MLP
Merino Lifetime Productivity Project

Merino Lifetime Productivity Project Newsletter No.9

Macquarie with a green hue

The Macquarie MLP site at Trangie NSW, hosted by NSW DPI in conjunction with the Macquarie Sire Evaluation Association (MSEA), is looking a picture with a distinctly green hue due to abundant feed on offer! These conditions and recently updated site results will be showcased in a webinar on May 13, 1-2pm.

Over the last 12 months Trangie has received over 790mls of rain. This is a direct contrast to the preceeding period with less than 290mls. So this webinar will present Trangie as you've not seen it before! The season, the site in its current condition and the recently updated results including their wool, carcase and reproduction results for the 2020 cycle for both the 2017 and 2018 drop MLP ewes. This will be the first full set of reproduction results for the 2018 drop.

Reproduction will be a special focus with a webinar *Reproduction Supplement* presented reporting preliminary scanning results for the 2021 reproduction cycle. The new reproduction component trait research breeding values will be presented, plus a quick overview of updated results.

Presenters include Matthew Coddington, MSEA Chair, NSW DPI's Kathryn Egerton-Warburton and Tracie Bird-Gardiner (current acting Site Manager) plus Ben Swain as part of the MLP team. Matthew Coddington returned as Chair with Alison Tancred as Deputy Chair at Macquarie's March AGM after David Greig ended his term. Many thanks to David, especially for his field day efforts.

The webinar will run on SheepConnectNSW's popular platform and be communicated out via their 4000+ industry contacts. It can be watched live or via a distributed recording whenever it's best convenient.

Register for a greener view of the Macquarie MLP site: sheepconnnectnsw.com.au/events/896.

MLP quick facts

- The Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) funded MLP project is a $8m (plus $5m from partners), 10-year partnership between AWI, the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA), nominating stud Merino breeders and site hosts.
- 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.
- **Balmoral, VIC** **Host:** Tuloona Pastoral
  Committee: Balmoral Breeders Association
  Pingelly, WA **Host:** Murdoch University / UWA
  Committee:
  Federation of Performance Sheep Breeders (WA Branch)
  MerinoLink, Temora NSW **Host:** Moses & Son
  Committee: MerinoLink Inc.
  Macquarie, Trangie NSW **Host:** NSW DPI
  Committee: Macquarie Sire Evaluation Association
  New England, NSW **Host:** CSIRO
  Committee: New England Merino Sire Evaluation Association
- A full suite of assessments will be undertaken during the MLP project including visual trait scoring, classer gradings, the objective assessment of a range of key traits and index evaluations.
- A unique and extensive dataset will result and be used to enhance existing Merino breeding and selection strategies, for both ram sellers and buyers, to deliver greater lifetime productivity and woolgrower returns.

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Around the sites

Balmoral

The fantastic seasonal conditions continue at Harrow, although the Autumn break is yet to arrive. Ewes are now receiving a grain supplement and being rotationally grazed. Classing and wool measurements were completed in February. Carcase measurements were also taken in the lead-up to the site's final joining. 21 rams were joined to 1155 ewes in early March when the 2015 drop ewes averaged 53.8kg and CS 3.4, and the 2016 drop ewes 52.1kg and CS 3.2. An updated report will soon be produced for the Balmoral site.

2016 drop MLP ewes ready for classing and midside sampling, February 2021. Dark rib line is vegetable oil residue from EMD/FAT scanning. ***Image credit: Bill Walker, Walker Classings***

The Balmoral 2021 classing and midside team, February 2021. ***Image credit: Bill Walker, Walker Classings***

Pingelly

Good rainfalls in late summer and early autumn resulted in good pasture germination, with follow-up rain now necessary for this germination to survive through to winter rains. Ewes are currently holding their condition well, grazing dry pastures and stubble plus receiving a grain supplement. Joining took place from February 1 until March 8. Ewes were in good condition pre-joining with the 2016 drop ewes averaging 70kg and CS 3.1, while the 2018 drop averaged 64.3kg and CS 2.9. April pregnancy scanning saw the ewes achieve 94% and 93% conception in the 2016 and 2017 drops, with 62% and 50% scanned multiples. An updated report is currently in development for the Pingelly site.

Some of Pingelly's site committee at a recent meeting, March 2021. ***Image credit: Bronwyn Clarke, Murdoch University***

Pingelly
2021 MLP Field Day

SAVE - THE - DATE

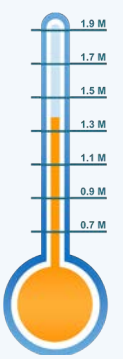
October 22

Project Data Tracking

The MLP project has now collected 1,376,078 data points across the five sites. The projected total is currently estimated as 1,971,555 records, with data collection scheduled for completion in July 2024.

1.3M records seems substantial, however for a project looking at lifetime performance, the remaining 0.6M (approx. 30%) are critical for measuring lifetime performance and data analysis.

These data points include wool, carcase and reproduction assessments. Together they will form a dataset to be used to enhance Merino breeding and selection strategies, improving lifetime productivity and woolgrower profitability.



MerinoLink

Good seasonal conditions have continued at Temora including minor flooding in March (which did not impact the MLP ewes). Ewes are currently grazing on barley stubble. Joining ran from December 22 through to Janury 27, eight rams were joined to 305 2016 drop ewes and another eight to the 388 2017 drop ewes. Pregnancy scanning noted 89% conception across the two drops with 62% of those scanned as earlies. The 2016 drop scanned as 23% single bearing and 66% with multiples, 2017 drop had 22% single bearing and 67% with multiples. Individual WEC results were collected in February.

MerinoLink's MLP ewes 5 weeks off start of lambing, April 2021.

A second view of MerinoLink's MLP ewes, April 2021.

Macquarie

An abundance of green feed at Trangie means the MLP ewes are in very good condition. Rams were removed on January 25 after going out on December 21 (following teasers from December 9). March pregnancy scanning results note the 2017 drop ewes achieving 92% conception and the 2018 drop 94%. The 2017 drop had their first individual WEC samples taken on March 29 (note, the 2018 drop had no worm burden).
An updated report has been released and is available for download at merinosuperiorsires.com.au.
Register for the upcoming Macquarie webinar - Trangie as you've never seen it! sheepconnectnsw.com.au/events/896

2017 drop MLP ewes, March 2021.

2018 drop MLP ewes, March 2021.

New England

Good seasonal conditions continue in the New England with above average rainfall and milder temperatures. A pre-joining carcase assessment was completed in late March, at this time the 2017 drop ewes averaged 56.1kg and 3.3 CS while the 2018 drop ewes averaged 51.4kg and 3.2 CS. Since March 29, 14 rams have been joined to the 2017 drop (2.1%) and 11 to the 2018 drop (1.9%), with plans for removal on May 3.

2018 drop MLP ewes pre-joining, March 2021.
Image credit: Jen Smith, CSIRO

Site committee members Luke Stephen and Duncan Lance at pre-joining ram inspections, March 2021. ***Image credit: Jen Smith, CSIRO***

Profile Series: Meet the MLP Site Managers

Jen Smith - CSIRO, New England NSW

Jen is the Site Manager for the New England MLP site which is hosted by CSIRO along with the New England Merino Sire Evaluation Association, located at Chiswick, near Uralla, New South Wales.

Jen with the MLP ewes.

With her own farm and sheep enterprise, plus an extensive background in fine wool and genetic research, Jen brings both a practical producer's approach and serious research acumen to the MLP project.

Where has your career path taken you?
Jen completed a B.Rural Sc (Hons) at the University of New England and followed this up with a PhD on the genetic variation in fine wool crimp frequency and its effects on processing performance at the University of New England. Since then Jen has worked for the CSIRO, first in a technical role and then in research including involvement in the CSIRO Fine Wool Project, Toward 13 Micron project, and the AWI/CSIRO Breech Strike Genetics Project.

What's a highlight of your role?
The positive feedback, especially from local commercial sheep producers, from field days.

How would you describe your site and its ewe base?
The New England site has a high summer rainfall with the long-term mean annual rainfall being around 800mm and the site being >1000m above sea level.

The site has a superfine wool base ewe flock, but not an entirely traditional wool type. The MLP base ewes were a combination of Chiswick Station ewes and ewes from the Breech Strike Genetics flock. They had an approximate average 17µm adult fibre diameter and bulk 70's wool quality count, cutting about 4kg greasy fleece weight with an adult mature weight of 48-50kg.

Where are New England's ewes up to in their lifetime?
The 2017 born F1 ewes have now had three fleece measurements and visual classings completed plus they have lambed twice. The 2018 ewes are one year behind.

What makes the New England site unique?
The environment and sheep type, plus the CSIRO team has the capacity to do all sorts of additional research using these sheep (if only we had unlimited resources!).

What is the site's particular MLP interest?
CSIRO's particular interest is those aspects of profitability that are costs to production; disease resistance, reproductive performance and resilience to the production environment.

What's the most important activity of the year at Chiswick?
For the core work, equally the fleece measurements before and at shearing, classed fleece traits plus objectively measured fleece traits and fleece weight, accompanied by weaning where we get the last of the data on reproductive performance for that year.

What's the most interesting activity of the year?
Lambing! We have a particular interest in the genetics around lamb survival so collection of the birth data, on both lambs and dams is pretty exciting.

From Jen:
'Lambing is the most interesting and also the most exhausting activity of the year!

And the biggest challenge?
Managing the diversity of sheep types. It can be tricky to manage the sheep in terms of their resistance (or not) to the main disease issues at this site; worms and flies, and at shearing the type diversity is a wool classer's nightmare!

Jen's top tips for collecting quality data:
Think it through in detail beforehand so you remember everything, anticipate potential problems in the process and have a Plan B ready. Also, use a consistent team who work well together plus supply food - that always helps teamwork and motivation!

CSIRO's MLP WEC sampling team, March 2021. ***Image credit: Amy Bell***

Further information

Download MLP Reports from www.merinosuperiorsires.com.au/mlp-project-reports
Feel free to contact the Site Managers, Project or AMSEA staff who are listed in reports for assistance with interpreting reported results.

Contact MLP Project Manager Anne Ramsay on 0400 368 448

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 hosts, 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.

www.wool.com/MLP