



# AUSTRALIAN SUPERFINE WOOL GROWERS' ASSOCIATION INC

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## ASWGA Tasmania Region Report

### July 2009

Activities have been relatively subdued over the 2008/2009 season largely due to the continuing once in a hundred year drought with many superfine properties receiving record low rainfall totals. However on a brighter note June and July have seen some very good rainfall totals in all areas except the northern midlands where there has been worthwhile rainfall. Winter temperatures have been relatively mild with few frosts. This provides the prospect of a reasonable early Spring.



**Photo 1: Sheep on Glen Stuart in Tasmania**

Sheep numbers have continued to fall with many superfine properties down to half and with wether flocks severely reduced. The number of ewes mated this year will be the lowest since the 1930's but prospects for a better lambing are favourable. If there is a reasonable Spring the road to rebuilding the superfine flock will begin.

While forecasts predict a new El Nino and unfavourable dipole ration in the Indian Ocean devotees of the late Inigo Jones will recall that he predicted this Tasmanian drought and that it would decline at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The high price of lamb and mutton has resulted in a move to meat sires. Sales of Merino rams are down by 50% and many people are mating half to Merino sires and

half to Terminal sires. There is no incentive to return to Merino sires for next season as cash flow is the major determinant. Therefore if superfine prices do not improve and sheep meat prices remain high then the level of return to superfine wool production will be lower.

This year due to reduced stocking rates and supplementary feeding the quality of the clip was well maintained with diameter VM unchanged, yield 1% lower strength lower only by 0.2 n/kt and fleece weights marginally higher.

Ultrafine production under 15.5 microns was the same as for the 2007/08 season while superfine production from 15.6 to 18.5 microns fell by 744 tonnes greasy. The move finer in Tasmania continues with 48% of the total Tasmanian clip 18 microns and finer and 64% 19 microns and finer.

With most of the Tasmanian clip now being sold through Melbourne and with the ongoing support for Roberts Wool Pool and the association with the Merino Company the volume of wool available for the traditional February sale has declined. The February sale was trialled as a Friday sale restricted to 19 micron and finer fleece wool. For February 2010 this format will continue with a small increase in the number of lots offered but concentrating on a premium quality catalogue showcasing the best Tasmanian superfine wool.

The ongoing bitter debate with the Tasmanian Government on retention of the regulations controlling the movement and running of the Exotic sheep breeds continues

without final resolution with the Minister and DPIW staff failing to understand the importance of protecting the States \$80 million wool industry.

The listing by the Commonwealth Government of the lowland *Themeda spp.* and *Poa spp.* ecological grassland communities has finally occurred under the EPBC act is of serious concern. While continued grazing use is permitted any change of use can be blocked. These communities are the backbone of the States superfine wool industry. One problem to emerge without any consultation was the inclusion of the "derived" grasslands. These "derived" grasslands have been partially developed particularly in the 1950's and 60's with aerial seeding and fertilizing with sub clover and rye grass etc. and have in recent times with low wool prices reverted partly back to native species and annual species. This potentially vastly increases the area covered and without any clear understanding of what this entails. The failure of the Commonwealth to fund an excellent and well thought out stewardship programme for these communities and no funding or compensation makes a mockery of the listing.



**Photo 2:Allan & Carol Phillips of Glen Stuart with Andrew Blanch of New England Wool**

The 2009 CampbellTown show provided good competition in the Merino Section with Merryville stud taking the major awards with good support from Trefusis and Glen Stuart. Allan Phillips of Glen Stuart received the prestigious Bruce Forster Laincot Award for contribution and service to the Tasmanian wool industry.



**Photo 3:ASWGA President Mr Kevin Dunn with Alister Strickland**

The Region appreciated the visits of the President Kevin Dunn reporting on his overseas findings and at stud ram sales visiting members and prospective new members.