

Selection of Merino Ewes on Reproductive Performance by producers in southern Australia

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To better understand the practices used for selection of ewes to improve reproduction a survey of 1280 Merino sheep producers, representing 2.5 million Merino ewes was undertaken in March 2009. The number of producers to be surveyed in each statistical division was determined by the relative proportions of wool producers in each area according to the Australian Wool Innovation Limited shareholder database. The full methodology is reported by Curtis (2009).

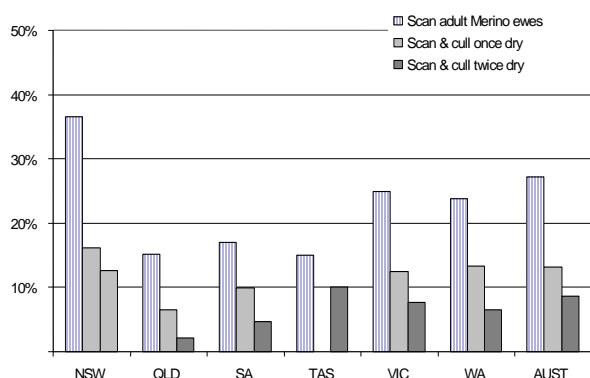


Figure 1. The proportion of respondents who i. scan for pregnancy in their adult Merino ewe flocks ii. Cull ewes on failure to conceive in 1st instance iii. Dry ewes are retained and given a 2nd chance to conceive in the following year

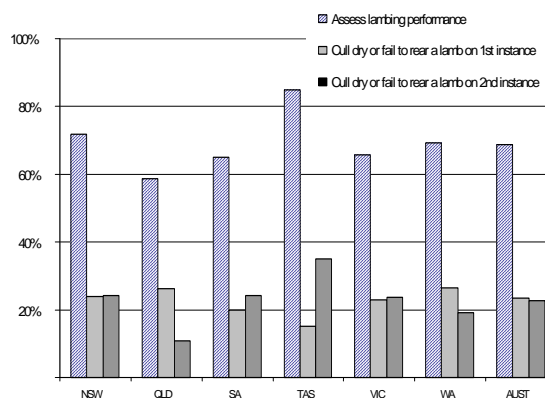


Figure 2. The proportion of respondents who assess adult Merino ewes on lambing performance at marking or weaning and/or cull on dry and failed to rear in the 1st instance or are given a 2nd chance

Approximately 32% of producers surveyed scanned at least some of their ewe flocks for pregnancy status. This is in line with other reports (Behrendt, 2009) on the prevalence of scanning in Australian sheep flocks. Producers who scan for pregnancy usually choose to scan both maidens and adult flocks. New South Wales had the highest proportion of producers who scanned both maiden and adult flocks pregnancy scanned at approximately 35%. Most producers who scanned maiden ewes retained any dry ewes, giving them a chance the following joining, whereas most producers who scanned adult ewes culled the dry ewes at that scanning.

Fifty six percent of producers assessed both maiden and adult ewe flocks at marking or weaning by the wet/dry method to determine if they raised a lamb. It had been assumed that this was a prevalent practice but little data was available to support this view. Most producers who assessed their maiden flocks retained any dry ewes, giving them a second chance to fall pregnant the following joining, whereas the treatment of the adult ewe flock after lambing was highly variable between states.

About 20% of producers neither pregnancy scanned nor assessed ewes post lambing if they reared a lamb and this accounted for about 0.5 million of the 4.5 million ewes covered by the survey.

The knowledge of selection and culling practices in Australian flocks for reproductive performance informs the Sheep CRC and others of opportunities and scope for improved culling methods to further impact on the performance of the national flock.

Behrendt R, (2009) Lifetimewool Final Report, Australian Wool Innovation, Sydney, NSW.

Curtis K, (2009) Wool Desk Report, Department of Agriculture and Food WA, on-line at www.agric.wa.gov.au

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