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Non Mulesing Network

Newsletter of the Department of Agriculture and Food

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WELCOME

Welcome to the ninth edition of the Department of Agriculture and Food's newsletter on the transition from mulesing and managing breech strike.

Please pass this newsletter on to anyone who is interested and encourage them to register for future editions by emailing Julia Smith (Department of Agriculture and Food, Albany)
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Have you recently stopped mulesing or are you thinking about it?

If you would like to share your experiences with other sheep producers who are in the same position and learn from other experiences, please phone Julia Smith on (08) 9892 8450 or email julia.smith@agric.wa.gov.au

In brief!

A new version of the National Wool Declaration is now available. A combined Classer's Specification and NWD has been developed to help align the declared mob information with the lines of wool produced at shearing. A separate page NWD is still available for brokers who do not wish to change their Classer's Specification.

[To download the latest version of the NWD click here](#)

For further information contact:
www.agric.wa.gov.au/mulesing

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Important disclaimer

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2010 Deadline – what happened?

Since the Australian wool industry agreed in 2004 to phase out the practice of mulesing by 2010, there has been a steady stream of communication, often highly emotive, from animal welfare groups, producers, scientists and industry leaders, and more often than not focusing on the 2010 deadline. However, in July 2010 the Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) adopted a new policy that would support a 'scientific fact-based approach to ensure the optimal health, welfare and productivity of Australian sheep, and to ensure they are protected from the risks of disease and death', and in turn ultimately delaying the 2010 deadline.

Whilst this decision has received criticism from animal welfare groups and wool retailers, what should be highlighted is that whilst some producers have ceased mulesing and continue to successfully run unmulesed sheep, the Australian sheep industry as a whole was not in a position, nor was it ready to cease mulesing completely by this date. The decision not to adopt the 2010 deadline was based on welfare and sound scientific grounds and pushing producers to cease mulesing before they were ready to do so, would have had serious welfare consequences.

However, we know that it is possible to successfully make the transition from mulesing and those producers who have made, or are in the process of making, should be commended. There are a range of alternatives currently available and being researched. Studies have demonstrated that clips are better from a welfare perspective than surgical mulesing, however the process has come under scrutiny from animal welfare groups, some regarding clips as 'bloodless mulesing' and some retailers declaring that they will not buy wool that has come from clipped animals. Intradermals are currently being researched and look promising, but perhaps the most successful and long term strategy is based on management and genetics. Staying on top of scouring and dags, lowering your flock's breech wrinkle score, culling high risk animals and other management techniques such as strategically timed chemical applications and the timing of shearing and crutching are all essential criteria in successfully making the transition. Producers who continue to mules should be encouraged to become accredited and use pain relief.

An extensive range of resources are available to producers wishing to make the transition. FlyBoss, www.flyboss.org.au, developed by the Sheep CRC, has a time shearing tool which allows producers to select their location and enter in time of shearing, crutching and any chemical applications to see their relative risk of flystrike through a year. Other sites such as DAFWA's Non Mulesing site (www.agric.wa.gov.au/mulesing) and AWI's site (www.wool.com.au) provide current news and trial results.

Where to from here?

It is essential that producers fill out a National Wool Declaration. By filling this out, producers are not only showing retailers that they are serious about the transition but also helping themselves by increasing the amount of declared wool in the market system, which in turn may give rise to premiums. It does not matter if producers declare their wool as pain relief or ceased mulesing, it allows transparency through the market place and allows buyers to identify the type of wool they need.

It is evident that mulesing is no longer a publicly accepted method of controlling breech fly strike. Whilst there is no 'magic silver bullet', research into practical management methods and alternatives will continue so that in the future the Australian sheep industry is in a position to cease mulesing. Until that date, producers who still mules are also urged to implement strategies such as controlling dags and culling sheep at high risk, both of which take little time and finances, to make the transition easier.

Ceasing Mulesing at Eildon Springs Merino Stud – A producers story.

Andrew Greenwood, Principal - Eildon Springs Superfine and Fine Wool Merino Stud

Eildon Springs is a merino stud based in Waubra, just outside Ballarat in central Victoria. Wool from this stud, and from the flocks served by its rams, is destined for high end fabrics and those fabrics are made to European specification. The decision was made in 2008 to cease mulesing. The stud has successfully managed the transition by using both genetics and management techniques.

Selection against wrinkles has always been a high priority at Eildon Springs and during the transition period the owners have continued to cull from stud-breeding ewe flocks any animal with a breech wrinkle score of 3 and above. This gives them confidence that they are producing rams for clients which in turn will help reduce over time the wrinkle score of their clients' sheep.

Another genetic factor considered is worm resistance, with the aim of moving their flock in the direction of less frequent and less severe scouring. Dag scores are taken prior to crutching and this enables them to cull ewes showing greater susceptibility to scouring and, over time, produce a flock more resistant to worms.

Ewes are crutched in late July, 4 weeks prior to lambing. This achieves reduced wool on the breech during spring as well as aiding lamb suckling. Faecal worm egg counts (FWEC) are taken prior to the ewes being brought in for crutching, so a drench can be given if necessary. A preventative treatment of Dicyclanil is applied to the breech of lambs at marking and lambs are routinely drenched at this time. Upon weaning, ewes have Cyromazine applied and weaners have monthly FWECs taken to stay on top of any worm burdens over the summer period, prior to crutching and shearing in Autumn.

Eildon Springs has had very low levels of strike since ceasing mulesing, with no known strikes across the flock over a 2 year period - other than poll strike in fighting young rams. During the very wet and humid spring and summer of 2010-2011, the stud has had a total of only four cases of body strike across the flock, indicating that the decisions made in the past on genetics and management have been highly successful. Eildon Springs remains committed to the decision to cease mulesing.

[To read the full case study, written by Andrew, please click here.](#)

New ASBV's released



New Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) have been launched for a number of new traits to help sheep farmers breed sheep that are less susceptible to breech strike. They are called research breeding values and have been launched for dags (DAG), breech cover (BCOV), wool colour (COL), fleece rot (FROT) and wool character (CHAR) on a research basis. These research breeding values have been developed from the two AWI funded breech strike trials in Mt Barker, WA and Armidale, NSW plus information from the Sheep CRC and Sire evaluation trials. As more industry information is collected, these breeding values will be turned into full Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBV).

All visual traits are reported as either Early (E) or Late (L). Early traits were scored when animals were between 1-6 months old while late traits were scored on animals at yearling age and/or older. Thus a trait such as dag score, that were scored when the animals were yearling or older, is called late dags (LDAG) while breechcover scored on lambs up to six months of age are called early breech cover (EBCOV). Sheep with a negative research breeding value for LDAG will produce progeny that will have less dags around the breech area. Similarly sheep with a negative

EBCOV breeding value will produce less wool around the breech area. A more negative ASBV is desired in both traits.

The Merinoselect website (<http://sheepgenetics.org.au>) publishes ASBVs for a range of traits including the latest research breeding values for the new traits. The leading trait sires for breech cover are shown in the table below. Currently, the leading sire is from ASBV's from the Mt Barker AWI breech flock, followed by Glendemar.

By selecting rams that have a lower ASBV value for these traits, growers will be able to move towards producing a flock that is less susceptible to breech strike. More information on ASBV's and trait leaders are available from Sheep Genetics Australia <http://sheepgenetics.org.au>

Animal ID	YWT	AWT	YEMD	YCFW	YFD	YDCV	YSL	YSS	YWEC	NLW	EBWR	EBCOV	LDAG	7%DP	7%	10%ss	14%ss	3.5%DP
MT BARKER AWI BREECH FLOCK-050267	2.9 66%	1.0 62%	-	0.9 57%	-0.1 68%	-0.6 55%	-6.0 58%	5.3 50%	-21 39%	-	0.3 65%	-1.4 57%	-0.2 47%	115 32%	107 32%	110 38%	114 38%	113 34%
GLENDEMAR-051453  	10.4 98%	9.1 96%	3.0 96%	10.7 91%	0.7 94%	-2.7 91%	25.5 91%	4.6 89%	-26 87%	4% 49%	1.7 94%	-1.4 92%	-0.2 75%	161 66%	124 65%	115 71%	120 73%	166 66%
MT BARKER AWI BREECH FLOCK-050019	6.3 69%	3.8 65%	-	-4.9 60%	-0.3 71%	-2.1 58%	3.9 61%	6.6 54%	-	-	0.0 68%	-1.4 61%	-0.4 51%	127 34%	108 35%	111 41%	121 40%	122 36%

Results from DAFWA non-mulesed sheep

Background to the trial

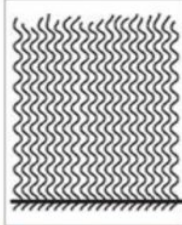
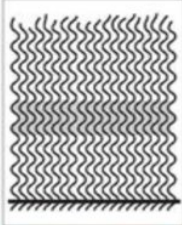
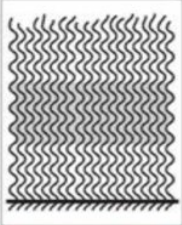
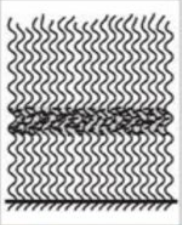
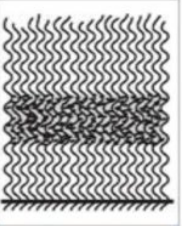
DAFWA ceased mulesing on its Research Stations in 2008 in order to better understand the management of non mulesed sheep. The spring of 2008 in WA was extremely wet and saw high levels of breech and body strike in many parts of the State. The majority of these strikes were not due to animals not being mulesed, but rather there were body strikes. Lessons learnt for 2008 were put into practice during 2009 and 2010, such as changing the time of shearing by a month and introducing a chemical application at marking. We have also been selecting against dags and wrinkles. These practice changes have seen a very small amount of strikes across the two years, demonstrating that with some planning and little time, it is possible to manage unmulesed sheep.

2010 Results

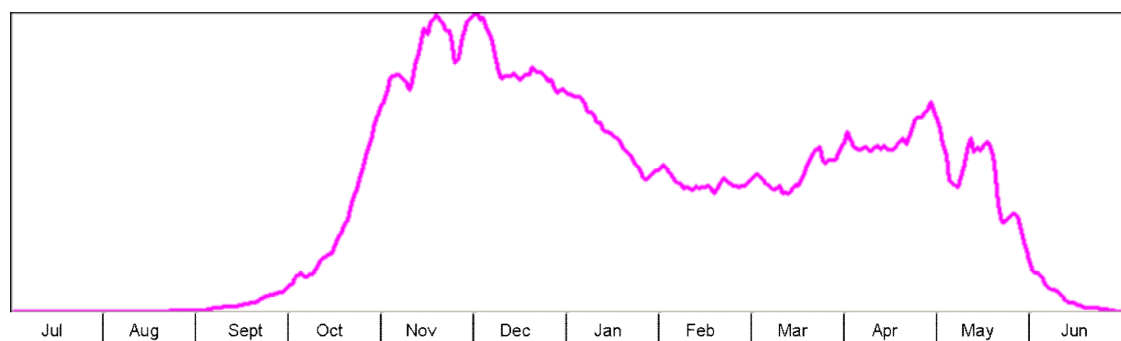
In 2010 sheep were monitored at GSARI (Katanning) and at Mt Barker was the first year of monitoring unmulesed maidens during pregnancy. Overall, there were relatively low levels of strike reported in research flocks during 2010 due to strategic use of crutching and chemical application combined with a favorable season.

At Mt Barker, the maiden ewes were monitored for strikes and showed no adverse problems during pregnancy or lactation. These ewes were crutched in mid September to reduce their susceptibility to flystrike. Scouring in this mob was closely monitored with an average dag score of 1.8 just prior to crutching and a worm egg count of 95 eggs per gram. During mid November there were some heavy rainfalls followed by warm humid weather, which meant optimum conditions for flystrike.

In the maiden ewe flock consisting of 235 ewes, three strikes were recorded, all of which were body strike. Fleece rot is a predisposing factor for body strike, with animals susceptible to fleece rot more likely to be affected by body strike. The moisture and bacterial growth often associated with fleece rot provides an ideal environment for blowflies to lay eggs. The AWI Visual Score Guide (below) on fleece rot should be used when assessing your flocks susceptibility to fleece rot.

Fleece rot				
				
Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5
No bacterial colouring or staining	Band of bacterial staining <10mm wide with no crusting.	Band of bacterial staining >10mm wide with no crusting	Band of crusting <5mm wide, with or without bacterial staining.	Band of crusting >5mm wide, with or without bacterial staining.

The below graph is from the Flystrike Risk Tool, available at www.flyboss.org.au, shows the relative risk of flystrike in non mulesed Merinos for the Mt Baker area. The height of the graph indicates the average flystrike risk relative to the highest risk period. The actual risk will vary greatly from week to week due to seasonal conditions.



The lambs from the maiden ewes were marked on the August 30, and received a preventative application of Clik® to the breech and body due to entering the highest risk period. Clik was used as it has one of the longest protection periods available and the lapse of the wool withholding period coincided with shearing.

After weaning, the lambs were run with cross-bred lambs that did not receive a preventative treatment. Two cross-bred lambs were struck during November, but no merino lambs were struck, demonstrating the importance of a strategically placed chemical treatment. Shearing of these lambs was planned for early December, to coincide with withhold period of Clik® wearing off, but was delayed three weeks. The delay in shearing saw two lambs body struck due to fleece rot. The risk of further strikes was high and as a result these lambs were backlined with Extinosad®.

The timing of shearing and crutching plays a vital role in managing flystrike and can give up to six weeks protection from breech flystrike. Shearing or crutching time should be planned to coincide with the start, or just before the usual start, of the fly season, keeping in mind withholding periods and protection periods of chemical preventatives.

The 2009 drop merino hoggets received a preventative chemical application of Vetrazin to the breech in early March after one animal was found to be fly struck and due to still being in the high risk period. Three more breech strikes were observed during June. Three out of the four struck animals had a dag score of four at the time of strike and the fourth animal was a dag score five at the time of strike. This further highlights the importance of controlling dags to reduce susceptibility to flystrike. A dag score four animal (figure below) can be up to seven times more susceptible to breech strike than a dag score one animal in the same mob.

