



Final report

Sheep Producers Australia

Annual Service Agreement

2022-23 Financial Year

Project code: E.SPA.2023
Prepared by: Sheep Producers Australia

Date published: 26 February 2024

PUBLISHED BY
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited
PO Box 1961
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Introduction

The Sheep Producers Australia (SPA) & Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Service Level Agreement project supports effective and strategic consultation on service provider programs and projects, animal health, welfare and biosecurity, industry leadership and capability building, and adoption. The project facilitates improved communication and engagement between service providers and SPA, improved awareness of industry stakeholders of outcomes of sheep producer levy investment into research development and industry services, and the provision of capacity building for sheep industry participants. SPA strives to collaborate with MLA to build and strengthen a collaborative partnership to deliver to our joint constituents.

Consultation

SPA participated in MLA Taskforces, quarterly and annual consultations to provide guidance on the sheep industry's priorities. Through SPA's engagement in these forums and through the SPA Policy Council and associated working groups, representatives of Australia's sheep industry can provide direct input and feedback to service providers.

Sheep Reproductive Strategic Partnership

SPA is a member of the Sheep Reproductive Strategic Partnership Committee which oversees the direction of the strategic partnership managed by MLA. The initiative seeks to profitably and sustainably increase lamb production by increasing weaning rates and decreasing mortality. This year saw the release of the 'Fit to Join' ewe assessment tools to help producers improve ewe and lamb survival, and the potential to increase on-farm profit from \$4–\$8 per ewe. Two projects are being progressed which examine the impact of shade and shelter on sheep reproduction and welfare to inform management strategies to minimise the impact of heat stress on reproductive performance. The Towards 90 adoption program was launched in July 2022, consisting of modules that detail best practice for the entire reproductive cycle. The program reflects the aspirational targets of achieving 90% and beyond in lamb survival across single and twin-bearing ewes.

Red Meat Panel

SPA is a member of the Red Meat Panel (RMP), with two representatives attending meetings throughout the year.

A key component to the implementation of the new approach to the MLA Producer Investment Call Process, the first red meat panel workshop was held in August 2023. The workshop was a valuable opportunity for producers, peak industry council and regional committee representatives and MLA staff members to identify the scope, impact and scale of the research needed to address the priorities. Terms of reference relevant to the sheep industry that were subsequently developed and agreed by the Red Meat Panel sheep included:

- Sheep productivity – merino ewe mortality: prevalence, causes and mitigation strategies.
- Precision sheep management – unlocking the potential of precision sheep management to improve weaning and growth rates.
- Animal wellbeing - Sheep Pneumonia: working to reduce the prevalence in sheep flocks.

Sheep Sustainability Framework

The Sheep Sustainability Framework (SSF) is led by SPA and WoolProducers Australia (WPA), supported by MLA and Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) to demonstrate the industry's sustainable practices, identify areas for improvement, and better communicate with customers and consumers. SPA was engaged with SSF operations throughout the year and an active participant on the SSF Board. The Board works to approve the 3-year strategic plan, annual operating plans and approve report launches and industry engagement events.

The first Annual Report of the SSF was launched with more than 50 key stakeholders in Bendigo in July 2022. Notably, the report features two firsts for the Australian sheep industry.

- A Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) was conducted to determine the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from both Merino and non-Merino sheep in the Australian flock from 2005 to 2020. The LCA also models a number of emissions reduction pathways to predict the impacts on net GHG emission over time. This landmark study provides deep insight into both industry trends to date and paths for the future and is an extremely important platform for continued policy research.
- The sheep-specific seasonal ground cover dashboard uses thirty years of satellite data and remote sensing technology to map and evaluate the conditions of Australian sheep-grazing land. The dashboard shows rainfall trends and the proportion of bare ground, green and non-green ground cover over time.

The first consultative committee meeting was held on the 5 October 2022, with 60 attendees from 22 organisations. Participants highlighted that the framework is a highly comprehensive document covering many themes and is an example of robust industry collaboration. It is seen as a benefit that the framework is an industry owned and driven document with a strong reputation in international markets. Key themes raised for consideration by the framework were around data collection, and opportunities that may exist in the future for producers to make voluntary contributions of data to increase the dataset needed for the framework, as well as opportunities for producers and companies to benchmark against the framework reporting.

The National Producer Survey results were published in October 2022. The survey has highlighted that the use of appropriate/best practice pain relief tail docking and castration is low, and that there is a high percentage of use of inappropriate pain products (Trisolfen). The results provide a body of evidence to support the development of communication and extension around best practice pain management and the correct application of products available.

The first Industry Forum meeting was held on 9 March 2023, with approximately 50 attendees from across the entire sheep supply chain. Forum members were provided with presentations on the commercial value of the SSF, which assisted in contextualising the materiality workshop discussion. Discussion canvassed current and emerging sustainability topics and understanding the relative importance of specific measures and indicators of sustainability. The forum's objectives were to engage stakeholders in the foundational concepts of the SSF and test the changed and updated universal material topics and agriculture sector standards developed by the Global reporting Initiative to which the SSF is aligned.

The second SSF Annual Report was released on Friday 12 May in South Australia. Highlights from the report include:

- The percentage of producers who have completed the six-day Lifetime Ewe Management (LTEM) training with AWI, a program of best practice adoption, has increased to 9.4% of all AWI-eligible wool levy payers (up from 8.09%)
- The percentage of non-mulesed/ceased mulesed bales offered has risen to 15.8% (Merino) and 40.1% (non-Merino)
- Sheep mortality on ships during export has declined to 0.14%
- The percentage of Australians who believe Australians lambs are farmed and raised in a humane manner has risen to 55% (from 53%)
- Investment in wool research, development and adoption has increased 18.5% to \$32.7m
- Rise in Australia's value share of global sheepmeat exports (45%) and global wool exports (75.5%)
- The percentage of sheep-grazing land achieving 50% ground cover is holding steady at 62.2%.
- Australia continues to be declared free from 12 major diseases
- 91% of producers use vaccinations to prevent disease and protect their flock (new data)
- 50% of sheep producers generate and use renewable energy (new data)

Carbon Neutrality and Climate

SPA is progressing a project that seeks to build on the findings of the 'Pathways to Low Emissions in the Australian Sheep Industry's report. This project will support SPA to review the sheep industry's greenhouse gas emissions profile and implications for research, extension and adoption and costs to industry and the considerations for emissions reduction measures that could be applied at a sectoral (rather than enterprise) level.

Traceability

SPA is playing a key leadership and strategic advisory role in the national implementation of electronic identification (eID) for sheep and goats, both the co-design process and on the Sheep and Goat National Traceability Task Force (SGTTF), as well as implementing nationally agreed communications, resources and education to support transition.

The co-design initiative provided a platform for stakeholders across the livestock production supply chain and governments to collaborate and combine their knowledge and views on the national livestock traceability system. Key outputs of the co-design process included:

- technology and data requirements and dependency mapping
- material to support planning considerations for policy and regulatory changes
- communication materials and guidance for engagement across all supply chain participants
- a cost model that allows testing of different implementation approaches.

SPA chaired the first public national sheep and goat eID webinar which was held in November 2022. Focus areas of the webinar included:

- Why traceability is important
- How eID for sheep and goats helps trace sheep more effectively than the mob-based system
- Lessons learned from Victoria following its rollout of eID for sheep and goats.

There was 807 registrations and 251 attendees (31% of registrations). A survey/poll was made available at the end of the webinar (approx. 1/3 of webinar participants engaged with some or all of the poll). The majority of attendees who completed the poll identified their primary role as sheep producers. Also represented were agricultural businesses, goat producers, cattle producers,

saleyards, and agents. 89% of poll participants agreed traceability is important, and 83% also saying they understand the role of eID in supporting more effective tracing of sheep and goats. A recording of the webinar is accessible through the [SGTTF website](#).

Animal Health, Welfare and Biosecurity

SPA participated in Animal Health Australia (AHA) consultation, industry forums and committees held throughout the year. The engagement between SPA and AHA facilitates industry input into levy invested programs that deliver important surveillance and biosecurity outcomes.

Emergency Animal Disease preparedness

The emergence of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) in Indonesia prompted a number of activities in Australia, in which SPA participated. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) convened a series of workshops to draft national action plans for dealing with the threat of FMD and LSD. In both instances, ensuring an adequate supply of vaccines for use in Indonesia and, in the event of an incursion of either disease, to contain potential spread within Australia, was a top priority. An LSD vaccine suitable for use in Australia is considered not to be available.

In parallel, the NSW Department of Primary Industries acquired an international licence for the manufacture of mRNA vaccines, which can be designed and produced in a relatively short time and does not necessitate the introduction of an exotic disease virus into Australia for experimental purposes. The Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI) at Menangle commenced a proof-of-principle trial, producing a pestivirus (endemic to Australia) vaccine for sheep (Border Disease). It was established that, despite the phylogenetic proximity of the Capripox viruses (LSD, Goat Pox, Sheep Pox), LSD in cattle was highly unlikely to be infectious to sheep and would not result in cases of Sheep Pox in Australia.

Another activity prompted by the incursion of these two EADs in neighbouring countries was a revision and update by AHA of the disease specific AusVetPlan action plans. SPA was represented in the Writing Group, which met at regular intervals (virtually and occasionally face-to-face) for several months.

The Writing Group dedicated time to finalising an update of the Nationally Agreed Standard Operating Procedure (NASOP) for animals in transit at the time when a national livestock standstill is called (specifically, in the event of an FMD incursion). The different constraints and imperatives faced by intensive and extensive livestock industries made it clear that a “one-size-fits-all” policy would not be possible. However, should a standstill be called, the Group agreed that animals already in transit to a processing plant should proceed to the destination as originally planned, provided the remaining journey did not cross jurisdictional boundaries.

A review meeting of the National Arbovirus Monitoring Program raised the transmission of LSD as arthropod-borne, but this was not deemed a justification to modify the program’s activity. Should Buffalo Fly be deemed an effective LSD vector, that will require a novel approach for monitoring and management.

SPA represented the extensive industries of the AHA Industry Forum in a workshop of the advisory committee reviewing the National Animal Health Information Program (NAHIP) and the National Significant Disease Investigation Program (NSDIP). Both programs will be affected during the planned transition from the outdated National Animal Health Information System (NAHIS) database to the

new AusPestCheck, which will also have tenancies for plant and aquatic pests. Two reports emanating from these programs are Animal Health in Australia (AHiA), and Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly (AHSQ), which are downloadable from the AHA website (<https://animalhealthaustralia.com.au/resources/>), as is the report from the NAMF.

Sheep Health

Sheep Producers Australia is a member of the AHA's Sheep Health Project (SHP) steering committee. A salient item for discussion has been the development and implementation of the Integrity Systems Company's (ISC) MyFeedback program to replace Livestock Data Link (LDL). A major innovation will be the inclusion of disease and defect data in the processing report, a concept that was trialled over many years, using disease data captured by the National Sheep Health Monitoring Program (NSHMP). This is purported to increase the number of subscribing producers to the program, boosted by linking an NLIS account to LPA reaccreditation.

The NSHMP no longer records Johne's Disease (JD) on the list of endemic diseases. Although the previous strict control measures have largely been shelved, JD remains a notifiable disease, which means that every recording still necessitates an onerous administrative impost. Leaving JD off the list poses the risk of it being neglected as an endemic disease of great economic importance. The progress made by producers in reducing the quantity of clinical cases through vaccinating lambs in the last ten years or more is at risk of being lost, should vaccination rates decrease. Further, decreased significance may lead to reduced research interest, diminishing improvements in vaccine research and development.

Footrot remains a significant component of sheep foot health, and its management is hampered by difficult access to a serotype-specific vaccine, which has proven successful. SPA has participated in negotiations with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to have the vaccine's status of availability under a Minor Use Permit (MUP) changed to that of a registered product. At this stage, the vaccine's commercial market potential does not justify investment in the generation of the additional data required by the APVMA for this to happen. Negotiations for a reduction of the data requirements remain on the agenda.

Sheep Producers Australia participates in AHA's Sheep Health Forum (SHF), with Wool Producers Australia (WPA), Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA). The SHF considered proposals for: investigating the genetic basis for foot health problems; the possibility of replacing drench resistant worm larvae on pasture with susceptible strains; the sterile insect technique for replacing sheep blowfly to be trialled on Kangaroo Island, the prevalence and cause(s) of sheep pneumonia and the business case for a vaccine. Additionally, a request for the possibility of exploiting the known anthelmintic properties of some fodder crops were also considered.

Chlamydiosis was considered as a possible subject for research investment, but a comprehensive literature survey did not support this. At least two of the eight *Chlamydia* species recognised to cause disease in animals are known to be endemic in Australia, but *C. abortus*, the most common cause of infectious abortion, is not one of them. *Chlamydia* spp. commonly reside in the gastrointestinal tract of sheep and only sporadically cause disease. Humans are susceptible to chlamydial infection, necessitating hygiene and personal protection when treating sick animals or lambing ewes.

Best Practice Sheep Husbandry

Animal welfare remains a high priority for the Australian sheepmeat and wool industry, for Sheep Producers Australia (SPA) and its members. Sheep producers perform routine husbandry procedures at lamb marking to enhance an animals' lifetime health and welfare outcomes, which ultimately translates to sustainability and productivity. The use of suitable products to manage pain, relieve inflammation, reduce blood loss, disinfect, and protect wounds is regarded as best practice in animal husbandry.

SPA contributed to the compilation of a Best Practice Lamb Marking pamphlet published by Animal Health Australia, explaining the different pain relief modalities depending on whether the procedure creates an open wound, or not.

This year, in collaboration with WoolProducers Australia (WPA), SPA finalised the scope and design of a project called 'Best Practice Lamb Marking'. This project aims to define 'best practice', engage, and encourage producers to conduct best practice husbandry procedures, including reducing, refining, and replacing routine husbandry procedures considered aversive at lamb marking.

To achieve this aim, increasing the level of on-farm analgesia, adopting the latest research and production tools and strategic and effective communication are equally paramount to identifying the benefits and opportunities to individual producers of the replacement or refinement of aversive husbandry procedures that may become unnecessary in future.

Industry leadership and Capability Building

Sheep Producers Australia Leadership Network

The Leadership Network was developed to accelerate the development of current and future leaders to ensure strong leadership for the long-term success of the Australian sheep industry. SPA recognises the importance of confident and competent people in driving our industry forward and values investment in building future leaders and positioning the industry for a strong future.

The leadership program continues to have significant impact across the industry and has enhanced and developed participants' confidence and capability. Current and emerging leaders have provided positive feedback on the opportunities offered to them and their increased confidence, skills contributing to their ability to advance their professional development. Sheep Producers Australia has supported two emerging leaders to participate in the leadership programs through a selection process. These two have been successful in placements in the Young Farmer's Council and the National Agricultural Leadership Program.

Young Farmer's Council

The Young Farmers' Council is a new initiative to increase youth engagement with the National Farmers Federation (NFF). The Council gives young producers an opportunity to contribute to NFF policy and share ideas and activities to engage more young people in policy and advocacy. This is the second term for the organisations sponsored young producer representing Sheep Producers Australia on the council.

The Council provides an opportunity for members to:

- Share information about youth focused activities across Australian agriculture.
- Discuss policy relevant to young producers.
- Gain exposure to policy issues and advocacy structures.
- Build networks across industry organisations.
- Gain experience developing and advocating policy that promotes young people in Australian agriculture.
- Council members also have the opportunity to work with Telstra to promote digital adoption and innovation within Australian agriculture.

Quote

“Thanks to Sheep Producers Australia for supporting and giving me the opportunity to be on the National Farmers Federation (NFF) Young Farmers Council. From this opportunity I was lucky to be nominated by the NFF and offered a place in the World Farmers Organisation (WFO) Gymnasium program - which I wouldn't have had the opportunity to be part of if it wasn't for Sheep Producers Australia. The WFO Gymnasium is a high-level capacity building programme aimed at training young farmers to make them become future leaders in the agricultural sector, implemented in close partnership with Bayer. The WFO program focusses on advocacy, public speaking, networking, along with a series of technical sessions.” <https://www.wfo-oma.org/the-gymnasium/>

National Agricultural Leadership Program

The National Agricultural Leadership Program (NALP) is an annual leadership program for young and emerging leaders in agriculture. It builds leadership skills and provides direct experience in policy development, advocacy, governance and communications and media.

The NALP has four components:

- Leadership Workshop – three-day intensive workshop in Canberra, meeting with key stakeholders in agriculture including, federal politicians, government departments, media and private sector lobbyists.
- Policy Project – experience researching and developing a new policy on a key issue facing agriculture.
- Inspiring Speakers Webinars – webinars from leaders in agriculture talking about their leadership journey.
- Mentoring Program – specific mentoring to support ongoing leadership and development.

Each of these are designed to complement one another and give participants an interesting and engaging experiences in what the NFF does in agricultural advocacy. At the end of the NALP participants are well placed to use their skills in agriculture, advocacy organisations and their local communities. Sheep Producers Australia has sponsored and supported an emerging leader to be able to access professional development and increase her skills in advocacy for agriculture.

Quote *"When I joined the National Agricultural Leadership Program (NALP) I wanted to grow my network and learn about decision-making in agricultural policy. NALP provided me with all of that and more! I was humbled with the investment of time from the politicians, government bodies, lobbyists, media and other key stakeholders on my leadership journey. Can't thank Sheep Producers Australia enough for supporting my position and providing the opportunity to be exposed to mentors, decision-makers and industry leaders."*

Good Meat Summit

Sheep Producers Australia was asked by MLA to join the Good Meat Summit (Summit) which was held in Sydney on 21 March 2023. The Summit group was approximately 50-60 people in attendance to discuss the future of global meat and livestock production with a range of scientists and specialists who were part of the Dublin Declaration. SPA supported 6 sheep producers to attend the Summit to have their say in supporting a collaborative industry response.

Global Sheep Producers Forum

The Global Sheep Producers Forum (GSPF) is a global program to provide a common voice for the global sheep community that reflects our collective vision of the future sustainability of the sector. Members of the GSPF include the American Lamb Board, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, British National Sheep Association, Canadian Sheep Federation, National Sheep Association, National Wool Growers' Association of South Africa, and Sheep Producers Australia.

The GSPF strives to foster global collaboration to develop evidenced and united positions and collective actions that address the shared challenges and opportunities facing those in the sheep industry irrespective of global boundaries. The Canadian Sheep Federation hosted the 2022 GSPF face to face event and the SPA CEO attended the event representing Sheep Producers Australia.

The Next Generation Global Sheep Forum is an important aspect of the GSPF. SPA manages the podcast series which will enable young producers from each country (New Zealand, United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia) to be interviewed and discuss their individual sheep management that aligns with the Global Sheep Forum goals and on building capacity and capability in the next generation of sheep farmers. Throughout the year 7 young producers from participating member countries were interviewed.

Adoption

SPA distributes MLA program information, updates and resources through SPA social media channels, direct email updates to members and board, in the media, newsletters and to broader stakeholders. SPA promotes all sheep industry updates and events, Research & Development, surveys and MLA events. This includes, but is not limited to:

SPA promoted the following programs and reports through its network this quarter including:

- Towards90 updates and producer sites
- eNVD App Communications campaign
- Integrity Systems Company communications and webinars
- Sheep and Wool Producers Intentions Survey and results
- Sheep Reproductive Strategic Partnership (SRSP) monthly updates
- Aussie Meat Trade Hub
- MLA Genetics Hub
- Grass seed carcass contamination and prevention
- Best practice lamb marking and pain relief
- Sheep Sustainability Framework Annual Report Launch
- New MLA Grazing Land Management Hub

- New MLA Producer Case Studies
- Australian Good Meat videos
- Nuffield Scholarship Opportunity sponsored by MLA
- Fake Meat Media Release and updates
- Community Sentiment Voconiq latest Report
- Meat Standards Australia (Sheepmeat)
- eNVD App Launch
- Good Meat Summit