

# AMS NEWS

## The Australian Merino Society

(Incorporated)

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### Contents

• President's Report	1
• Annual General Meeting	2
• Prime time Pt3/08 Update	5
• Eneabba Flock Report	6
• Merino Validation Project and Progeny Testing	7
• 2004/2005 AI Program	7
• Murray River 2005	7
• Website	8
• 33 <sup>rd</sup> AGM 12 August 2005	8

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## Executive 2004/2005

### PRESIDENT

Ashley Hobbs 9642-1379

### VICE PRESIDENT

Ray Morgan 9954-1014

### COMMITTEE

Robert Beard 9636-2064

Wayne Cheriton 9625-1291

Ian Hesford 9075-7080

Ashley Hobbs 9642-1379

Frank Legge 9458-1200

Ray Morgan 9954-1014

Helen Paganoni 9824-1320

Robert Shepherd 9064-1124

Jim Shepherd 9645-0313

Kath Stacey 9064-1165

Robert Wilson 9645-1013

Dougal Young 9642-4032

### MEMBER WITH

### SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS

Dr Tony Schlink, CSIRO 9333-6028

### BREEDING POLICY COMMITTEE

Ashley Hobbs 9642-1379

Robert Beard 9636-2064

Frank Legge 9458-1200

Ray Morgan 9954-1014

Michael Dodd 9664-2078

John Hewett 9641-2111

CN Representative

## President's Report

Hello all. A fresh year and the optimism that it brings of a new farming season. I hope you all are finding suitable solutions to the challenges I daresay this summer is throwing up. It is when we experience such tough conditions that AMS sheep with their hardiness make things that little bit easier.

I must apologise for the newsletter being so delayed. We have decided only to publish when there is sufficient quality material to do so. Although there has been some months delay, we have postponed the newsletter due to wanting to put more final information about the future of the CN flock. That is still some time away so we will confirm details at a later date.

As this is my first newsletter I will give you a brief background to myself. I run a small RBC just north west of Brookton with my wife Lucille and my parents Bruce and Rita. We also have a commercial flock. Our farming operation is mixed with between 55-60% of the arable area being cropped each year.

Before I go too far I would like to thank Rob Beard for serving as President for the past 3 years. That is a considerable contribution to our organisation as I know he was very dedicated to the progress of AMS. I know that he is continuing to pursue marketing options for both wool and meat outside traditional avenues. One good point made by Vince Gareffa [Mondo Meats] at the AGM Conference, was that the first issue is to get your product into the market place, get good lines of communication going and have them loving your product. Then tell them you are going to increase the price in 6 months, as this gives them time to get use to it and no surprises. From talking to Rob he is taking this point of view. To many of us as we see fluctuating prices we always want the better price and we don't seem to get long term customers, Vince appears too, so maybe we should think about his approach.

I am particularly pleased with the variation we have got on executive with members from all parts of the agricultural area of the state and a really diverse range of experience. I'm sure new members of exec will have plenty of input. Those AMS members who have any issues they would like to raise please feel free to call myself or any of the executive so we can help.

Once again this coming mating season a number of members will be progeny testing. This does take some extra time and effort but in our quest to breed better sheep we need to be able to identify the best sires so we can make smarter decisions. This is being done with help from Merino Genetic Services, which is funded by MLA, through the Merino Validation Project. The rest of the merino industry is starting to take more notice of these results. So the more we test individual sires the more likely we will find those truly profitable sheep as well as finding those that are causing your flock significant damage. Already participants are finding that in an Australian wide project we have animals that are very good in some traits and are in the best performing Australia wide for that trait. As well, there are some all rounders that based on MGS's index are in the top 150. Some of the sires used are from outside the AMS, this is so comparisons can be validly made with the rest of the merino industry. Speaking from my own experiences the results only sometimes match one's expectation of the sire and there is considerable variation. So the poor animals do dilute the genetic gain significantly. There is a slight chance that these sires may produce an excellent progeny but more likely it will be none. So it is better all round to focus resources on animals more likely to produce the best results. It is a highly worthwhile and effective tool; just remember not to cull sires before the results are in. That's why you are testing them. If you would like to know how to go about it give me a call. I trust that you have had a productive joining season and that lambs will be plentiful.

Ashley Hobbs

## Annual General Meeting – President’s Report

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Presidents report to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of The Australian Merino Society - 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

It gives me pleasure to present my third President’s report at this, the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM of The Australian Merino Society.

I must start by congratulating one of our long time members, Mr Kevin Cahill, on being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia, mostly for his services to the Royal Agricultural Society, but also partly for his contribution to AMS, and his own community.

Most of our members are having a reasonable season, with reports of good lambing percentages, although follow up rains from now will be critical. We are also hoping that the members in the east get good rains next summer. There have been some excellent results from growers who have lot-fed wether and cull ewe lambs with the carcasses virtually matching prime lambs and it looks as though values for our types of wool are trending in the right direction.

Ram sales for the season just gone were up on the year before, which is a good sign of confidence so soon after a couple of very ordinary seasons. With the continuation of advertising and more importantly explaining to producers outside of AMS how and why our system can work for them, we should be able to build on ram sales, an integral part of maintaining our professional society.

A couple of aspects of our system have changed since last years AGM. As we know from the AGM, we have allowed ram breeders to use a set of index parameters to select animals which suit their client’s needs and their environment.

The Breeding Policy Committee will still be recommending a base index for most members that will aim to maximise profits from their sheep flocks.

The second major change to our system was the agreement to suspend the contribution of ewes to the next tier for the time being. The key here is that the ideal of contribution of ewes has not been suspended for good. The policy can be reviewed in the future if we feel certain bio-security issues pose low risk compared to benefits gained. There was some concern that moving away from the practices of the past would spell the end of AMS. This could not be further from the truth. As I mentioned in my report last year, the Society will remain strong, even if under a different system, as long as people are prepared to help each other and share information.

Another workshop was held earlier this year at CSIRO. This workshop was open to all members not just ram breeders. Again some excellent information was gained from the speakers, although I was a little disappointed in the numbers that attended, given the effort put in to organise the event. The idea of getting new information out to members and the methods of doing this are under review at this stage given the number of seminars and sheep up-dates etc that are being held each year.

Our Society has the opportunity to be involved in the 7<sup>th</sup> Merino Conference to be held in Perth in July 2006. The Chairperson of the organising committee, Mrs Carol Hardie, hopes that we can continue our participation, which so far has been to contribute to planning exercise on the format of the Conference. There is also the chance to be part of major sheep displays during the Pre-Conference Tour, which will be for about 12 days moving from Geraldton to Katanning.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the committees for their contributions over the last 12 months. There have been some hard hitting and in depth questioning from one new committeeman, which has been good to see. Thankyou to those who may be retiring and we look forward to input from any new committee people after today’s AGM.

The professionalism and knowledge of our office, Chris and Annie again needs to be recognised. Thankyou. And of course I must thank my wife Vicki, and family for their support.

This is my last report, as I will be standing aside for a new President at today’s AGM so I must thankyou, the members, for allowing me to hold this position. My only regret is that circumstances did not allow for a visit to see members in the eastern states in the last couple of years, although we have tried to keep in close contact. I believe our Society is at least in a stable if not strong position in the farming industry. I hope you all have a good day and good seasons.

Thankyou  
*Robert Beard*

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting – Minutes

Venue: Sunset Room, Ocean Beach Hotel Date: 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Time: 9.07am

**PRESENT:** R Beard (Chairman), N Abbott, R Batchelor, M Batchelor, G Blake, A Briscoe, K Cahill, W Cheriton, P Cusack, O Dare, M Dodd, A & J Heitman, I & M Hesford, M Hewett, A & L Hobbs, F Legge, K Barr, A Micke, C Morgan, R & L Morgan, J & H Paganoni, J & L Shepherd, R Shepherd, F Shepherd, K & V Stacey, J Stephens, D Young, R Wilson, C & A Richardson.

Wayne Laird and Brett Cox Cunderdin Ag School before lunch.

**APOLOGIES:** Dr Norm Adams, David and Chris Antonio, Bob Hall (Life member), Michael Hesford, John and Lorraine Hewett, Barry Jefferis, King Lethbridge, Kerry Mutter, Doug and Fiona Nicholson, Ken Reddington, Bill Waud, Tony York, Jim Hughes.

**PROXIES:** Murray Hewett holds proxy for:

- John Hewett

Chairman holds proxies for:

- Doug and Fiona Nicholson
- Michael Hesford
- Barry Jefferis
- Dr Norm Adams

### MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING:

**Motion:** **Moved: Craig Morgan/Frank Legge 'that the minutes of the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2003 be received as a true and accurate record. Carried.**

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT** R Beard presented his report to the AGM.

**Motion:** **Moved Ray Morgan/Dougal Young 'that the President's Report be received'. CARRIED.**

**ANNUAL FINANCE REPORT:** F Legge presented the 2003/2004 AUDITED Financial Accounts to the meeting.

**Motion:** **Moved A Hobbs/Wayne Cheriton 'that the audited accounts be received and endorsed'. Carried.**

**WEBSITE:** Discussion took place on an AMS website and recommendations from the website committee.

**Moved Alan Heitman/Jim Paganoni 'that AMS engage Vivid Interactive Design to develop our website at a quoted cost of \$13,500 + GST (from consolidated funds) and that ongoing maintenance costs be covered by user fees for hosted web pages and other potential beneficiaries'. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**BUDGET** The budget as recommended by Executive was presented to the meeting and endorsed.

**Motion** **Moved Michael Dodd/V Stacey 'that the budget for 2004/2005 be adopted. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

### ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS:

**President:** R Morgan nominated Ashley Hobbs. There being no further nominations A Hobbs was duly elected.

**Executive members:** Ray Morgan offered himself for re-election  
Ashley Hobbs nominated Helen Paganoni.  
Vincent Stacey nominated Rob Wilson  
Ashley Hobbs nominated Ian Hesford.

Helen gave a precise of her background.  
Rob gave a quick overview.

Ian gave a quick overview.

There being no further nominations all three were duly elected.

The President moved a vote of thanks to our retiring Executive member, Michael Batchelor. Fred Shepherd thanked Robert Beard for his contribution to AMS and noted that Robert's dress code had improved.

**Person with Special Qualifications:** Dr Tony Schlink, CSIRO, Floreat offered himself for renomination. Executive recommended Dr Schlink.  
There being no other nominations, Tony was duly elected.

**Breeding Policy Committee:** Alan Heitman nominated Messrs Morgan, Legge, Hewett, Dodd . There being further nominations all were duly elected.

**AUDITORS:** Westcourt Consulting was recommended by Executive for the position.

**Moved** **Moved Ray Morgan/Frank Legge 'that Westcourt Consulting be appointed as the Society's auditors for the ensuing year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005'.**  
**Carried.**

**LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE:** Williams and Hughes was recommended by Executive for the position.

**Moved** **Moved Helen Paganoni/Alan Heitman 'that Williams and Hughes be appointed as legal representative for the ensuing year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004'.** **Carried.**

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** The Executive recommended that all subscriptions and ram levies remain the same as 2003/2004 inclusive of GST.

Full and Provisional membership	\$187.00
Associate membership	\$33.00
Subscriptions	\$22.00
Gift-Newsletters	\$16.50

**CN REPORT:** K Stacey presented her CN report.

**BREEDING POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT:** C Richardson presented the BPC report.

**GENERAL BUSINESS:**  
**NAN Trial Report** C Richardson presented the NAN Trial report to date (see attached).

**CN Distribution Day** 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004.

**General comments:**

- Frank Legge – staple strength – opportunity for direct selection for SS now exists in index.
- Owen Dare felt that selection in some groups may be antagonistic to common goals.
- Alan Heitman suggested selecting for non mulesing sheep.
- Ashe Briscoe – MLA funding availability.
- Contribution of ewes was debated with members having different views, depending on their situation and Biosecurity pros and cons.
- Some ram breeders thought semen exchange was a possibility in place of contributed ewes. Embryo transfers was also another option.
- Kevin Cahill - AMS as a body is now settled and numbers are fairly static. Most have closed flocks. We do not appear to be bringing in as many outside sheep as before.
- Lice, footrot, brucellosis and worms were all considered Biosecurity risk factors.
- It was suggested each group assess Biosecurity needs and set protocols.
- Frank Legge felt that it was important that genes still travel up the tier system.
- Fred Shepherd suggested the committee will continue to monitor the situation and suggest options to members.

**Welcome** Robert Beard welcomed the arrival of Cunderdin Agricultural staff, Wayne Laird and Brett Cox.

**Conference** John Stephens asked that it be noted when looking at venues for next season

**Facility/Accommodation:** that he does not like swipe cards for doors and car access and noted that the water for showers was cold.

Administration will take this on board. Due to the wild storm during the night the pilot gas light had blown out and hotel staff was notified and rectified the matter.

## **2005 Annual General Meeting**

Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005 – venue to be confirmed.

## **Meeting Closure**

The President thanked the members for attending and declared the meeting closed at 12.40pm.

Lunch followed the AGM.

The afternoon's program '**Future Opportunities for Sheep Producers**' commenced at 1.55pm

### **1. Welcome**

Robert Beard, AMS President

### **2. 'Future market opportunities for wool producers'**

Trevor Flugge, AO, Chairman, Australian Wool Services

### **3. 'Paddock to plate for merino Sheepmeat – reality or fiction'**

Vince Garreffa, Mondo di Carne Meats

### **4. 'DNA Technology – what are the realistic opportunities?'**

Dr Tom Watson, Director Business Development, Genetic Technologies Limited

### **5. 'Pastures from space – an opportunity to increase sheep production'**

Dr Steve Gherardi, DAWA

## **Prime Time Pt3/08 Update**

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During 2004 this trial required the scanning of 6220 ewes on 8 separate properties for multiple foetuses as well as age of foetus.

Preliminary trial results suggest that:

- In AMS sheep with a 6 week joining period that 1% rams are usually adequate.
- Frequency of strategic lupin feeding targeted at increasing ovulation rate may affect conception rates by upto 20% (more frequent looks to be better than less frequent).
- Strategic feeding of ewe lambs can allow the successful mating and lambing of ewe lambs (68% lambs marked).
- Level of paddock protection from the elements was demonstrated to influence the numbers of lambs weaned by more than 30% (previously ungrazed barley stubble appreciably better than normal pasture paddocks).
- Drenching of ewes at the time of LAP AI (on the day of AI) can have a significant negative affect on conception rates – 10% demonstrated.

Some general comments-

- In many AMS flocks there is a loss of lambs in twin bearing ewes of approx 50% lambs between scanning and marking. (i.e. 150% lambs marked from 200%+ foetuses at scanning –approximately 100 days after rams introduced).
- Supplementation of ewes with a feed mix to encourage colostrum production has had very encouraging responses to date. More work is required here to fully demonstrate the potential impacts on improved lamb survival and future sheep productivity.
- Protocols for the various treatments used in this trial have been developed (these will be the basis of future recommendations regarding best management practices).

We have applied for another MLA PIRD to continue these investigations of opportunities to improve weaning percentages by changing management techniques. If successful we will be conducting further trial work during the 2005/06 mating and lambing season.

The results to date give indications of ways to readily increase the numbers of lambs weaned in your sheep flocks, which is another way of increasing NETT returns.

Sheep farmers need to be increasing returns by 3.5%pa to just stand still which is indeed challenging if your returns from wool are decreasing!!

# Eneabba Flock Report – February 2005 Executive Meeting

Ray Morgan

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We at 'Neearra' feel extremely privileged. Privileged to have the ENEABBA flock at our place. In Lois's letter she guaranteed continued supply of top CN rams. I am very confident to reaffirm that and say how pleased I am, that Craig is so excited about this flock being on his place. We also had the privilege of having Robert bring his seven way drafting system up and sort the ewes. I have placed our order with Robert for the first available unit. It was only 43°C the day we sorted the ewes and without this technology we would have been days not hours doing the drafting. Get in behind me and order yours!

**The ewes:** Chris and Robert did a visual of them in the wool. Those that were acceptable were then fully measured, FW, Bwt and all the wool traits, of course L&S and Yield. They were then ranked on W/D 1.5 and we had the privilege of another visual and rejected some. Feet were generally good. Important for the sand on which they will live. With the selection these ewes have been through there can NOT BE another flock to equal them.

The purple tag ewe lambs are moving ahead on lupin stubble. The purple tag ram lambs, also on lupin stubble and looking good, apart from the number of horns.

The **worker rams** were shorn relatively recently and with the movement of the flock and our AI date being 2 weeks earlier this year (Craig and Jos are good breeders too), no AI has taken place in the Eneabba flock. The top 500 ewes have been single sire mated to the top 6 rams. 56 or 7 mixed age ewes and 26 or 7 green tag maidens per ram. All single sire rams were observed to be capable of natural service. It was indeed pleasing to see 'Neearra' ewes returning home. The message is, even after this much scrutiny, contributed ewes are up there. Not just 'Neearra' but other ewes identified with a tag as being contributed. The next 270 ewes have been paddock mated to the next best 5 rams.

I must confess to a certain amount of nervous anxiety as we took the rams out to put with the ewes. My attempts to draw direction from Robert resulted in, "you are the client, what the client wants the client gets". Therefore I alone was responsible for the mating decisions for the CN Eneabba flock. A flock of sheep that I have held in reverence for a long time, hence my nervousness. Craig is away awaiting the birth of their baby. Total random selection of the groups of ewes and also the rams that went with them. These ewes are all very good.

With the information that we now have on these sheep and electronic drafting, next years mating will be more sophisticated.

## Index update - February 2005

Frank Legge

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### Fault discounts

Members will be aware that it is from the discounts applied to wool for faults that the selection intensity factors (SIFs) for the fault traits are calculated. I have continued calculating the SIFs for yield (YLD) and staple strength (SS) since the AGM and have found the values fluctuate appreciably. The values obtained have dropped as low as 0.26 and 0.16 for YLD and SS but are now rising again and are currently 0.33 and 0.25. Some judgment is therefore required in deciding the values to use in our selection index at the present time. I would be inclined to reduce the values suggested at the AGM but not to the extent of the recent calculations. Reasonable choices would be 0.4 for YLD and 0.3 for SS. We have to accept that the discounts vary and should be collecting data so that we can produce a running average over some suitable period, say a year, for future use.

Members may of course also wish to alter the values a little to deal with the particular characteristics of their own flocks. If their yields are low they would tend to favour a higher value, say 0.5 or 0.6; if yields are very good the best number would be a little lower, say 0.2 or 0.3. Similar adjustment could be given to the SIF for SS.

### The future

Where will the AMS flock be in 10 years? It is not possible to know this with certainty but it is possible to make a reasonable calculation. We must start with some assumptions. Let us say that ram breeders select the rams they use from the best 25% of their rams, as judged by the selection index, and cull 40% of their worst ewes. Assume the rams are used on the average at 2.5 years of age and the ewes at 4 years so the overall average generation interval is 3.3 years. Ten years would then be roughly three generations.

Using the D1, D1.5, D2 and D3 indexes the calculated percentage gains over three generations, with heritabilities applied, are as shown in the table below. The D1 index, which is closest to the maximum profit index, is designed to hold FD constant. The figures in the table can be regarded as conservative as ram breeders will probably use rams ranking higher than the average of the best 25% in their own flocks. It must be noted however that the gains in the table are based on the assumption that all ewes and rams will be measured for all the traits in the index. Lower rates of gain will occur if this is not the case.

Trait	D1	D1.5	D2	D3
FD	0.1	-0.5	-1.3	-2.2
CV	-3.0	-3.2	-3.4	-3.7
FW	10.3	9.9	9.2	7.8
SS	15.0	14.0	12.2	10.2
YLD	5.5	5.4	5.1	4.5
BWT	2.9	2.6	2.3	2.1

### The Past

The fact that the D3 index shows a substantial increase in fleece weight, in contrast with the experience of the AMS, is compelling evidence that the procedures used in the past have been unsatisfactory. The use of greasy fleece weight instead of clean fleece weight and the use of pin bone sampling for yield instead of mid-side have produced a flock with widely varying clean fleece weights and yields. Now that these deficiencies in procedure have been overcome we can expect substantial and rapid improvement in fleece weight. The values of SS also vary widely, not having been in the index previously, and hence will improve rapidly.

## Merino Validation Project (MVP) and Progeny Testing

The MVP provides AMS members with the opportunity to add considerable value to the data being collected as a result of ram breeders being involved in progeny testing programs by utilising both single sire paddock mating and AI to generate data on potential sires.

These results are encouraging, however we need to be committed to more progeny testing in the future because we are all aware that often with rams 'what we see is not necessarily what you get', as far as progeny being true to type is concerned.

The issue of carcass quality characteristics is emerging as a critical factor in future flock profitability and we need to ensure that we utilise the measurement tools available to ensure that replacement stock possess desirable genes for meat production as well as wool and lamb production. Participants in the MVP will be meeting with Dr Alex Ball on 14<sup>th</sup> April in Perth.

## 2004/2005 AI Program

This season 7 ram breeders participated in the AMS LAP AI program that is focussed on progeny testing potential sires.

In all approximately 2,220 ewes were prepared for the AI program with the first program completed on 21 December 2004 and the last on 22 February 2005.

23 AMS rams were presented for semen collection and of those satisfactory semen was collected from 18 rams. This year 18 potential AMS sires are being evaluated as well as 4 external sires including The Grange, Centre Plus and Kolindale P32.

## 2005 Murray River 'Murray Meanderer'

Looking for a holiday that's relaxing, value-for-money and great fun. Arguably the best place to take a houseboat holiday is in South Australia. The scenery is diverse and spectacular, ranging from red-ochre cliffs and towering gum trees, to sandy beaches and lush orchards. Recently some AMS members got together to do just this. Relax, celebrate a special birthday and recharge the batteries.



Parked while we take our daily exercise



Alan has the big catch!



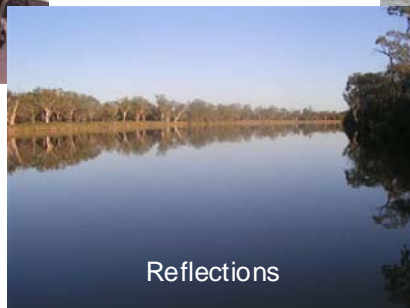
Lunch and a few drinks before our nanna nap



Joy and Chris enjoy a laugh



pelicans gather every day to fish



Reflections

**Website** [www.ausmerino.com.au](http://www.ausmerino.com.au)

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The AMS site is up and running. This has taken a great deal of work and I wish to thank the Committee for their input. There are still minor changes to be made but the site is already proving popular not only as an educational tool for students but for members and outside clients seeking livestock. Livestock can be listed on the site for sale or wanted at no charge to members. Just email the office with the following details and they can be listed the same day:

Tag Colour	Number	Date Available	Date of Shearing	Animal Health Statement	Price	Info
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Info section allows you to add any other information e.g. drench status, treatments etc. Visit the website and check details already listed.

We have a category for Ewes, Rams and Wethers, and also a category for Merino and Other Breeds. Surplus AMS ewe hoggets are keenly sought after by the prime lamb industry as they make ideal dams.

Some RBC's have linked their own page. We encourage all RBC's to be proactive and host a page. This website is experiencing substantial traffic.

An addition to the website will be ACCREDITED TEST HOUSES. At present we only have one accredited test house. The remaining test houses have so far failed to satisfy our accreditation requirements.

## **Annual General Meeting and Conference – Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005**

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This year the Executive has recommended continuing with the format introduced last year. The morning will be devoted to the AMS Annual General Meeting and the afternoon to a Conference, the theme of which will be '**Maximising profits from merino sheep meats**'.

The venue for this year is the Perth Zoo Conference Centre – a very relaxed atmosphere. Catering will be supplied by Mustard Catering. Please reserve the date in your diary – a high quality line-up of speakers will provide you with the latest information on how to 'maximise your returns from Merino sheep meat'.

The proposed format for the day is **AGM**: 8.30am-12.30pm, **Conference**: 1.30-4.00pm followed by a **Sundowner**: 4.00-5.00pm.

For those wishing to stay in Perth, the West Coast Eagles vs Dockers Derby will be played at Subiaco Oval commencing at 6.40pm. This is home game for the Eagles.

Various accommodation is available at Metro Inn, Arlington Quest Apartments, Peninsula Apartments, and Broadwater all at reasonable rates and based in South Perth. More details to follow on these later or you may like to check out [www.ratestogo.com.au](http://www.ratestogo.com.au) or [www.wotif.com.au](http://www.wotif.com.au). These are websites with special accommodation rates and have super special rates up to 20 days prior to requiring accommodation.



Ray and Alan enjoy a healthy dip in the Murray River!