



CONNEWARRAN

MERINO STUD

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Greetings from all at the Connewarran Merino Stud. What a pleasure it is again this year to be writing to you about sheep and wool. Please find below some of the goings on at Connewarran in the past 12 months, and our endeavours to breed ever better sheep that can enable us all to continue to enjoy the fruits of our industry.

Richard, Jenny, Hamish and Eli Weatherly



SIRE EVALUATION TRIALS

Our commitment to annual independent benchmarking of Connewarran genetics continues. We currently have two sires entered in three trials. Connewarran 1002 is in the North East for the 2016 drop. Data collection is complete, but unfortunately we do not yet have an official report. From what we have seen so far it should be a reasonable all round result.

Connewarran 15024 is represented at Balmoral for the 2017 drop and as the link sire to Dookie for the 2018 drop. At Balmoral, things have started well. Data has been collected on weaning weight, breach wrinkle and breach cover. 15024 has ranked equal 3rd of 20 sires on weaning weight. Given that there are a number of studs that produce amongst the biggest sheep in the industry represented in the trial, and that 15024 is from our wool rather than carcass family, this is a very pleasing result. Eli and Hamish viewed progeny on farm in February and they were a very even group. Hopes are high that they will continue to perform.

15024's lambs had slightly more breach cover and wrinkle than the average of the Balmoral drop. It is worth noting that the Dookie trial is a non-mules trial. We hope that this will be another useful step in assessing the feasibility of running a non-mules operation with Connewarran genetics. Insemination is complete and 15024 has scanned the second highest number of foetuses of the 11 sires represented, so we should have reasonable numbers to judge from.

ROB RUSSELL

The team at Connewarran were extremely fortunate to welcome Rob Russel to our 2017 classing. Rob brings vast experience and expertise, great professionalism, and critically, an independent and unbiased eye to our stud deliberations for which we are extremely grateful. He will be with us again in 2018 and we hope for the foreseeable future. The 2018 drop lambs, the result of joining decisions agreed upon during Rob's first classing with us, are now on the ground and look extremely promising.



WORLD MERINO CONFERENCE: URUGUAY

Both Eli and Hamish had the pleasure and privilege of travelling to Uruguay in April this year as part of the Australian delegation to the World Merino Conference. We were impressed by the passion and professionalism of sheep breeders in Uruguay, the quality of their sheep, and their commitment to our industry. A particular inspiration was a 5,000 ha operation that mixed merinos and beef. The owner presented to us that historical rainfall had been 1200mm, but in recent years this had increased to 1500mm! Who says you can't run a successful merino enterprise in high rainfall areas?

Hamish and Eli issue our most sincere thanks to all those in Uruguay who extended such a wonderful welcome and hospitality. We'd also like to thank the hundreds of fellow merino breeders and new friends for their company and fellowship over what was a wonderful 10 days.

WORM RESISTANCE IN STUD SIRES

Last year we produced WEC ASBVs for clients for the first time, and intend to make this a permanent fixture in our data collection. One of the challenges regarding the generation of these figures is that our ‘top’ rams are typically housed in preparation for multivendor ram sales at the time the raw data is collected. This means that these sheep, which include many of our own future stud sires, are not able to be assessed along with their peers. In 2018, Connewarran purchased a microscope and all the component parts required to conduct Faecal Egg Counts. As such we will now be able to regularly assess our own stud sires and their susceptibility to worms under commercial conditions at critical times of the year. We hope to be able to make this information available in future years to support clients in making their purchasing decisions.

MULESING UPDATE: CLIPTRIAL

In spring 2017, as part of our ongoing on-farm research into the feasibility of ceasing mulesing Connewarran blood sheep, we trialled clips on approximately 200 spring born lambs. Clips are a breach modification alternative that can be declared as ‘non-mulesed’ on a wool specification. According to AWI, clips offer a reduction in pain, higher growth rates from marking to early post weaning (similar to growth rates of non-mulesed lambs), and can provide a reduction in breech wrinkle score and decreased urine stain and dags when compared to non-mulesed lambs.

In summary, we learnt that:

- The contractor felt that Connewarran blood sheep were well suited to clips, as their relatively loose skins made application easier and more effective
- Our personal observation was that, even if pain is reduced, clips still result in a high level of pain

- We did not feel that the breech was modified sufficiently to warrant the use of clips and that they tended to create a fold of skin on either side of the tail.

The lambs were treated with Dicyclanil in November and run through summer and early autumn before being shorn in mid-May. In a relatively benign fly-strike year, strike was approximately 1% in the clipped lambs and 0% in the mulesed. Interestingly, in the wether hoggets, which were treated with Dicyclanil in November and shorn in February in 9 months wool, there was zero fly strike in either the mulesed or non-mulesed sheep.

At this point, although indications are that ceasing mulesing is feasible, the Connewarran commercial and stud operations will continue to mules using pain relief. The 2018 drop Dookie sire evaluation trial will serve as the next phase of data collection regarding moving to a non-mules sheep. Subsequent on-farm trials are likely to feature mulesing on an 'as needed' basis, mulesing only 'high-risk' sheep. Such a strategy would allow us to record mules status and draft sheep into relevant lines for shearing, then declare and sell the wool accordingly.

RECOMMENDED READING:

MERINO SHEEP BREEDING, BY MURRAY ELLIOTT

Murray Elliott, one of the most experienced and insightful men in the Australian wool industry, has completed a new book! Murray has been involved with the Connewarran Merino Stud since its inception, and remains a mentor and inspiration to us all. As far as we are aware, there are few people who have classed more sheep in their lifetime, been involved with more world-class studs, or thought more deeply about them. As such, we hold his knowledge and ideas in the highest regard. Murray will be in the Connewarran tent at Sheepvention and, with a

cooperative publisher, will have his book available. We encourage all avid sheep breeders to drop by and say hello to Murray, get some soup and a brownie from Eli, and, subject to availability, pick up a copy of Murray's words of wisdom.

SURPLUS EWES

In recent years we have received enquiry for surplus ewes well beyond that which we can hope to fulfil. If you have Connewarran blood, or substantially Connewarran blood, ewes that you would be interested in selling directly, then please let us know and we can put you in contact with interested parties.

RAM SALES

This year, various commitments of the Connewarran team have led to the decision not to prepare and offer rams for sale at any of the major multi-vendor sales. Instead, for 2018 only, we will offer all rams at our on-property auction with the intention to return to Sheepvention and Ballarat in 2019. We will, however, maintain our display tent at Sheepvention and encourage you to pay us a visit. Great sheep will be on display, and Eli's legendary coffee, soup and brownies will be on offer!

We thank all clients, agents and helpers for their support in 2017. We had a strong sale at Sheepvention and also appreciated support in Ballarat. On-property, 60 rams were offered and cleared at an average price of \$1,525, with more sold subsequent to the sale. This year we will again be offering 60 rams by Helmsman auction. We remain mindful of providing appropriate supply and maintaining fair and reasonable prices. Consequently, we intend to have a further 16 rams available for mini-auction after the sale, should the sale be over-subscribed.

**WHERE YOU CAN SEE
CONNEWARRAN RAMS IN 2018**

6th and 7th August

Hamilton Sheepvention, Site 367 (No pen of 5 this year)

1 pm, Wednesday 17th October

Annual on-property ram sale

Any time

By appointment to inspect on property

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