

Article

Dorper Flocks on Far West Coast Increasing Productivity

The adoption of some key management practices has enabled Ben Polkinghorne of Penong to lift the marking rate in his annually joined, self-replacing White Dorper flock by over 30% in the last three years.

A group of Far West Coast producers running self-replacing Dorper flocks participated in a recently completed three-year Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project.

The project was coordinated by Anne Collins, AC Ag Consulting and Daniel Schuppan, Nutrien Ag Solutions and was undertaken to address the apparent trend of declining lambing percentages in local flocks.

The producer group learnt about key management strategies that could influence the reproductive performance of their flock. Training was undertaken in condition scoring of ewes, feed budgeting and pre-joining ram assessment. The value of pregnancy scanning for multiples and differential management of single and multiple bearing ewes, lambing multiple bearing ewes in smaller mobs and optimum time of weaning were all discussion points for the group. In addition, the value of managing ewe condition score and feeding appropriately, identifying dry ewes at marking, assessing ewe udder soundness, and vaccination for *Campylobacter* were examined.

The impact of different management practices was demonstrated in participants' flocks. Ben Polkinghorne's flock was one of the key demonstration sites.

A mob of 200 of his ewes was individually identified using eID tags and their performance monitored over the course of the three-year project. The conception rate of the monitored group of ewes increased by 27%, from 125% to 159% in this time.

The key practice that ultimately helped lift the overall flock marking rate from 99% to 137% across the course of the project was monitoring ewe condition score and feeding appropriately. "One of the key changes we have made is to bring forward our weaning date so that the ewes have more time to recover and get back into good condition for joining", Ben said.

Ben was already pregnancy scanning for multiples prior to the PDS, but was not consistently managing them differentially for lambing. Tracking of individual ewes through the PDS was able to confirm the importance of doing this and illustrate the impact of the extra demand from twin lambs on ewe body condition score.

All ewes scanned empty or dry at lamb marking are removed from the main flock, and depending on numbers, sold or given one more chance.

Above average rainfall during joining in summer 2021-22 helped to capitalise on the changes that had been implemented.

Another flock that was monitored as part of the project was trialling six-monthly joining. Tracking of individual ewes in this flock provided a good insight into the impact of ewe condition score at joining on conception rate. The best conception rate was achieved at condition score 4 and above, with ewes less than score 3 at joining having reduced conception rates.

At the conclusion of the project, 100% of the producers who had participated in the PDS indicated that they had already adopted the majority of the demonstrated best management practices, or that they intended to.

A full copy of the project report will be available on the MLA website in the near future - [Maximising Dorper Reproductive Performance | Meat & Livestock Australia \(mla.com.au\)](https://www.mla.com.au/Maximising-Dorper-Reproductive-Performance)



Image 1 Producers learning how to appropriately assess the body condition score of the

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