2% nlw and below -0.1 ebwr and -1.0 yfd). As your ram team improves, your contract terms on ASBVs should slowly change too.

For more information contact Tom Granleese 0432 339 008, [tgranle2@une.edu.au](mailto:tgranle2@une.edu.au) or learn more by visiting the “Practical Wisdom Notes” section of the Sheep CRC website.

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## Mentoring for Youth at Historic Wyvern Station

One of Australia's most progressive Merino breeding operations will throw open its doors to young people at a training and mentoring weekend in February.

The 50,000 hectare Wyvern Station at Carrathool, in the Riverina, will host workshops and mentoring sessions on February 9-10 2019 in a joint initiative with the Peter Westblade Scholarship committee.

Topics to be covered over the weekend will include sheep selection, stockmanship, agribusiness skills, sheep and wool marketing, new agricultural technologies and professional development.

Steeped in history, Wyvern is an iconic wool producing property with state of the art facilities including a new wool shed, yards and shearer's quarters.



Peter Westblade Scholarship chairman Craig Wilson said a select group of young sheep and wool handlers would be encouraged to pursue the 2019 scholarship.

"This will provide a fantastic location for the young people to visit and gain invaluable experience and knowledge over a weekend on one of Australia's most progressive Merino breeding operations," Mr Wilson said.

"The scholarship promotes the practical skills associated with the sheep and wool industry and aims to deliver hands-on experience to young people.

"It provides education and mentoring opportunities for people aged 18 to 30 years wanting a career in the Australia sheep and wool industry over a 12 month period."

Applications and nominations for the scholarship and the Wyvern weekend have now closed however if you are interested to know more or know of some amazing young people who would benefit please contact the scholarship executive officer Georgie McGuinness on 0437 473 414.

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Scholarship**

## PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS IN THE SHEEP AND WOOL INDUSTRY

The Peter Westblade Scholarship honors the Late Peter Westblade a true visionary passionate about breeding profitable sheep and a strong supporter of young people interested in agriculture.

The Scholarship exists to promote the practical skills associated with the sheep and wool industry and aims to deliver hands on experience and mentoring to young people aspiring for a career in this dynamic industry.

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## DNA testing sheds light on parentage



**Syndicate joinings through Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLA) show that sire dominance is a very real phenomenon and that twins don't always share the same father.**

While the MLP project will not be completed until 2025 and only limited results will be available in the interim, there will be opportunities to share observations along the way.

Through the life of the project, all F1 ewes (daughters of 135 industry sires) will be annually syndicate joined 4-5 times. Syndicate joining is the process of joining a particular group of rams to a particular group of ewes, in this case through a natural mating program rather than via artificial insemination. DNA parentage will then be used to identify the sire and dam of their F2 progeny with the ultimate aim being to generate repeat reproduction records.

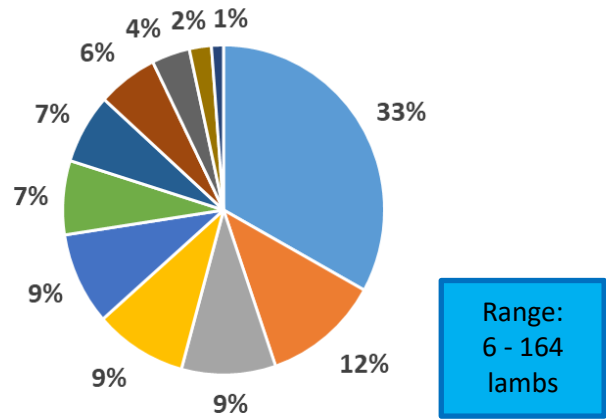
Early DNA parentage results for the joinings at three sites conducted through the MLP show that, within a syndicate, there are often rams that dominate.

Research previously undertaken by MerinoLink and co-funded by AWI showed that when the same syndicate was joined for a second time, the dominance patterns often change. MLP will allow this phenomenon to be explored in greater detail.

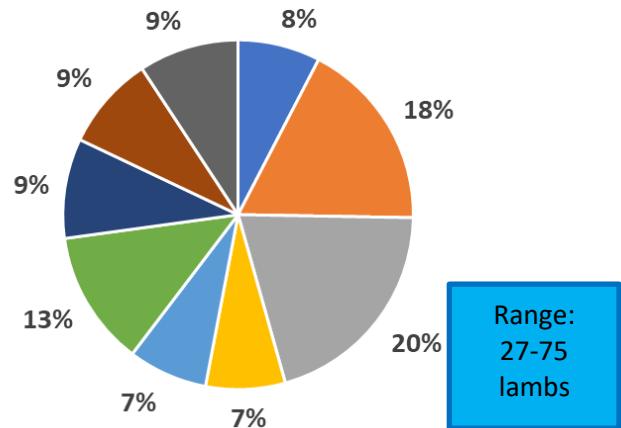
The figures on the right show the percentage of progeny per sire from maiden joinings at Balmoral (the 2015 F1 ewes, 2017 joining) with a joining percentage of 1.9%, and Merinolink and Pingelly (the 2016 F1 ewes, 2018 joining) both with a joining percentage of 2.3%.

These figures demonstrate the disproportionate contribution of dominant sires relative to other sires within a syndicate. Of particular note is the sire at Balmoral who produced 33% of the progeny in 2017 amounting to 164 lambs, compared with only six lambs by another sire in the syndicate.

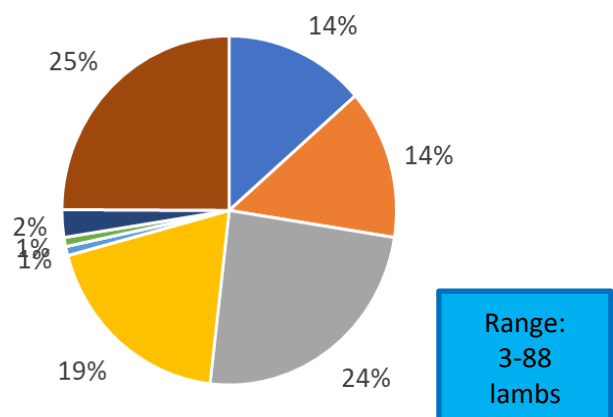
**Balmoral 2017 F2 Lambs Per Sire**



**Pingelly 2018 F2 Lambs Per Sire**



**MerinoLink 2018 F2 Lambs Per Sire**



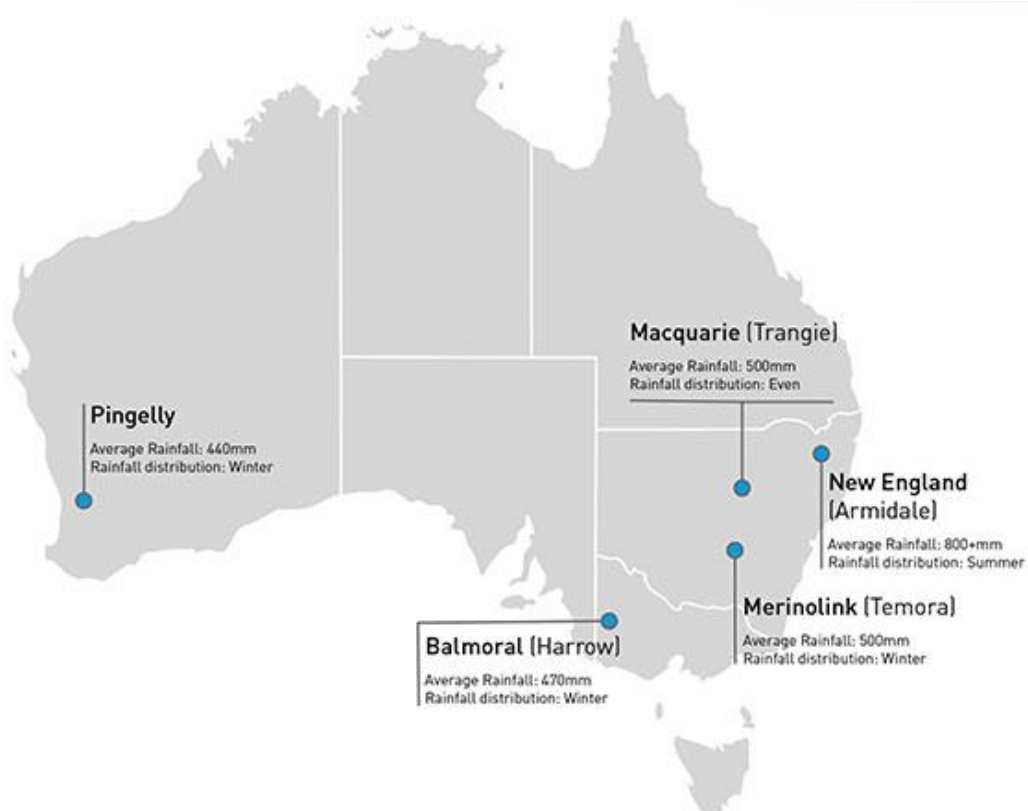
This observation, combined with ongoing assessment of parentage within the MLP syndicates, may have important implications for breeders who routinely use syndicate joinings. Unless the rams in the syndicate are of equal genetic merit, the outcome of the joining will reflect the genetic performance of the dominant rams. Repeat records over time generated through MLP will provide an insight into whether joining percentages or other factors impact on sire dominance.

Another interesting observation from DNA parentage is that a significant proportion of twins are sired by two different sires. MerinoLink Site Manager, Sally Martin, confirmed that 32% of twins were sired by two different sires at the MerinoLink site. This increased to 36% at Balmoral and 63% at Pingelly. These figures are consistent with previous work reported by MerinoLink.

#### Maiden Ewe Joining results (Balmoral 2015 F1, Pingelly and MerinoLink 2016 F1)

Year Joined	Ewes Joined	Number of Sires	Progeny tagged	Sets of Twins	% Twins by Two Sires
Balmoral 2017	584	11	498	92	36
Pingelly 2018	386	9	368	49	63
MerinoLink 2018	348	8	353	87	32

While the outcomes of syndicate joinings are not a key focus of the MLP project, a strength of the project is the volume of data being collected and the opportunity to leverage through additional research.



*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.*



## 2019 MerinoLink Conference – Hour of Power applications are now open

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The purpose of the MerinoLink Annual Conference and Field Day is to provide an opportunity for sheep producers and service providers to network and learn about research outcomes and management programs. It is also an opportunity to have a positive influence on the future direction of the sheep industry in Australia. MerinoLink embraces ideas and technology from past, present and future research and trials to assist in moving the Sheep and Wool industry forward in a profitable and practical way.

The 2019 MerinoLink Annual Conference will be held on **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June** at the Armidale City Bowling Club, Armidale, NSW. The Field Day will be held on **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June** also in Armidale, with the venue to be confirmed. Following the success of the **“Hour of Power”** at the 2018 MerinoLink Conference, the session will again be incorporated in the 2019 program to further exemplify MerinoLink’s strategy to encourage the involvement of young people in the Sheep and Wool Industry and to **showcase young people in the industry**.

The **“Hour of Power”** is a fast-paced, informative session presented by a range of young researchers, scholars and innovators from across Australia. University students will have the opportunity to present their research projects and findings directly to members of the industry that their research could benefit. Previous Peter Westblade Scholarship scholars will be invited to highlight the experiences they gained through the scholarship and how it has helped them in pursuing their career. Lastly, the **“Hour of Power”** will also include other young innovators who are having an impact in the industry, to share their experiences and highlight how they are making a difference.

Each presenter will be allotted a 3 to 5 minute time slot in which they have to communicate their message in a succinct yet comprehensive manner. This will be followed by opportunities to network and create potential mentoring partnerships with conference attendees. Each **“Hour of Power”** speaker will be partnered with a mentor who will assist in making network connections during the conference.

### ***Purpose:***

- To provide an opportunity for young researchers to present their research outcomes directly to industry members
- To provide young scholars and innovators the opportunity to showcase what they are doing within the industry
- To provide an opportunity for young people interested in the sheep and wool industry to network with members from varying levels of the industry
- To promote MerinoLink as a facilitator of education and networking opportunities

### ***Objectives:***

- To provide education and networking opportunities for young industry members
- To provide conference attendees with an insight into current research that could benefit the industry
- To promote the Sheep and Wool Industry as a desirable career path and to promote enthusiasm and encouragement for young persons to learn and grow in the industry
- To provide two-way communication opportunities between young people and producers and service providers

### ***Outcomes:***

- To provide networking opportunities for future mentoring partnerships for young people in the industry or wanting to enter the industry
- To highlight to young people the potential career paths and avenues that exist within the industry
- To identify research areas that are relevant to the industry and our conference delegates, and to provide dialogue opportunities to progress these ideas

## 2018 Hour of Power - Media Coverage

The sheep and wool industry's young guns were firmly in the spotlight at the MerinoLink annual conference... with the innovative "Hour of Power".

The "Hour of Power" was a fast-paced, informative session presented by nine researchers, scholars and innovators, aged 18 to 30 years, from across Australia.

MerinoLink chief executive officer Sally Martin said the inaugural Hour of Power provided university students and graduates with the opportunity to present their research projects and findings directly to industry members.

Sally Martin said the initiative was well received by an audience aged from 15 to 75 years.

"We received comments on how the Hour of Power was most inspiring and encouraging to see these young people coming through," she said.

"These young speakers were hot, sharp and to the point, and made the most of their networking opportunities.

"It was a great opportunity for them to present their work and ideas to an industry audience.

"We hope to make the Hour of Power a core component of the conference in future.

"The average age of our attendees was 44 and this has been consistent year on year.

"The younger demographic appreciates the networking opportunities with industry leaders the MerinoLink conference provides them."



2018 Hour of Power presenters with MerinoLink Chair and CEO

L to R – Sally Martin (CEO), Will MacSmith, Elise Bowen, Heather Earney, Dione Howard, Emma Turner, Forough Ataollahi, Rachael Gawne, Kate McCarthy, Octavia Kelly and Richard Keniry (MerinoLink Chair)

## **Application Criteria**

- Aged 18 to 30 years
- Honours, Masters or PhD students undertaking research topics relevant to the Sheep and Wool Industry and/or
- Someone who has made an impact within the Sheep and Wool Industry, is passionate about the industry and sees a career within the industry

## **How to apply**

If you would like to apply, or would like to nominate someone, please fill out the attached application form and send it back to Carmen Thackeray [merinolinklimited@gmail.com](mailto:merinolinklimited@gmail.com) by **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019**.

Should you like to provide any supporting documentation or media with your application please attach it in the email with your application. Suitable supporting media may include research abstracts, a short video explaining a bit about yourself and why you fit the application criteria and/or any other documents that support your application. Please keep supporting documentation to a maximum of 500 words or 3 minutes.

Applicants will be shortlisted and contacted by **Thursday 7th March 2019** with further information.

For questions or further information on the “Hour of Power” Session, or the 2019 MerinoLink Conference and Field Day, contact Carmen Thackeray on 0409 839 957 or by using the above listed email.



## Tracking the trends of genetic gain in Merinos

*Peta Bradley and Emma McCrabb, MERINOSELECT, Meat and Livestock Australia*

The trends in genetic gain across MERINOSELECT flocks are providing breeders with a reason to smile. The increases in gain across the board tell an exciting story about genetic gain in the merino industry.

The figures presented in this article have been constructed using the flocks, which are submitting data to the MERINOSELECT database.

Figure 1 illustrates the trends in average index values of the three merino indexes. The Dual Purpose Plus (DP+) and Merino Production Plus (MP+) indexes have seen great and largely similar gains over the past decade, with the rate of gain increasing since 2014. The Fibre Production Plus Index (FP+) has followed this trend at a reduced pace.

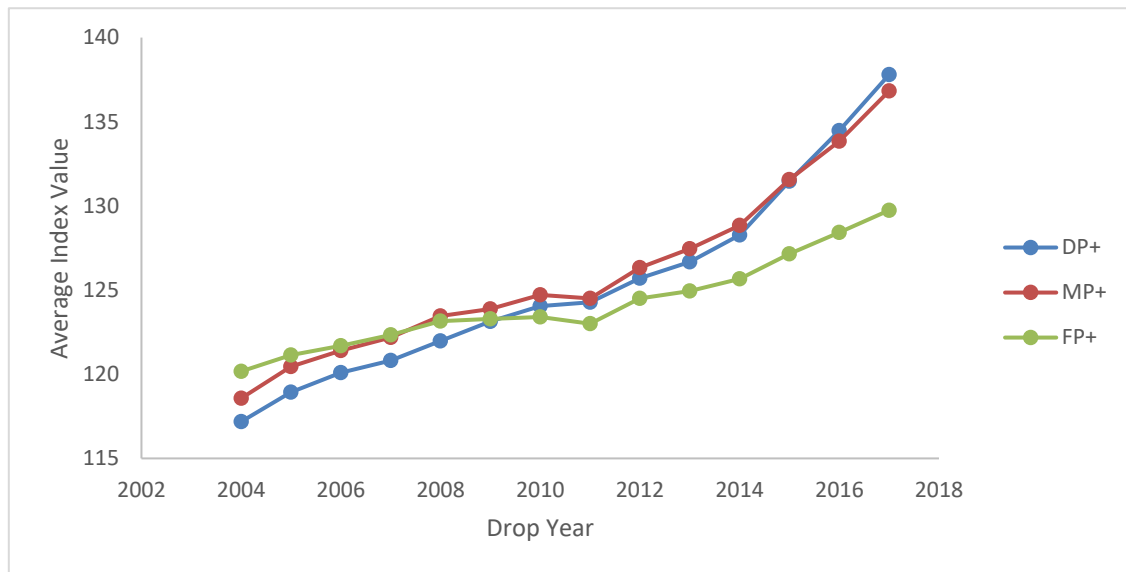


Figure 1. Trends in genetic gain as shown by average index values for the 3 main MERINOSELECT Indexes.

Three key traits in many breeding objectives of merino breeders are YCFW, YEMD and YWT. The trends for these are highlighted in the Figures below.

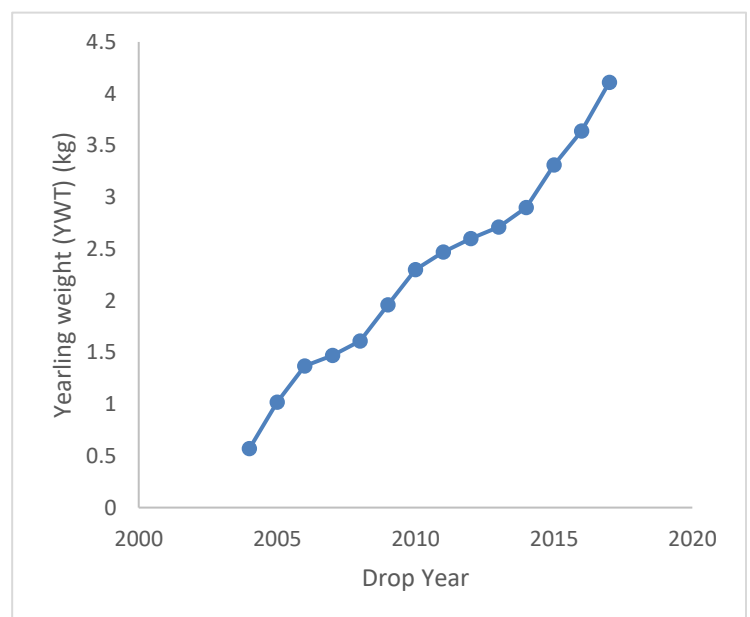
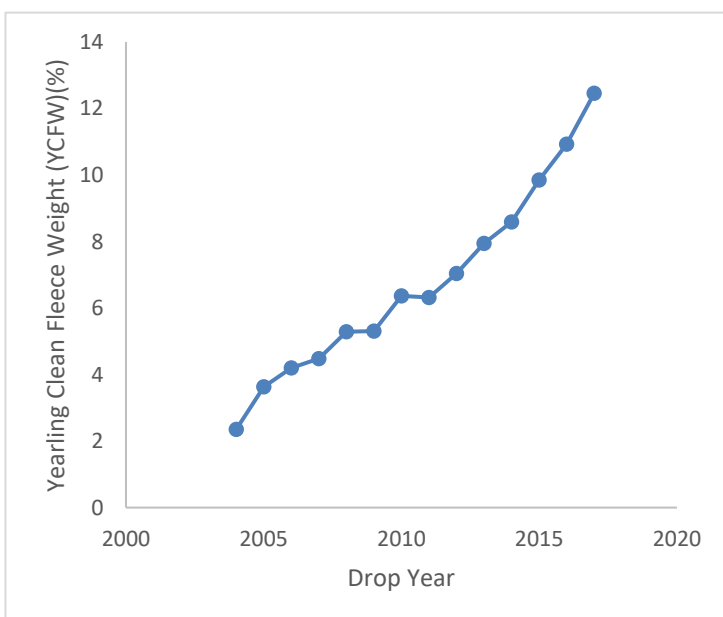


Figure 2 and 3. Genetic trend for Yearling Clean Fleece Weight (YCFW) and Yearling Weight (YWT).



Fleece weight is a driving production trait for many merino producers, and this emphasis can be noted in Figure 2 through the great increases in Yearling Clean Fleece Weight (YCFW). Similarly, there has been an increase in yearling weight (YWT) over time, seen in Figure 3. Figure 4 shows the interesting progression on Yearling Eye Muscle Depth (YEMD). It is important to note that individual MERINOSELECT flocks may have similar or dissimilar trends depending on what traits they have been placing selection pressure on in their breeding objective.

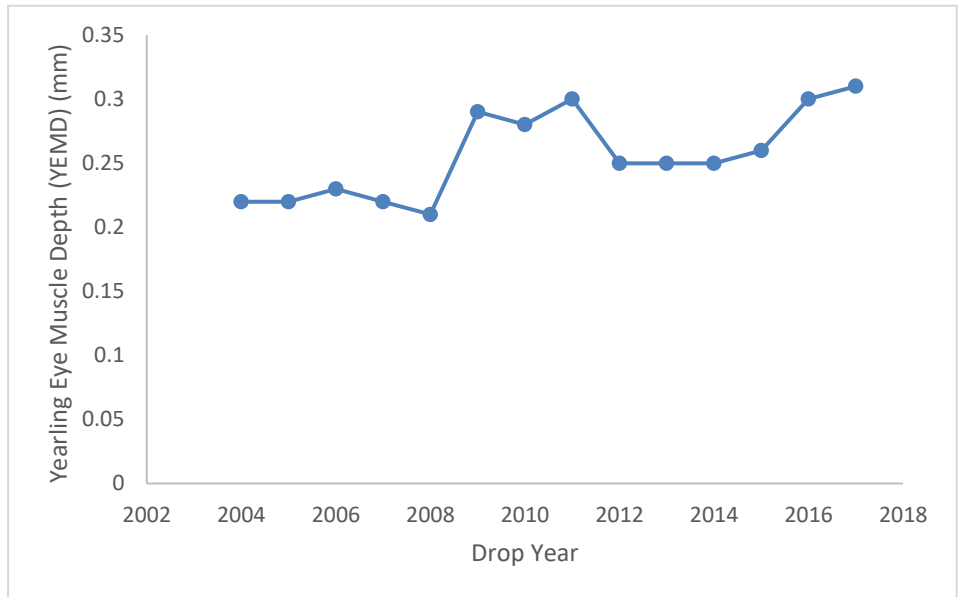


Figure 4. Genetic trend for Yearling Eye Muscle Depth (YEMD).

Opportunities: What lies ahead

Breech wrinkle (EBWR) is another trait which is of great importance for breeding plainer sheep for a future environment. From Figure 2 and Figure 5 below it can be seen that despite an increasing fleece weight trend, the genetic trend for breech wrinkle is also decreasing (a more negative breeding value indicates an animal’s potential to produce progeny which are plainer). This trend represents a growing opportunity in the merino industry to continue in this direction. However, these trends are driven by data from flocks that are recording these traits. It is important that if a breeder or their clients are wanting to make selection decisions on these ASBVs that they are being recorded in the breeder’s flock.

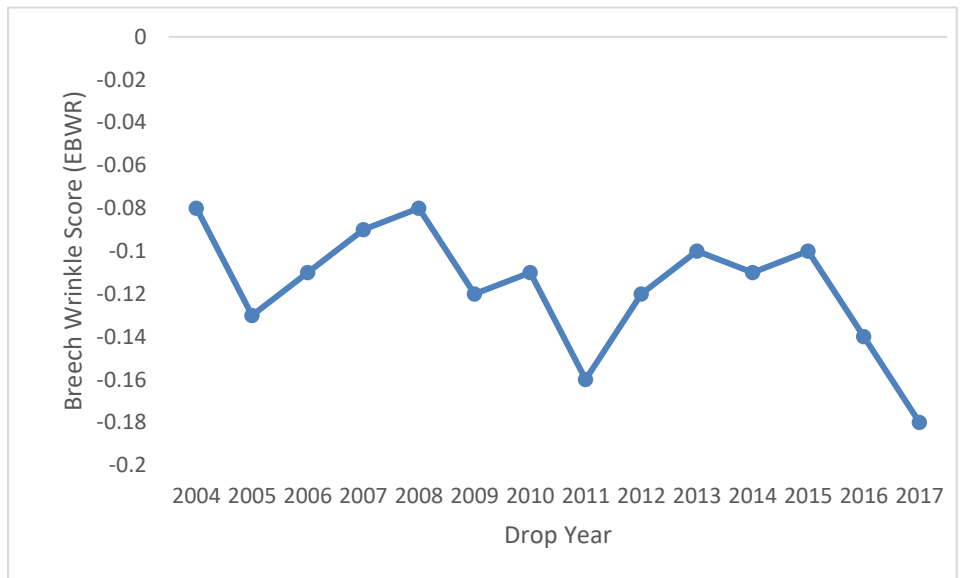


Figure 5. Genetic Trend for Breech Wrinkle (EBWR).

The trend in Number of lambs weaned (NLW) depicts another opportunity for the industry. Figure 1 shows that the rate of gain for each of the indexes have remained relatively constant until recent increases since 2015. This increase coincides with an encouraging increase in the number of flocks recording reproduction, and

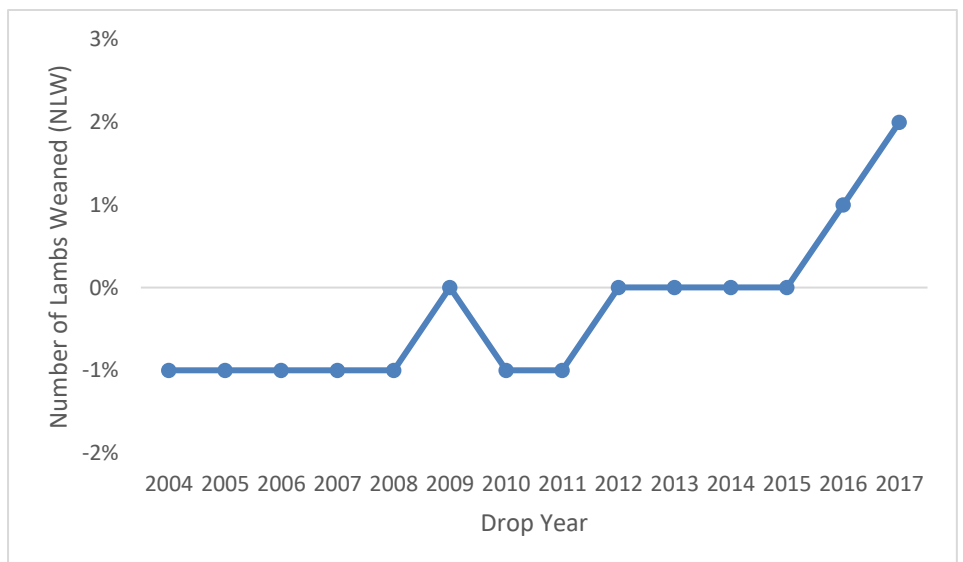


Figure 6. Genetic Trend for Number of Lambs Weaned (NLW).

therefore an increase in the number of animals with reportable breeding values for NLW. The genetic trend for Number of Lambs Weaned (NLW) as shown in figure 6 has also increased from 2015 onwards. This can partially be contributed to the increase in the rate of gain for the indexes from this point as NLW is an important trait in these indexes.

There has also been an encouraging increase in the number of MERINOSELECT clients collecting data that allows a reportable NLW breeding value, from 34% in 2015 to 47.5% for the 2016 drop. Sheep Genetics along with AGBU (Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit) have been working on developing component trait breeding values to allow breeders to select on the different parts of reproduction. These are the known as the component traits of reproduction and include; conception (if a ewe gets pregnant or not), litter size (how many lambs are born) and ewe rearing ability (the ability of the ewe to rear the lambs that she has). This enables breeders to select the individual components that drive reproduction that they wish to improve. These redefined reproduction breeding values will be rolled out in 2019, with the merino analysis following initial roll out in the maternal breeds.

It is important that commercial ram buyers are identifying ASBVs and traits that are important to their breeding objective based on the key profit drivers for their production system. Ram buyers should also be in regular communication with their seed stock breeders to ensure that they are measuring the traits that they are they will be selecting rams on. Percentile bands are also a vital tool for ram buyers to be utilizing to bench mark where their ram source flock sits relative to the rest of industry and bench mark the individual rams within that flock.

**AMSEA (Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association) and MerinoLink are excited to announce that the first edition of the MLP Project Newsletter has been released. The full newsletter can be down loaded from the AMSEA website under 'Latest Updates' at [merinosuperiorsires.com.au](http://merinosuperiorsires.com.au).**



### Merino Lifetime Productivity Project to address key industry questions

**Understanding and maximising lifetime performance is critical to increasing productivity and profits for woolgrowers.**

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA) have teamed up with five sire evaluation sites to deliver the Merino Lifetime Productivity Project (MLP) from 2015 to 2025. The AWI funded project is valued at \$7 million with an additional \$5 million in support from all project partners.

The MLP project has been designed to capture lifetime Merino ewe data from diverse environments, genetics and Merino types to help the Australian Merino industry better select for and deliver improved lifetime performance outcomes.



2017 Drop MerinoLink F1 Ewes being classed by Bill Walker in the left hand race and Nathan King on the right. Assistants Rich Kenney, Anne Ramsay & Sally Martin.



2017 Drop Pingelly F1 ewes in green spring pastures at Ridgefield UWA, Pingelly WA, September 2018.

The project is an opportunity to answer many of the industry's questions in relation to selection and ewe lifetime performance, such as:

- Is it possible to select for lifetime productivity at a young age using raw data, breeding values, genomically enhanced breeding values, visual classing or a combination of industry approaches?
- What is the impact of selecting for wool, growth, reproduction, welfare and carcass traits on the productivity of Merino ewes over their lifetime?
- Why do some animals perform year in and year out, while others fade over time?
- Are there new ways to better predict superior lifetime performance?

The ewe progeny from 135 industry sires (known as F1 ewes) will be run across five cooperating sites and will be assessed annually for the traits in the table over the page. Field days at each of the sites also provide a chance for producers to inspect the F1 ewes first hand. All ewes are retained in the project for life, with culling for welfare purposes only.







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