

## **To Animal Health Australia, Public Consultation**

### **Response to Discussion Paper “Sheep Standards and Guidelines – Mulesing’ prepared by the Sheep Standards and Guidelines Writing Group, January 2013.**

This response addresses the section within this paper on ‘Progress With Alternative Breech Fly Strike Controls’ and specifically the claim that ‘Overall, genetic progress is slow but steady with a timeframe of many years to complete solutions in breeding.’

I am a veterinarian who designs and implements the Merino sheep breeding programs on 40 studs throughout Australia and across all sheep raising environments. All studs have ceased mulesing, the first in 2001, most by 2008, and the most recent in 2012. Collectively we produce and sell over 11,000 Merino rams annually. A survey I conducted in 2005 of commercial Merino breeders following similar selection procedures – ie. plain bodied wrinkle free Merinos – showed that 50% were prepared to stop mulesing immediately.

The transition from a sheep that is wrinkly and requires mulesing to a sheep that is plain bodied and does not need to be mulesed is less than 5 years, and in some cases as rapid as 3 years. It is not true in my experience to say that progress towards mules free status for Merino sheep is a slow process that takes ‘many years’ to complete. These mules-free sheep are already out there in large numbers and are naturally resistant to all forms of flystrike including the most severe and challenging body strike outbreaks during wet summers. There is no reduction in wool quality and quantity, in fact we have observed improvements, and definitely the environmental fitness, vigour, and fecundity of these animals have improved. Ample evidence can be presented to the Animal Health Australia (AHA) in the form of documented results, property visits, and testimonials.

The only reason I can see for the claim that the transition towards a sheep that does not require mulesing is ‘slow’ is that the adoption of appropriate selection procedures has been inexcusably slow.

### **Response to Discussion Paper “Sheep Standards and Guidelines – Tail Docking’ prepared by the Sheep Standards and Guidelines Writing Group, January 2013.**

I am a veterinarian who designs and implements the Merino sheep breeding programs on 40 studs throughout Australia and across all sheep raising environments. On one of these studs, Parkdale Poll Merino Stud, Dubbo, NSW, we have bred Merino sheep with naturally short tails by infusing the short tailed genes from the Finnish Landrace sheep into Merino sheep. We now have many short tailed sheep in the flock.

Compelling evidence was already available from AgriResearch in New Zealand where it was shown that short tailed breeds such as the Finnish Landrace can be used to rapidly reduce tail length in Romney sheep. The short tail trait is highly heritable (70%).

The short tailed Merino sheep we have bred have excellent muscular control which allows the tail to be elevated clear of the urine stream. With half length, the sheep do not need to be tail docked, and the under surface and sides of the tail are mostly free of wool. Tails which are about half this length again, or equivalent to a tail ending slightly below the tip of the vulva in ewes, are also starting to appear, and this seems to be the final length that will be reached.

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