

INDEPENDENT CLASSING AND MERINO SIRE EVALUATION COMBINE TO DELIVER MERINO

The **Merino Sire Evaluation program** operates at nine separate sites across Australia and **compares the breeding performance of sires from different flocks**. Their progeny are assessed for a large number of measured and visual performance traits, which **helps woolgrowers select sires across a large range of breeding objectives**.



New England Sire Evaluation Field Day.



Visual classing at the Elders Balmoral site.

The very first Merino Sire Evaluation programs were established in 1987 by the NSW Stud Merino Breeders Association in partnership with the University of Sydney and NSW Agriculture. They were initially concentrated in NSW: Hay, Deniliquin, Dubbo and Walcha.

Almost 30 years later, Merino Sire Evaluation in Australia is stronger than ever, with nine sites operating in a wide range of environments, all comparing sires from different flocks by extensively assessing their progeny for both visual and objective performance.

“Merino Sire Evaluation is truly unique in that it offers a complete package of information,” says ram breeder and chairman of the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA), Tom Silcock.

“Each site involves recognised sheep classers providing visual assessments for a wide range of conformation, wool quantity and breech traits, as well as classing each sheep into a grade.

“Plus, we collect an extensive list of objective measurements for wool, carcase and parasite resistance. It’s a one stop shop for a breeder to make an informed decision about whether to use a sire or not.”

Visual and objective information collected at each of the independently managed sire evaluation sites through Australia, is reported in regularly updated Site Reports. A standard Site Report includes results for 11 measured traits and 20 visual traits, many assessed at multiple ages and reported separately.

Site Reports and other sire evaluation information and results are available on the Merino Superior Sires website, www.merinosuperiorsires.com.au. These freely available reports are clearly popular amongst ram breeders and woolgrowers with up to 2,500 individual reports being downloaded on a monthly basis.

“Being able to independently evaluate sires in a particular environment gives breeders confidence to use those genetics themselves”, says Tom. “And Merino Sire Evaluation

continues to attract new entrants every year, which further increases the appeal to a wider audience.”

Whilst Merino Sire Evaluation in Australia has for many years fulfilled an important role of providing truly independent genetic benchmarking information, Tom believes the key to the success of the program has been its strong breeder involvement.

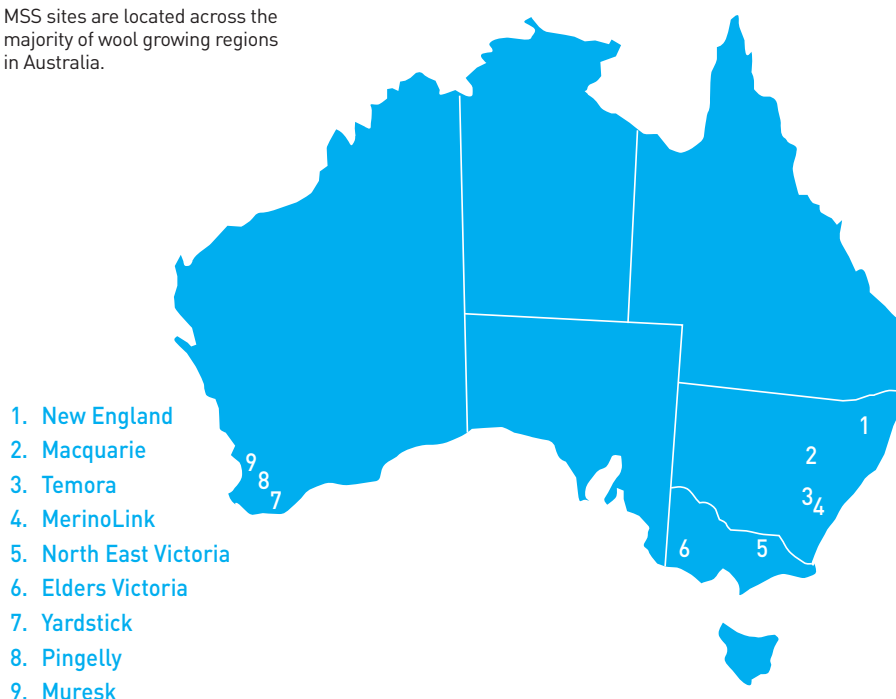
“In most cases the sites are hosted on commercial wool-growing properties with a committee of breeders and other interested people managing the trial. Breeders are also involved in national governance, in formulating the trial protocols, how the results are reported and in driving ongoing innovation. Their passion and commitment is driven by a need for independent and comprehensive information about potential sires.”

Ben Swain, also a woolgrower, is the Executive Officer of AMSEA, the national association formed by the individual sites coming together in 2003 to oversee the requirements

AND MEASUREMENT NO SIRE EVALUATION



MSS sites are located across the majority of wool growing regions in Australia.



for running sites, the analysis of the data collected and the reporting of results.

As well as being reported in Site Reports, all data collected at sites is combined and reported in Merino Superior Sires. "To achieve the combined analysis, each site uses link sires," Ben says. "Link sires are rams that have been successfully used at another site, or in another year. By using link sires AMSEA is able to compare the results of all sires entered, regardless of where or when."

Linkage between the sites offers industry benefits well beyond Merino Sire Evaluation, with the combined database playing a critical role in the success of the national genetic analysis, MERINOSELECT. Without Merino Sire Evaluation many of the flocks in MERINOSELECT would not be linked, or linked for only some traits.

Merino Sire Evaluation continues to offer a platform and focus for research and development. The Visual Sheep Scores booklet containing the national standards for the visual scoring of a range of traits

was conceived and developed by AMSEA. And, in the past 18 months AMSEA has formed a partnership with AWI to deliver the Merino Lifetime Productivity project. The project, outlined in the June 2016 edition *Beyond the Bale*, will operate for the next nine years and see the ewe progeny from 135 industry sires evaluated throughout life for a wide range of commercially important visual and objective traits.

The operation of individual Merino Sire Evaluation sites is funded by commercial entry fees paid by ram breeders. Most sites are also supported by generous in-kind support from dedicated site committees, service providers, local state departments of agriculture and sponsors.

AWI supports Merino Sire Evaluation through the funding of link sires, support for the Executive Officer's role, the analysis of the results and the administration of AMSEA. **B**

LIST OF TRAITS ASSESSED

Measured traits	Visual traits
Greasy Fleece Weight	Fleece Rot
Clean Fleece Weight	Wool Colour
Fibre Diameter	Wool Character
Body Weight	Dust Penetration
Fibre Diameter Coefficient of Variation	Staple Weathering
Fibre Curvature	Staple Structure
Staple Length	Fibre Pigmentation
Staple Strength	Non-Fibre Pigmentation
Eye Muscle Depth	Recessive Black
Fat Depth	Face Cover
Worm Egg Count	Feet/Legs
	Body Wrinkle
	Jaw
	Back/Shoulder
	Breech Cover
	Crutch Cover
	Breech Wrinkle
	Dag
	Urine
	Visual Classifier's Grade

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on Merino Sire Evaluation visit www.merinosuperiorsires.com.au or contact Ben Swain on 0427 100 542 or ben_swain@bigpond.com