



ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS – SEPTEMBER 2019 –

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MerinoLink Chairman's Report

It gives me great pleasure to present to you the 2018/19 MerinoLink Chairman's Report.

As I reflect on the year just past, I am overwhelmed with mixed feelings of highs and lows as the merino industry continued to shine with a strengthening wool market where demand was consistent and the price continued to rise to new records, "again" reaching an EMI of 2100c. The demand and price for lambs soared to levels never seen before and at levels which were hard to imagine only a couple of years prior. Re-stocker and trade merino lambs making between \$6.50 - \$9.00/kg and the demand for mutton pushing prices to new records of \$6.25/kg. It's hard to imagine that in the one year the sheep industry indicators for wool and meat were all broken. Unfortunately for much of NSW, QLD and some parts of VIC and SA the story has not all been perfect with the drought that started in 2017, continued into 2018, really taking its toll and putting its feet down, has worsened in 2019.

The drought in NSW particularly has and will continue to have a huge impact on the national sheep flock, with NSW being the biggest sheep producing state and breeding numbers on a steep decline. Many producers have been forced to reduce numbers as grain prices soared and hay became very hard to source. All that being said, the high prices received for meat and wool have made the decisions to continue to feed a bit easier and there is still optimism in the industry. Australia is a big land mass and there are some areas which have received good rain and the outlook is positive for those regions, it's a true reflection of the diverse environment that we as Australian wool growers operate in and will continue to strive and push the boundaries to survive this variable climate.

Once again, MerinoLink has had a very busy year as the business moves into its maturity stage, we are faced with a challenging environment in which to operate. The business has grown off the back of successful annual conferences, our involvement in industry projects and our ever-growing reputation and recognition has been a success to date. In 2018, the MerinoLink board recruited some new eyes to the table as Craig Wilson, Robert Mortimer and Sally Martin all founding directors stepped down from the board, as to did Steve Jervis. I would like to personally thank all four of the board directors for their guidance, contribution and commitment to MerinoLink, their input has been critical to the success of the organisation. As one door closed on the leaving board directors, the next one opened for a new set of eyes to the board with five new board directors putting their hand up to be part of the MerinoLink team, on that note I would like to welcome Jennifer Medway, Michael Field, Greg Sheather, Jock Nivison and Michelle Humphries. Each new board director comes with a diverse background and skillset which compliments the MerinoLink board and is in line with our objective to facilitate a skills-based board to lead the business.

During 2018, discussion with Sally Martin the founding CEO resulted in Sally stepping down as CEO of MerinoLink to focus on her passion as the Technical Advisor & Project Manager



for MerinoLink. Sally worked extremely hard to build the foundations of MerinoLink and her efforts as CEO need to be acknowledged. MerinoLink exists today because of her dedication and passion to breeding Merinos, and in her words, she is a “sheep tragic”.

Jason Letchford joined the MerinoLink team in December 2018 as the new CEO. Jason comes to MerinoLink with a broad knowledge of the industry being a son of a wool classer / shearing contractor and brings extensive experience in finance and accounting which includes holding roles as CFO. Jason has settled into MerinoLink in 2019 and had been busy learning the ropes and implementing processes to streamline the maturing organising. I would like to welcome Jason to the team and look forward to working with him in the future.

Sally Martin was instrumental in the development and approval of the DNA Stimulation project, which is and will continue to be a flagship project for MerinoLink. The MerinoLink and UNE DNA Stimulation project which is funded by MLA’s Donor company (50%) and participant (50%) is an exciting opportunity for MerinoLink to work with ram breeders, ram breeder clients and commercial breeders to increase their use of genetic and genomic tools currently available with the aim to double genetic gain in line with MLA’s National Livestock Genetic Consortium’s strategic direction by 2022.

The project is utilising genetic tools such as, DNA testing for studs and flock profiling for commercial producers. Sally alongside Tom Granleese from UNE are then working with studs one on one and commercial producers in workshops to better understand how these tools can assist them in making better breeding decisions. Although this project is still in its early stages, the potential industry benefit is extremely exciting.

The AWI funded – Merino Lifetime Productivity project (MLP) which is a joint project with Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA) continues on with the MerinoLink site at “The Vale” Temora. Marty Moses from Moses & Son owns is the site host and over the duration of the project his commitment and continual engagement in the project and its outcomes is commendable. This past year Temora has been extremely dry and drought feeding has been in place since February 2018. This is at a huge expense to Marty and I thank him on behalf of MerinoLink and the industry. A special thanks to AWI for their funding support towards feeding and commitment to the project.

The 2018/19 year saw both the 2016 and 2017 drop ewes being joined, resulting in the first year for the MerinoLink site to have reproduction data on both drops of F1 ewes. The MLP project is about capturing lifetime performance of breeding ewes and reproduction results is a critical outcome for this project. As the project is still in early days with the project coming to an end in 2024, it’s hard to predict the future, however the data that is being collected along with the experiences of all stakeholders involved is a huge success and I look forward to bringing the results to the MerinoLink membership over the next few years more results become available.

Sire Evaluation still remains a key stone project for MerinoLink and I believe will always be a focus as the outcomes of a genetic benchmarking platform is paramount for genetic



success in the industry. The 2017 Cavan Station SE was in its final stages in 2019 and special thanks must go to the team at Bogo Merinos for their continued support. This year at Bogo saw some climatic challenges, however the team continued to operate and run the sheep to ensure the desired outcomes were met.

In late 2018, an expression of interest to ram entrants for a 2019 joining was circulated and the number of interested participants resulted in the site being over subscribed for the proposed 2019 joining at Cavan Station. As such our Project Manager, Sally Martin was successful at securing a second site located on "Brooklyn" in Boorowa NSW. Across both sites there is 32 rams being evaluated of which 6 of these are link sires. It was a new era for AMSEA Link Sire project as sires selected for the 2019-2021 link sire funding from AWI will now have high linkage back to the MLP project providing additional data to both MLP and SE.

In June of 2019, MerinoLink hosted its annual conference in Armidale NSW. The move to Armidale was always going to be a risk, however the conference was a huge success and by all reports, a great couple of days for existing members that made their way to the New England and also welcomed a number of new attendees from the local area. 150 attendees were present at the conference and the following day we held our field day in conjunction with the New England MLP site at CSIRO in Armidale. This again was a great success and I would like to extend my thanks and congratulations to the conference organising committee led by Michael Field and Carmen Thackery the conference co-ordinator.

I am a firm believer that investment into R&D is critical for success and that success is driven by extension of R&D outcomes. As such, I am keen to see the team at MerinoLink focus our efforts to extend the messages and results to our network and beyond. The next 12 months for MerinoLink is going to prove our biggest challenge yet, we must embrace our knowledge and understanding of the merino industry and join forces to strengthen our organisation as we go into a new era of operation. The MerinoLink board will be working hard to develop our next steps and provide key strategic direction to the membership on how we are going to continue to deliver results to help make profitable decisions on the farm. We will look to enhance our relationships with industry peak bodies and align our activities with strategic outcomes.

Finally, to the MerinoLink board, I would like to thank you for your support and efforts over the past year and I look forward to working with you over the next 12 months.

Richard Keniry
MerinoLink Chairman



Members of MerinoLink Limited as at 31st August 2019

Member Category	Numbers -2014	Numbers (2015)	Numbers -2016	Numbers -2017	Numbers (2018)	Percentage %	Location	
Ram Breeder	24	26	28	46	37	20%	NSW	85%
Commercial Breeder	44	68	73	94	102	54%	VIC	7%
Service Provider	23	28	29	19	17	9%	QLD	2%
Sponsor/Supporters	5	9	10	9	9	5%	SA	2%
Student/U 25 years		12	13	6	9	5%	WA	2%
Affiliates					14	7%	TAS	1%
Total Members	96	143	153	175	188	100%	ACT	2%

MerinoLink Limited Current Board Members Jul 2018 – Jun 2019

Richard Keniry (Chairman)
Jock Nivison
David Davidson
Michael Field
Greg Sheather

Matt Crozier (Vice-Chairman)
Michelle Humphries
Rick Baldwin
Lexi Cesnik
Jen Medway

Annual Report Summary: FY2018-2019

Change of Management

The 2018-19 Financial Year has been a period of change for MerinoLink as it enters into a more challenging period, where current projects have moved from the start-up to a maturity phase and the challenges that come with that. Although there are some new extension projects in the pipeline, the next step for MerinoLink is to examine how it will grow, in the current economic environment.

As a consequence, the organisation has undergone numerous changes in management to face these challenges: In October 2018, Sally Martin made the decision to step away from the role as CEO in order to focus more on her passion of Project Management and Livestock Consulting. As a result of this, Sally and the MerinoLink Board recruited Jason Letchford to the role of CEO. Jason comes from a background in finance and agriculture making him an ideal fit for guiding MerinoLink through its next phase.

Challenging Environment

FY2020 will be MerinoLink's 9th year of operation and the Board and Management will need to consider the following:

The Project Management side of the business is cost recovery and is difficult to return profits from, with the realisation of lower margins to manage and administer projects. In addition to this, there is a flattening of its 'growth curve', in terms of attracting new members and the 'headwinds' facing the industries' major funding bodies Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA).

Both these organisations will have smaller buckets of funding for running new R&D projects in the foreseeable years. In addition to this, both are under greater scrutiny from stakeholders in terms of return of returns on investment, in the R&D space.

In summary, MerinoLink needs to find ways to add additional value to the management of these projects and future projects.

Conference and New Opportunities

On a positive note, the 2019 MerinoLink conference was the biggest conference to date with nearly 200 growers & industry participants registering their interest in the Armidale Conference and subsequent Field Day.

The post conference survey reinforced its success and made it clear that the Merino growing community continues to have strong desire to learn about research and extension projects in this space. The Conference was also effective in appealing to a wide range of demographics but it was especially pleasing to see the ongoing success of the 'Hour of Power' and the attendance of Agricultural students including a strong contingent of students from Charles Sturt University.

The 2020 Financial Year will see a new extension project kick off in conjunction with the University of New England (UNE) for the predictive software originally developed originally by the Sheep CRC, AskBill

This project aims to further develop the AskBill platform, while at the same time, give MerinoLink's membership base the opportunity to get greater benefit from such predictive, analytical tool.

This year will also see MerinoLink develop greater knowledge and awareness for members in the grazing management space. MerinoLink will team up with MAIA Grazing to deliver some information workshops, that will assist members to make better decisions around grazing management, especially in the current period of on-going low rainfall events in much of the eastern State's Merino growing areas

On-going Projects

MerinoLink Limited activities have focused on continuing a number of projects including:

- **Merino Lifetime Productivity Project (MLP):** - See Below for details
- **Sire Evaluation** at Cavan Station "Ravenswood", Yass: - See Below for details
- **Sire Evaluation** at "Brooklyn" in Boorowa.
- **DNA Stimulation Project:** 2019/20 will be year 3 of the joint-venture project between MerinoLink the University of New England (UNE) and project participants funded by the Meat and Livestock Donor Company (MDC) - See Below for further details
- **Wether Extension trial:** At the end of FY19, AWI and the Merinolink Board made the decision that the add on project to the Merino Lifetime Productivity Project, would not continue. This was based on a several factors but the drought conditions and the resulting increased cost of the project was a contributing factor along with the data collected to date providing enough information to accompany data from the ewes in the MLP - See Below for further details

Finances FY19

Change of Reporting Methodology

With the new management has come a different approach to reporting finances. In effect, the previous recording and reporting of finances was on a 'cash basis'. This approach has its benefits but can be less than ideal in a financial operation where project funds, through sponsorship and participant fees, are raised at the start of the project (or the start of a phase of the project) and where that funding is required to cover more than one financial year. In projects where this occurs, it has the effect of skewing the profitability of the project from one year to the next and the overall financial performance of the organisation.

This change in approach has seen the FY18 'draft' profit figure be revised down from \$284K to a loss of \$46K and the profit for FY19 being a loss of \$18.

The highlights of the Financial year were revenue from membership of \$34K and the conference, making a profit of \$43K.

See Finance Report prepared by Accountants RSM

Financial Forecast for FY20

In terms of income from projects, the finances for the DNA project are currently being restructured to a more 'user pay' system but are still on track to generate a profit of \$15k-20k profit per year.

This leaves the business with annual net income of around \$34K from membership, say \$15K from projects, plus \$25K from the conference (once Destination NSW sponsorship is removed) per annum, totalling \$75K. Further to this, there is \$74K in 'retained earnings' that may be drawn from, until greater revenue streams are sourced.



MerinoLink Membership Categories and Subscription Rates 2019/20

Below are the subscription rates for the various categories of membership for the current year. The Board will consider increasing these at its next meeting – being effective FY2020-21

There are 4 membership categories available.

Ram Breeders - \$495 (GST inclusive). Membership Benefits:

- Up to 2 people per membership. Additional people \$50.00 per person.
- Project and Industry updates
- Input into the content of the annual MerinoLink Conference.
- Reduced entry into the annual MerinoLink Conference.
- First preference and notification in entering sires or clients in MerinoLink performance trials, e.g. wether trials, sire evaluations and on farm demonstrations.
- Access to the MerinoLink run sire evaluations.
- Notification of all affiliated MerinoLink performance trial results – summary; directed to full reports; access to information on the members section of the MerinoLink website.
- Availability of cutting edge breeding technology, for you to trial and assist in its development and validation.
- Product purchasing power, for example electronic sheep technologies.
- Two way communication with industry leaders.
- Opportunities to have input into research trial development.
- To have a collective voice on issues that impacts our industry and your business.

Commercial Breeders - \$195 (GST inclusive) Membership Benefits:

- Up to 2 people per membership. Additional people \$50.00 per person.
- Project and Industry updates
- Input into the content of the annual MerinoLink Conference.
- Reduced entry into the annual MerinoLink Conference (MerinoLink member rates).
- Notification of all affiliated MerinoLink performance trial results – summary; directed to full reports; access to information on the members section of the MerinoLink website.
- Product purchasing power, for example electronic tag technologies.
- Priority preference and notification in entering sires or clients in MerinoLink benchmark, performance trials.
- Opportunities to have input into research trial development.
- To have a collective voice on issues that impacts our industry and your business.
- To be better informed and be more active in the Australian sheep industry.



Individual Service Provider - \$396 (GST inclusive) Membership Benefits:

- Project and Industry updates
- Notification of all affiliated MerinoLink performance trial results – summary; directed to full reports; access to information on the members section of the MerinoLink website.
- Reduced entry to annual MerinoLink Conference (MerinoLink member rates).
- Notification of sheep technology trial information and opportunities to have input into research trial development and to have a collective voice on issues that impact our industry and your business.

Under 25 years - \$55 (GST inclusive) Membership Benefits:

- Project and Industry updates
- Notification on upcoming events and youth opportunities, for example Peter Westblade Scholarship and Breeding leadership programs.
- Provide mentoring opportunities and networks.
- Reduced entry to annual MerinoLink Conference (MerinoLink member rates).

MerinoLink Board Directors 2018/2019



Rich Keniry (current MerinoLink Chair) is a commercial wool breeder currently managing the family business, Kildara Pastoral Company based in Cumnock NSW. Kildara is 2500 ha grazing property where we run a mixed wool and sheep meat operation with approximately 250ha of grazing cereals each year. My father purchased the property in 1998, at this time the business was a mixed sheep, cattle and cropping operation and since 2008 the business has been 100% sheep focused.

Originally from Sydney the purchase of the farm in 1998 gave me an opportunity to explore & learn an unknown field, I worked on and off the property until 2005 when I finally decided to stay. I studied a Bachelor of Agriculture at the University of New England, Armidale and previously completed an Advanced Diploma of Marketing. In 2008, I spent 3 years with Virbac Animal health as their Sheep Product Manager and in 2012, I returned home to the family property with my wife Belinda.

I am extremely passionate about the sheep industry and believe that with the advances in technology and the availability of quality information sheep breeders have available to assist in decision making on farm, the future of the sheep industry is exciting.

I believe that with the right focus and dedication to research the future of the wool and sheep meat industry is positive and that is why I became a member of MerinoLink. I believe that commercial breeders should have access to relevant data and research that stud breeders do to help them make informed decisions and MerinoLink is a fantastic opportunity for commercial breeders to access this information.



David Davidson grew up in the Young district and has been involved with the NSW Farmers and NSW Royal Agricultural Society. David runs a commercial merino breeder whose contribution to the board is from a farm perspective. He manages a mixed farming family business, west of Young, NSW, with his wife, Belinda and son, Sam. "The business is 50% cropping and remainder Merino wool, merino breeding, first cross and second cross lamb production and some cattle. We rely heavily on grazing crops for continued provision of fodder to maintain year-round production. Cropping also allows us establishment of excellent pastures for our grazing enterprises."

David is involved at a local level with the NSW Farmers' Association, but more-so with the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW as a Councillor, where he is a member on a number of committees, including Sheep and Fleece.

“MerinoLink has developed the unique ability to participate in and manage sheep industry research activities and disseminate that important information to its members, be they woolgrowers, stud breeders or service providers, as well as the industry at large.”



Matt Crozier is the General Manager of Cavan Station and Bogo Merino and Poll Merino Studs based at Yass. Cavan Station operates a large commercial flock of approx. 35,000 merino sheep joining around 15,000 ewes and a self-replacing Angus cattle herd of 1400 breeding cows. Bogo produces productive, commercially focused, balanced merino rams for an array of clients throughout NSW and VIC.

Matt cut his teeth jackerooing at F S Falkiner company properties Boonoke, Wanganella, Zara and Barratta before heading off to study Agriculture and Farm Management at Wagga and Orange Ag colleges. After managing his family grazing operations at Bungendore throughout the 1990's Matt turned his hand to futures trading speculating on interest rate, currency and agricultural commodity futures. After a 5 year stint in the financial markets Matt returned to the Southern Tablelands to manage various grazing and mixed farming properties for various clients before settling at Cavan 7 years ago.

Matt has been a member of MerinoLink for 6 years and is passionate about promoting the merino industry as a profitable and rewarding enterprise and career choice. Matt is a sponsor and advocate of the Peter Westblade Scholarship program and actively assists young people in the development of their careers in the sheep and wool industry.



Lexi Cesnik grew up on a commercial farm at Tarcutta, NSW on which her family run Merino Sheep. She completed an Undergraduate course in Agriculture at Charles Sturt University in 2014, and also the Post-graduate certificate in Agricultural Consulting through University of New England in 2017.

During her time at university she was a part of the Australian Wool Innovations, National Merino Challenge (AWI NMC) for 2 years. The AWI NMC presented many sides of the Merino industry include new and emerging technologies within the sheep industry, which was the main factor in her choice to pursue a career in the sheep and wool industry.

In 2015 Lexi received a position within MLA donor Companies Livestock Consulting Internship Project (facilitated by Meridian Agriculture) as an employee of Sally Martin Consulting (Young)

and Moses & Son Wool broking (Temora). Lexi's Role within the Livestock Consulting Internship was extremely dynamic and flexible. Through the internship Lexi had the opportunity to make meaningful contribution to the sheep and wool industry by running an Industry Supported Project (Vitamin and Supplement trial), as well as a project for the MLA Donor company (benefits and Barriers to the adoption of Precision Sheep Management). Lexi's passions lie in the areas on increasing on farm efficiencies through the use of Precision Management and helping the next generation of industry specialists make it happen.

Lexi Joined MerinoLink to increase her knowledge and skills and also to be surrounded by likeminded people who are passionate about sheep and wool production and increasing the productivity, profitability and sustainability of this amazing industry. Lexi wishes to become a MerinoLink board member to help ensure the future of quality independent sheep research and also the adoption of technologies that are available to stud and commercial producers.



Michelle Humphries graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science from the University of Sydney in 1984 and has since worked in the commercial field of sheep artificial breeding. She established Livestock Breeding Services Pty Ltd, an advanced reproduction technology company in 1985. Michelle also runs a Merino breeding enterprise at Jerilderie, NSW.

She has a keen interest in practical Merino genetics and management, and all facets of R&D in the sheep industry. She collaborates with RDCs and universities as a commercial partner in research projects.

Michelle is a Board Director and member of many industry groups and associations including the Murray Local Land Services, Australian Veterinary Association Sheep Veterinarians and the Ruminant Genetics Trade Advisory Group for the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. This list also now includes MerinoLink Limited.

Michelle's role in the sheep industry is currently being extended into the area of Emergency Animal Diseases with Foot and Mouth Disease training in Nepal and training for the Consultative Committee in Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) with Animal Health Australia (AHA).

Michelle's vision for MerinoLink is for an expanding role in project delivery and data collection and to be a conveyor of relevant information to members in a succinct and accessible format. Michelle has a strong belief that genomic technologies (for example targeted genome editing of CRISPR-CAS9) will play a significant role in the development of a modern Merino which is both productive and resistant to disease, and that MerinoLink is well positioned to be an important contributor in the collection of genomic data. Michelle sees MerinoLink as a valuable network for like-minded Merino breeders and service providers, and encourages an increased collaboration with other industry bodies and universities.



Jock Nivison is a third generation owner/manager of “Yalgoo” and has an Advanced Diploma in Rural Business Management from Marcus Oldham. Yalgoo is a diverse seedstock and commercial livestock business consisting of 33 000 DSEs. Yalgoo is situated on the northern tablelands and consists of 5 enterprises. All Yalgoo enterprises are managed with commercial discipline and genetic gain is driven by objective measurement and scientific enhancement. Jock is a firm believer in maximising and capturing genetic gain in livestock enterprises in an effort to assist clients achieve target EBITs/DSE.

Jock has been involved with industry and technical roles in both the wool and beef industry. Jock was a nominee for NSW Farmer of the year in 2016. And was awarded 2017 Australian Sheep farmer of the year.



Michael Field is proud to be a 4th generation wool grower, and particularly proud to be a part of MerinoLink. He was a founding member of MerinoLink and continues to support all of the organisations aims and to-date achievements. Michael feels that MerinoLink is one of the few organisations he can go to for reputable and practical research. Michael is re-joining the Board of Directors for a second tenure after having previously served MerinoLink.

Michael and his family run 3 large wool growing operations across 3 very different climatic regions in which each present their own challenges. Support is vital to the ongoing success for MerinoLink, and the Field family will continue to sponsor such events as the “Hour of Power” at the MerinoLink annual conference.

“The Merino ewe is a wonderful animal, and we need to continually look after her, and continue to increase her productive capacity through further genetic development.”

Michael has 3 children who may decide to come back to the family business, and one of his aims is to increase the value of the family holdings in an environmentally sustainable and financial manner, whilst continually looking after and attracting good staff.



Greg Sheather is married with 3 grown children, was born and spent his first 46 years on a small family farm in the high rainfall area of Tooma in the Upper Murray region of NSW. From a small base of only 120ha of purchased land, and with strategic leasing he was running up to 7,000 fine wool merinos.

In 2006 he accepted a management position in Tasmania and spent 8 years there before returning to the mainland. He now manages a 1600ha commercial merino breeding enterprise based at Bookham NSW for commercial investors under the CACM umbrella. He is an

enthusiastic supporter of the use of ASBV's in a targeted breeding program without losing the valuable visual assessment of animals.

He has a passion for merino sheep and genetics and sees MerinoLink as being at the leading edge of profitable merino breeding and an ideal vehicle to disseminate this information to the wider merino breeding industry.



Jen Medway is a fifth generation farmer from Gunning, NSW where she helps run a successful commercial merino sheep enterprise in partnership with her husband and three children. Jen sees a strong future for quality food and fibre production and is introducing new technologies and management practices to ensure they continue to grow their fine wool and first cross lamb operation.

In 2003, Jen graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics (Hons), starting her career with the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Jen is currently Manager of Research and Innovation at AgriFutures Australia where she is responsible for delivering AgriFutures' National Challenges and Opportunities Arena, which invests \$7m annually in strategic research, innovation and collaborative partnerships.

Previously, Jen managed AgriFutures' Investing in People Program, including the Rural Women's Award and Horizon Scholarship Program and was the Executive Officer of Tablelands Farming Systems. She is also actively involved in a number of local community groups in the Gunning region.

Jen is passionate about increasing the profitability of Australia's agriculture sector and is keen to ensure MerinoLink is a future-thinking organisation, providing sound information, resources and results for its members. It is important for MerinoLink to continue to build its strong foundation in providing objective, technical knowledge on all aspects involved in improving Australia's commercial merino breeding performance.



Rick Baldwin was the founding chair of MerinoLink Limited 2012-2014, and is the Co-Principle of Bundilla Merino Stud. Rick has been actively involved in all aspects of production based merino breeding and assessment for the last 20 years.

The MerinoLink Group allows merino breeders to network and drive industry issues that the forum believes will have a positive impact on the future profitability of merino enterprises, and that is why Rick is very excited to be part of the MerinoLink Group.

Key Personnel



Jason Letchford (MerinoLink CEO) – spent his formative years growing up in shearing sheds. As the son of a shearing contractor (and woolclasser), he spent most of his senior school holidays and university holidays working as a rouseabout and presser. He was discouraged from staying in the industry and enrolled at Queensland Ag College and later graduated from Queensland University with a Degree in Business.

After his studies, Jason initially spent a couple of years working for the London based Foreign Exchange Broker, MW Marshall but the recession ‘we had to have’ in the early 90s, saw him driving a truck for the next year and a half before starting on the Sydney Futures Exchange trading floor. Jason was a ‘local’ trader on the Trading Floor until it closed at the end of 1999. This led him to the accounting industry where he spent 5 years working for a Chartered Accounting firm. This experience took him to the role of Financial Controller for IT firm before progressing to being a CFO for business consultants WDScott Ltd and then Finance Director of sports brand-licensing agency, Velocity Brand Management Pty Ltd.

In 2004, he ‘completed-the-loop’ and took on a part-time committee position of Secretary-Treasurer of the shearing industry’s peak body, the Shearing Contractors Association of Australia. He still holds this position. Jason lives in Sydney, with his wife and three daughters.



Felicity Harris (MerinoLink Administration Manager) is the engine room behind MerinoLink’s administration and office management. Recruited as a replacement to Rachel Gawne who took maternity leave, Felicity has stepped up to the challenge of running the back office of a small business on very small budgets and confidently turns her hand to all tasks.

Felicity, has worked in business administration for the past 15 years in a variety of industries, giving her a broad depth of knowledge and experience. She grew up in Sydney but ‘green-changed’ to Orange NSW, where she enjoys rural life on a small farm with her two children, husband and a plenty of chooks, horses and sheep.



DNA SIMULATION PROJECT

MERINOLINK & UNIVERSITY NEW ENGLAND (UNE)

Project Aim

The aim of the MerinoLink & UNE DNA Stimulation project team is to work with a group of seed stock and commercial breeders to increase their use of genetic and genomic tools currently available with the aim to double genetic gain in line with the MLA's National Livestock Genetic Consortium's strategic direction by 2022.

The project also aims to genetically benchmark a cross section of the commercial breeders in Western Australia, NSW and Victoria (however the project is not limited to these states). The project team will work with the commercial breeder participants to explore the use of ASBVs in conjunction with their current ram selection practices and how to understand and interpret the Genomic Flock Profile for the best results.

Project Introduction

The MerinoLink & University of New England (UNE) UNE DNA Stimulation project is a partnership with UNE, MerinoLink, MLA Donor Company and the project Participants which includes 26 Merino ram breeders and up to 200 commercial Merino breeders.

How will this project be different?

The MerinoLink & UNE DNA Stimulation project is not about testing whether genetic tools work or the implementation of single tools in set situations but taking the best tools and knowledge from our world leading researchers and delivering it through service providers and ram breeders to commercial producers and building a supported system to best use the genetic tools in industry. The project will focus on capacity building and working collaboratively at all levels within and across the industry.

Project Funding

The MerinoLink & UNE DNA Stimulation project is funded on a 50:50 basis with project participants and the MLA Donor Company. The project has been instigated by MerinoLink Limited and is managed by MerinoLink and supported by the University of New England. The project will work with 26 ram breeders and up to 200 commercial breeders across Australia.

Merino Lifetime Productivity Project

(2016 – 2023)

AUSTRALIAN MERINO SIRE EVALUATION ASSOCIATION (AMSEA)

About the Project

The Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project has been designed to capture lifetime data from diverse



environments, genetics and Merino types that will help us better understand and deliver lifetime performance outcomes for the Australian Merino industry. The project is funded by entrants and Australian Wool Innovation and offers a unique opportunity to answer many industry questions.

Project Sites

The MLP project runs on five sites where sire evaluation trial operates for the first two years and then the MLP project continues to measure the performance of ewe progeny over four to five joinings and annual shearings. The ewe progeny will be annually assessed for visual and objective traits.

The MerinoLink site is located at The Vale, Barmedman Road, Temora. The Host property is owned and operated by Marty Moses (Moses & Son) and has been generously offered to MerinoLink to conduct research trial and projects on. In June 2019, the MerinoLink Board made a decision to change the site management to being run by the site host, Moses & Son to pick up on the efficiencies of the site being managed by the site management, in-line with the other MLP sites.

How it Works

The MerinoLink site Foundation ewes were sourced from Bluechip Livestock Sire Evaluation progeny, Bundilla, Centre Plus, Pooginook and a Pooginook commercial client. All ewes except the Pooginook client had ASBV's. The ewes were randomly allocated to each sire group for AI. The F1 progeny from this AI program form the basis of the MLP Project. The F1 ewes have been evaluated as per a normal sire evaluation (with some additional visual classing and objective measurement collected) for the first 22 months. Following the Sire Evaluation component of the MLP

Project the F1 ewes will be assessed and measured for wool, carcase and reproduction traits for up to 6 joinings. MerinoLink host an annual MLP field day to show case the project. To date 4 field days have been held, March 2016, October 2017, March 2018 and most recently in March 2019. Below is a list of sires participating at the MerinoLink site.

MerinoLink Sire Evaluation

(2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019)

AUSTRALIAN MERINO SIRE EVALUATION ASSOCIATION (AMSEA)

About the Project

MerinoLink coordinates a number of Merino Sire Evaluation sites across Southern NSW. Sites have been run near Jugiong, Temora and Yass NSW with a new site coming on board in 2019 near Boorowa NSW. All sites run under the auspices of the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA).



Merino Sire Evaluation is a progeny testing program that has been running in Australia since 1989 and currently operates at 10 sites located across Australia. Sire Evaluation is largely funded by ram breeders through entry fees with some sponsorship and funding from AWI.

How it Works

Merino Sire Evaluation uses foundation ewes at the host site that are distributed evenly across each sire being evaluated. The foundation ewes are artificially inseminated and lambed down in singles and twin mobs to maximise progeny numbers. At MerinoLink Sire Evaluation sites, all the foundation ewes and progeny are DNA Parent tested to identify full pedigree and early birth and rear type data.

The progeny are run together for the duration of the evaluation and measured or assessed for both objective and visual traits. The progeny are also randomly classed to identify tops (25%) flocks (50%) and culls (25%). The tops and culls are then reported in the site reports at each assessment stage and in the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation publication Merino Superior Sires annually.

Key industry sires are evaluated at the MerinoLink sites including sires from the following ram breeders: Adina (NSW); Billandri Poll Merinos (WA); Bogo Merinos (NSW); Boudjah (NSW); Bundilla Merinos (NSW); Centre Plus (NSW); Centre Plus (WA); GRASS Merinos (NSW); Greendale (NSW); Hazeldean (NSW); Kerin Poll (NSW); Mumblebone Merinos (NSW); Nerstane (NSW); Pastora Poll (NSW); Pooginook (NSW); Rocklyn Merinos (NSW); Roseville Park (NSW); Wattle Dale Merinos (WA); Weealla Merinos & Poll Merino Stud (NSW); Willandra Poll Merino Stud (NSW); Woodpark Poll (NSW).

Merino Wether Extension Project

(2017–2019. Completed)

About the Project

The Merino Wether Extension Project will value add to the existing Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) Project and Standard Sire Evaluation sites by measuring the post weaning and yearling meat traits of the 2016 MerinoLink MLP F1 wethers, and the adult wool and weight traits of the 2017 MerinoLink & Monaro Farming Systems Sire Evaluation (Yass) and the 2017 MLP F1 wethers. A total of 42 progeny groups and 40 Merino sires will be evaluated for additional traits.

How it Works

The three evaluations (mentioned above) have linkage to other Standard Sire Evaluations and the Merino Lifetime Productivity (MLP) project sites. The project will assess the wether progeny for meat and wool traits at post weaning, yearling, hogget and adult stages to produce genetic and phenotypic comparisons. The data collected will also be used to generate a farming system report to highlight the profitability per head and per hectare under different breeding objectives.



Past Projects

Sheep Supplement Trial – completed

MerinoLink Limited and Charles Sturt University (Veterinary Faculty) submitted a joint project to the NSW Sheep Advisory Committee (administering the OJD Levy on behalf of the NSW Government, NSW DPI) to investigate the cost benefit of a number of vitamin, mineral and trace element supplementations for sheep on the market.

eID Tag Demonstration and Evaluation – completed

A Project to trial electronic tags for sheep. MerinoLink with the assistance of Moses & Son set up a trial to evaluate five (5) different tag options currently on the market.

Genomic Demonstration and Validation project – completed

MerinoLink was successful in securing funding from Australian Wool Innovation to demonstrate and validate the commercial use of the Genomics Tools developed by the Sheep CRC in a ram breeding operation.

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