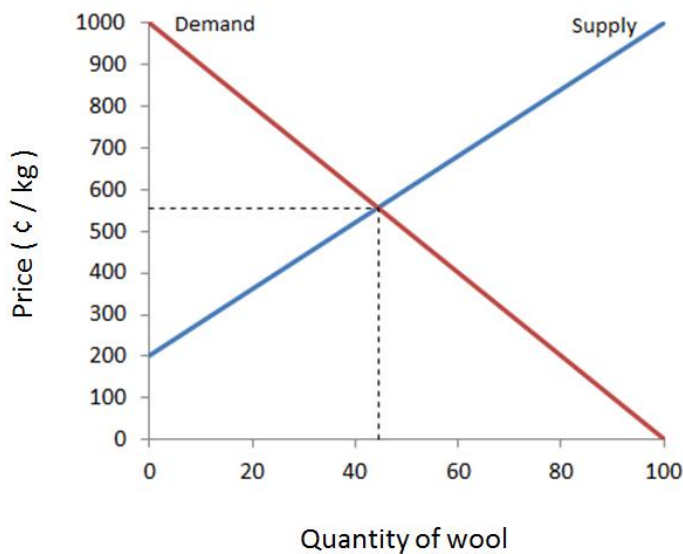


The Dohne in Australia
John Nadin
President, Australian Dohne Breeders' Association

BACKGROUND

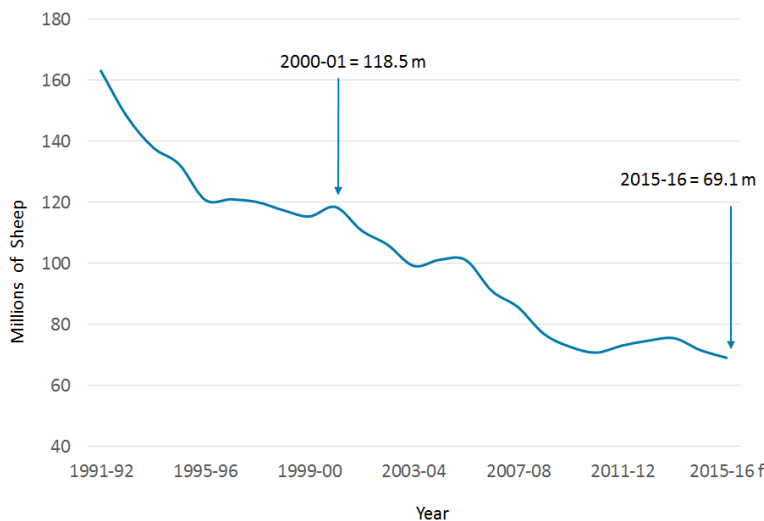
After the collapse of the reserve price scheme in February 1991 the Australian sheep industry was in a crisis with a huge stockpile of wool.

At its peak, the stockpile consisted of 4.8 million bales of wool costing wool levy payers and tax payers \$3 million dollars per day in interest and storage.



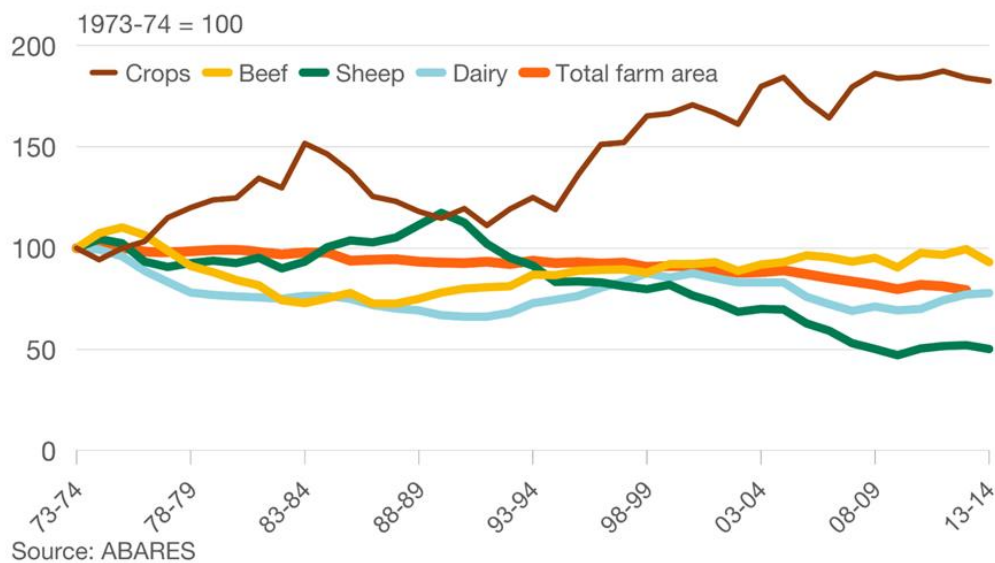
This stockpile was finally cleared in August 2001. However, the world stockpile of wool in various forms was estimated to only have dried up within the last few years, hence the relatively recent rally in the wool market.

By 2011 wool had gone from Australia's biggest export earner to 24th. The sheep flock, which in 1990 was 173 million, had dropped to the lowest level in 100 years at 68 million in 2010.



CHANGES IN FARM LAND USE

Australian sheep farmers found themselves in an unprofitable situation.



This led to two scenarios;

1. A move out of sheep and into cereal cropping and cattle
2. The move away from wool production into fat lamb production
3. Introduction of non-wool producing sheep breeds such as the Dorper and Damara

THE DOHNE PROVIDED

Later in the decade, new breeds were on the agenda as import regulations freed up the movement of sheep genetics from some countries.

The opening up of access to the South African sheep genetics gave Australian sheep farmers an alternative that they needed to make their operations profitable. The majority of these sheep were non-wool producers.

Many sheep breeds came to Australia from South Africa providing Australian farmers with a smorgasbord of choice.

For those farmers still believing that wool was a valuable commodity in their enterprise, their choice was limited to the SAMM (South African Mutton Merino) and the Dohne.

The Dohne's development in South Africa had been well defined, with the breeding objective to improve meat, wool, and reproductive traits.

The Dohne presented a very different alternative for Australian sheep producers. With an emphasis on both meat and wool traits, it presented the opportunity to have a true dual purpose sheep. This provided an alternative to the wool focused fine or medium Merino and meat-focused specialist prime lamb breeds that have traditionally made up Australian sheep enterprises.

The Dohne was first introduced into Australia in 1998 and the Australian breed society formed in 2000.

The maternal qualities of the Dohne ewe proved perfect for Australian conditions; hardy, resilient, fertile and rear high-performance lambs.

Australia's diverse climate is amongst the harshest and most unreliable in the world. From 800mm summer rainfall in the northern tablelands, 895mm winter rainfall in the southern tablelands, 620mm winter/summer rainfall in the central sheep/wheat belt, 240mm rainfall in the semi-arid pastoral zone, 575mm South Western winter rainfall with some of the highest number of wet days recorded nationally to the 990mm winter rainfall in the snow-laden far south of Australia.



What we inherited from the South Africans was a highly fertile breed producing a prime lamb carcass with fine, high crimp frequency merino wool with excellent fibre diameter and comfort factor figures.

Australian breeders enhanced these inherited characteristics and quickly set about breeding Dohnes suited to their environment by improving the wool characteristics for high summer rainfall regions (bright, soft, deep crimping), feet structure in areas with extremely wet winters on soft black soil and high protein pastures and the wool yield (deep crimping, well nourished, long-stapled, medium/64s fleece) in the harsh dry pastoral zone.



However, it was a slow process for two reasons;

1. The longer a breed has been line bred the slower the rate of change.
2. We could not sacrifice the carcass traits and growth rates for the sake of wool quality.

COMPLIANCE

From the outset, compliance was always going to be an issue. With high labour costs, most enterprises struggled with the high level of recording. Unfortunately, this led to the demise of many studs. Some studs adopted DNA testing for the pedigree but this proved too expensive for most producers.

Pedigree matchmaker was an alternative but only suited those breeders with small paddocks. Smart tags will be used for the first time this year which will be the most affordable and hopefully alleviate pedigree compliance.



THREE GENERATIONS ON

The Dohne in Australia has gone from strength to strength. Conformation, wool character, staple length, and colour have all improved significantly. Many commercial and stud breeders are now shearing at 6 or 8 month intervals.

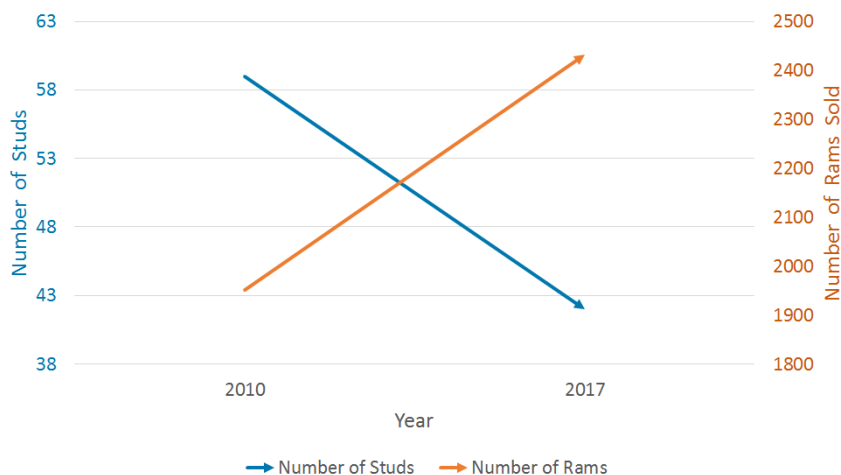
The Dohne's influence over the national sheep flock during the past 20 years has been profound. The Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia national sheep survey has listed the Dohne's percentage of the national flock at over 20% for the last 6 years.

What is not recorded is the undeclared genetic influence the Dohne has had in Poll Merino studs nationally.

The growth rates, carcass shape, fecundity, doing ability and quality apparel wool has the Dohne leading the way in the Australian sheep industry.

Over the years we have seen a natural attrition in registered studs. However, our current members are selling more rams at a higher average. Across Australia in 2010, 59 studs sold 1951 rams at auction for an average of \$ 1387. In 2017, 42 studs sold 2432 rams at auction for an average of \$ 1539. The breeders that remain are dedicated Dohne breeders, producing a quality, competitive product.

These breeders can hold their heads high as they are responsible for the improvement in the maternal characteristics and the 'type' of the modern Australian Merino.



THE FUTURE

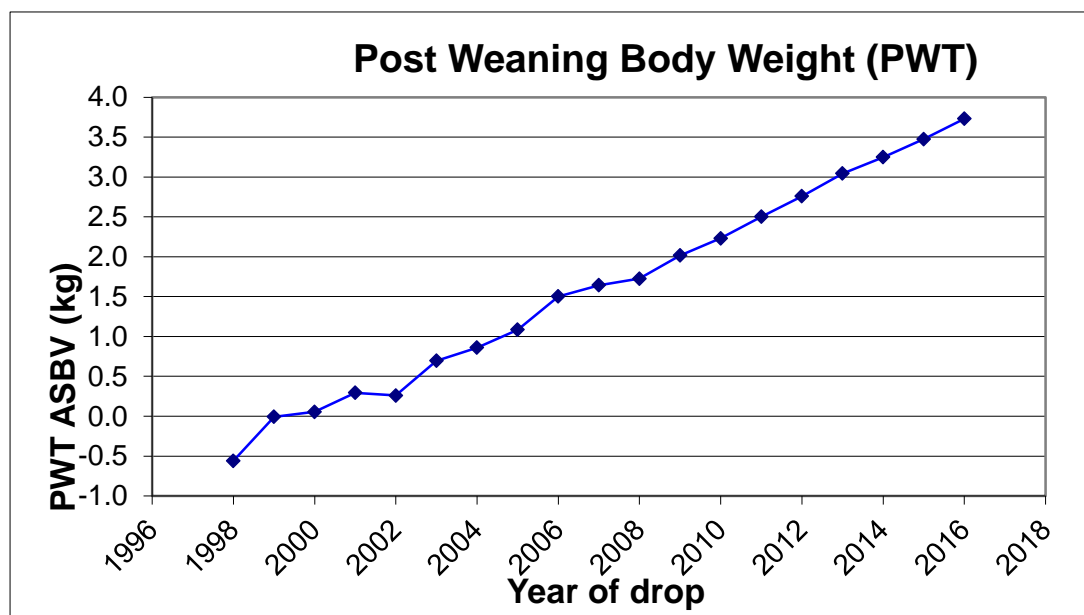
Moving forward, we as a council must ensure that our system is relevant to the direction at which the Dohne needs to head.

While ASBVs are necessary, they are only as good as the quality and accuracy of data that is provided by breeders.

Whatever the system/s we work with into the future, we must ensure the commercial relevance at all times.

It's imperative that we as breeders and classers differentiate our type. Many dual-purpose breeds have existed but few have survived (Bond, Comeback, Cormo, Rambouillet, Corriedale, Polwarth, Zenith). Once we lose our type and infuse other breeds into our breed we risk becoming a cottage breed or disappear altogether.

In an ever increasingly competitive market along with the dramatic increase in land values, it has never been more important to measure the production dollar value in kilograms of meat and wool produced per breeding ewe and in relation to the ewe's body weight. This put into dollar terms is what commercial growers can relate to. This needs to be explored with the aim of running parallel with ASBVs.



As we increase the growth rates we must be mindful of the potential increase in adult body weight. Many breeds are facing this dilemma and to stay abreast it is imperative that we start weighing and recording adult ewes.

Worldwide intensive and extensive animal raising is coming under increasing pressure from animal welfare groups. This pressure will not abate. Ethically, as an apparel wool producer, the Dohne stands alone with a natural bare breech eliminating the need for mulesing. We, as an organisation has let go an opportunity in marketing our ethically raised product to the world. However, it's not too late!

This is something that Australian breeders must embrace or a real opportunity will go begging.

I believe that we still have many years of genetic depth within Australia, especially with the potential to increase the number of ewes being graded into the nucleus flock. However, this is not the view of all breeders. It will become essential that we can import genetics once again from South Africa.

The Dohne is a credible breed recognised and respected throughout the industry. This has come about by members producing a quality product and an active council, a council working for the breed. Australian breeders can be proud of the influence the Dohne has had over the national sheep flock.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately it's the seed stock breeders that will determine the future of the breed, not the ASBVs nor the show ring nor the assessors. Chasing short-term markets and losing the long-term vision laid down 88 years ago will be the downfall.

The maternal traits, growth rates, and the unmeasured doing ability are what shape our breed. We are a global breed, a breed that ticks all the boxes. Until we truly believe this as breeders; believe in the type, the make and shape, we will be constantly treading water.

The South Africans provided us with a revolutionary breed, we continued the evolution by developing the breed to handle Australian conditions. The goal is to keep revolutionising.

This will come from balance; not from ASBVs alone, it will come from passionate, dedicated and experienced sheep breeders that understand what a Dohne is.

Congratulations are extended to the South Africans on their magnificent national ram sale. The advertising and credibility the breed derives from these sale results is unsurpassed.

We unsuccessfully tried to conduct a national sale on numerous occasions in numerous locations. What we didn't inherit from the South Africans was unity amongst breeders.

We must unite both domestically and internationally if we are to succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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