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“A predator control management program is invaluable and includes a map with control sites generated from the FeralScan app, an inventory for the program, legal signage requirements and a notification list.”



▲ Matt Mahoney, from Agridome Consultancy, runs MLA's Less predators, more lambs Producer Demonstration Site (PDS). Image: Mark Jesser.

Less predators, more lambs

North-east Victoria, near Mansfield

Scan this QR code to learn more about the project



PDS facilitator

Dr Matt Mahoney, Agronomist and Farm advisor, Agridome Consultancy

Aim

To improve lamb survival and demonstrate best practice in sheep management practices and predator control.

Participants

Autumn and spring-lambing Merino and first-cross sheep enterprises

Challenges

Wild dogs and foxes predate lambs in the first weeks of life up until lamb marking.

Key learnings and outcomes

- If a wild dog or fox baiting program starts 6–8 weeks before lambing, it appears to be effective even if neighbours aren't also baiting.
- Baiting sites need to be appropriate to the terrain and species targeted – set this out in your property predator control management program.
- FeralScan app is an integral part of the program and can be used by properties that are implementing predator control methods other than baiting such as shooting and trapping.
- The combination of best management practices and a timely predator control management program can substantially increase lamb survival and farm profitability.
- Lamb post-mortems confirmed that 18% of the lambs presented were killed by primary predation.
- Lamb survival has increased on all properties, attributed to using predator control management programs, equating to a potential extra \$42,000 income (280 lambs at \$150/head).
- Training in best practice predator control management, conducted by Greg Mifsud (CISS), in combination with best practice sheep management has improved lamb survival rates and farm profitability.
- FeralScan app provides accurate details of control activities, sightings and communication with other group members or farm staff.

📧 Matt Mahoney matt@agridome.com.au

Staying

Collecting data, working collaboratively and supporting each other are key to staying on the front foot when dealing with wild dog attacks.

This is the message from Victorian sheep and cattle producer Paul Diamond, who has seen first-hand the devastation wreaked by wild dogs on producers' livelihoods, livestock and mental health.

Paul's property, 'Pinnaroo', is one of eight host properties in MLA's 'Less predators, more lambs' Producer Demonstration Site (PDS), which is coordinated by Agridome Consultancy (see PDS snapshot on left).

The PDS aims to improve lamb survival and demonstrate best practice in sheep management and predator control in autumn and spring-lambing Merino and first-cross sheep enterprises in north-east Victoria.

“Wild dogs create a variable that's very difficult to control, so it's important to be vigilant and keep composure – although at times this can be extremely hard given the severity of the circumstances they create on-farm,” Paul said.

Harsh reality

Paul recalls the trauma of a wild dog attack where, over six weeks, he lost 60 scanned-in-lamb ewes. On top of the emotional toll, his financial loss was \$15,000.

It's not only wild dogs causing such heartache – Pinnaroo's location near the shores of popular holiday destination Goughs Bay means visiting pet dogs often roam the area and impinge on the livelihoods of local producers. These dogs may not be registered with the local council, making it difficult to determine their ownership.

“It takes a huge mental toll – one weekend I lost 30 lambs. I asked the ranger to go around Goughs Bay and check permits but it could have been a dog owned by people who were just visiting for the weekend,” Paul said.

These days, Paul works closely with his local professional wild dog controller for advice on trapping, baiting and shooting, and feels he has access to better support and tools.

“We utilise all the tools for the most effective methods of wild dog control,” Paul said.

Working together

Understanding the behaviour and location of wild dogs is key to predicting attacks

ahead of the pack

and knowing where to place control measures such as baits.

Paul said they have most of their damage in March and April, during the breeding season, as wild dogs are roaming further out of the bush.

Paul uses tools such as the FeralScan Pest Mapping and WildDogScan apps and works with his neighbours to collect data on dog sightings, attacks and control activities.

He said this collaboration is critical.

“The more data points I have – whether it’s my neighbour sighting a wild dog near my property or recently trapping one – the better I can prepare my sheep or cattle pre-lambing and calving,” Paul said.

New tools

Paul and his brother James have harnessed the power of technology to help producers implement a more systematic approach to everyday issues on-farm. They developed a farm safety software platform, AirAgri.

“AirAgri enhances farm safety and management and taps into the sensitive topic of mental health. I use it to conduct my day-to-day operations with the confidence that I’ll be getting home to my family every evening.”

An internet of things (IoT) network tracking device is incorporated into the AirAgri platform. This, along with the safety management system, gives Paul peace of mind.

The platform allows producers to manage and implement tasks across different job lists on their farm. Paul uses both AirAgri and FeralScan to log his predatory information.

“FeralScan feeds information back to government on the measures taken in different areas to control these predators, while AirAgri has task allocation so you can pinpoint areas where you want baits to be laid. You can then allocate that to different members on the platform,” Paul said.

Predator Control Management Program

Another important aspect of Paul’s wild dog toolkit is his Predator Control Management Program (PCMP), which he conducts from April to May. This program was devised by PDS facilitator Dr Matt Mahoney, of Agridome Consultancy.

A PCMP contains:

- everything in one place to ensure comprehensive predator control can be implemented

- property-specific details, i.e. joining and lambing dates, baiting start and end dates, and key contacts
- a property map marked with control points
- important information such as FeralScan login details
- neighbour contact details for notification
- information on number of baits required and signage requirements.

The PCMP is specific for his property and utilises thermal imaging and baiting controls for about eight weeks leading into, as well as during, lambing.

“Throughout the year it’s on and off but that eight-week period is really when we hit it hard. If we’re copping significant damage, which luckily we aren’t this season, we’ll add trapping to that list from February onwards.”

Paul uses thermal imaging on his gun scope which helps give him the upper hand by removing the need for spotlights, which he has found can spook wild dogs and foxes.

Learnings so far

Since applying his PCMP, Paul has seen lamb marking rates increase by 6–10% per year.

Being involved in the PDS has given him the confidence that the overall management system on the farm is going to continually perform year-on-year.

“The PDS, along with the use of Lifetime Ewe Management and the Lambs Alive courses, have given me a far greater understanding in the management of both livestock and pastures to maximise the output of our Merino flock,” Paul said. ■

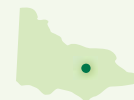
LESSONS LEARNT

- ✔ Consider all options and create a suitable response to wild dogs.
- ✔ Speak with government bodies which are in place to guide and support your business.
- ✔ Stay positive and remember at the end of the day your animals rely on you to protect them.
- ✔ Be vigilant to all aspects of your business and the variables that could impact it.



SNAPSHOT

PAUL DIAMOND,
‘Pinnaroo’, Goughs Bay,
Victoria



AREA

500ha

ENTERPRISE

1,500 superfine Merino ewes, 200 stud and commercial Angus breeders

PASTURES

Improved pastures and native undulating hill country

SOIL

Grey loamy clay

RAINFALL

750mm

TOOLBOX



✔ Scan this QR code to learn more about the MLA PDS
Less predators, more lambs.



✔ Learn more about MLA’s PDS program at mla.com.au/pds

✔ Making More From Sheep (MMFS) – tools and training to build profitable and sustainable sheep enterprises: makingmorefromsheep.com.au

✔ MMFS *Sheep producers manual* (predator management modules 5 and 12)



✔ Centre for Invasive Species Solutions: invasives.com.au

✔ PestSmart provides best practice pest control information: pestsmart.org.au

✔ Order the updated glove box guide *Best-practice management of wild dogs in peri-urban environments.*

