

eID on the Surf Coast

Producer case study: Murray Johns



Image 1. Murray using the tag reader

Background

Murray Johns is a mixed livestock producer based at Bellbrae, south-west Victoria. He manages 400ha, with 95 head of cattle and 1,700 sheep, turning off 1,000 lambs each year. He runs a self-replacing composite ewe flock of 1,100–1,200 ewes, with 50% mated to maternal rams. He currently uses two to three different breeds of maternal rams, along with two different breeds of terminal sire.

Terminal lambs and male maternal breed rams are sold as suckers direct to processors if they make weight and price targets, with some also sold as store lambs privately. Replacement ewe lambs and unfinished wether lambs are shorn and fed over summer on fodder crops.

Prior knowledge

At the beginning of the Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project, Murray knew that electronic identification (eID) could be used for:

- lifetime traceability
- individual identification of animals to record pedigree and performance characteristics, such as fleece weight
- monitoring of individual weight gain
- recording pregnancy status at scanning, and
- auto-drafting.

Before commencing the PDS, Murray was applying blank ear tags in addition to the mandatory eID tag to help identify which bloodlines the lambs came from. This was because all lambs ended up getting boxed into one mob due to paddock availability and providing larger mob sizes for grazing management.

Introduction of eID to the property

In 2022, Murray planned to implement eIDs into his farming system in three stages:

1. Purchase of a tag reader and associated software to tag and record/access information in the yards. Investigate whether this could be linked to the pregnancy scanning contractor's system to record pregnancy status.
2. Purchase electronic scales that can be linked to a tag reader. At the time, he had a weigh crate and a 20-year-old set of scales. This update would allow him to track growth rates.

3. Purchase an auto-draft system linked to eID. Murray sees this as a huge efficiency gain as he usually works alone.

Current use

Murray purchased an eID stick reader which uses Bluetooth to connect to his phone. This has allowed him to identify different bloodlines, removing the need for extra ear tags for identification. Due to the drought conditions which have affected business cash flow, he has yet to purchase any other equipment but still hopes to do so in the future.

Areas for improvement

Unfortunately, Murray has constant challenges with linking the scanning wand via Bluetooth to upload data. There is also no other option for uploading data.

He also spoke with his pregnancy scanning contractor who uses the traditional marking method (raddle/paint) and drafting after the scanner has left. The contractor found that missing ear tags and technology issues with scanning the tags created too many hold-ups, and it's quicker to use the traditional method. Producers are asked to record eID data after the scanner has finished if they wish to do so.

Advice to others

For producers exploring eID technology for the first time, it's valuable to speak with other producers in your region about what systems they're using and how it's working for them. Murray recommends asking your friends or neighbours what they are using and if they are happy with it. Peer insights can provide practical, unbiased perspectives that help guide your decision-making. While product representatives can offer useful technical information, it's important to consider a range of experiences. Start with a simple setup that meets your immediate needs—such as recording weights or tracking health treatments—and build from there as your confidence and data requirements grow."

More information

Refer to Integrity Systems Company's resources for further guidance on [Sheep and goat eID](#).

Use [this resource](#) to learn more about selecting the correct NLIS-approved sheep and goat devices.

Learn more about the Sheep and goat eID [National Implementation Plan](#).

For further information:

Jessie Wettenhall, Southern Farming Systems T 0447 848 815 E jwettenhall@sfs.org.au