



# AUSTRALIAN SUPERFINE WOOL GROWERS' ASSOCIATION INC

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## ASWGA Goulburn/Yass Region Report

### July 2008

In reviewing the past twelve-months since being re-elected Chairman of the Region, the immediate reflection is one of continuing tough conditions which members have had to endure, particularly in terms of seasonal conditions but also in terms of mediocre wool prices. The effect is that we continue to lose members for these and other reasons. The decline in membership is of concern both at Region and Council level and considerable time has been spent in contacting resigning and unfinancial members - an exercise awash with personal hardship, disappointment and angst. The year was also marked by the death of Mike Nicholls who had previously served on the committee for a number of years.

During the year, two Committee meetings were conducted (November, March) canvassing a number of issues which were taken to Council. A satisfying aspect of these meetings was that they were very well attended and almost all issues discussed resulted in carriage of motions unanimously and with enthusiasm.

With resigning and unfinancial members offering Ausfine membership as the primary reason for leaving ASWGA, Council was asked to take up discussions with Ausfine with the view of achieving greater cooperation between the two organisations. In the absence of any Council action on this issue and with more than 50 percent of current committee holding dual membership and further members indicating they are going to let their ASWGA membership lapse, the committee unanimously resolved that the Region seek to establish a memorandum of understanding unilaterally with Ausfine. This has been initiated and to date well received by Ausfine. The Region seeks an active strategy to engage with Ausfine, to reverse the decline in ASWGA membership and capture a better outcome for current and future ASWGA members.

Declining membership has increased the risk that the ASWGA logo is used on non-member clips. Brokers are also uneasy at exposure to truth in advertising legislation with inappropriate use of the logo. In the absence of more direct advice on membership status, brokers are proposing to electronically flush ASWGA membership details at the end of each selling season, requiring members to reaffirm annually their membership status.

The Region prepared a comprehensive paper for National Council covering governance issues in the context of ASWGA constitution and activities. The Region sees the issues and recommendations as most important in progressing and streamlining the waning governance of ASWGA.

The Region was disappointed that the request to host 2008 Zegna dinner in the Great Hall, Parliament House, Canberra was unsuccessful and have re-raised the issue in the hope that next time the Region will be successful. Reasons for persisting with this proposal include the additional national promotional opportunities the venue offers sitting amidst what remains the largest regional membership and regional members offering the Zegna event as the prime reason for taking out ASWGA membership. While on the issue of Zegna, the committee requested that consideration be given to permitting non-ASWGA members to enter fleeces (with entry fee) in the Zegna competition so that the nation's best fleeces are available and provide a high-profile catalyst for new membership. Perhaps the dual success of New Zealand fleeces in the latest event might spark wider Council support for this initiative.

After nearly two years of activity, the Region has been successful in getting Council to out-source the Annual Newsletter which will take on a larger full-colour professional format under the title *ASWGA Annual*. Not only does this mean a

significant boost to Council coffers, but also provides greater opportunity to more professionally showcase ASWGA.

The Region initiated an independent professional review of ASWGA website which was endorsed by Council. Some of the recommendations are starting to appear on the site but more action is required given the universal importance that websites now take in promotion and current awareness roles.

The Region has expressed its concern that the Big Merino, Goulburn displays products made from other than Australian wool. AWI have voiced support for the position taken by ASWGA.

The Region has asked NSW-DPI to establish and enforce protocols for stock transporters who cart shedding breeds because of the risk of contaminating sheep subsequently carted if thorough cleaning is not undertaken.

While welcoming the integration of AWI-AWS, the Region was concerned at the immediate departure of Brenda McGahan and the risk of traction loss in the Test Marketing Program. With marketing crucial to the survival of superfine wool growers, members remain anxious to see more effective and increasing marketing activity.

During the past twelve-months the Region conducted a Wool Feature (18<sup>th</sup> May 2008) at Crisp Galleries, Bowning for members in particular and the wool industry in general. Despite poor seasonal conditions and bracing conditions on the day over a 100 people rolled up. Invited speakers covered the latest position on the on-going mulesing debate, Thermoskin and Ausfine classing demonstrations and marketing options. This was followed by nearly a two-hour session where questions and comments from the floor were put to the seven-person industry panel. Issues covered:

- Local lack of wool products
- Levy expenditure on on-farm research
- Wool second export earner to coal
- Promote wool inflammability
- Differentiate wool quality and types
- Color code Woolmark to quality
- Retailers' reaction to PETA action
- China's position on mulesing
- Reasons for declining wool prices

- Wool profitability for next five years
- Ratio of wool price to cotton
- Fuel price rise a benefit for wool
- Breeding alternative to mulesing
- Lower quality wool cut of plain sheep
- Role of genetic modification for sheep
- Acceptance and pain of clips
- Auditing non-mulesing status
- Customer's requirements paramount

Members continue to achieve outstanding feats during the year. Notable examples include the Highlander Ultrafine group jointly winning the Loro Piana World challenge Cup for the world's finest bale; Hillcreston Park achieving an impressive nine 1PP bales and Cassandra and Andrew Ledger being Southern Tablelands finalists in the New England Wool's Ultimate Clip Preparation award. The Ledger's also broke the drought for the Region which had been unplaced in the Zegna competition for some five years gaining seventh place in the unprotected section. All people involved with these achievements are to be congratulated on their on-going commitment to excellence under continuing challenging conditions and may they inspire others to follow.

The Region initiated the nomination of Helen Cathles for the Government's Australia 2020 Summit (19-20<sup>th</sup> April 2008) and in Helen's words '*The 2020 Summit was a fantastic initiative*' and provided opportunity for members to convey experiences and suggestions via Helen to the Summit.

The Chairman gave an invited presentation to ABARE Regional conference at Lakes Entrance (25<sup>th</sup> July 2007) titled *Farming under landscape and climate challenges*. Kevin Rattigan and I were invited to attend an AWI-supported workshop (21-23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008) run by Australian Land Management Systems which seeks to accredit wool producer operations to the standards of the international ISO14001 environmental benchmark.

The Region has been active in increasing coverage and promotion of the Branch in local and national media with regular radio and press coverage of issues relevant to the Region. We are now in a position that media outlets contact us for comment on prevailing issues.

The year 2009 has been designated as United Nations International Year for Natural Fibres which offers an opportunity to promote the virtues of the world's greatest natural fibre - superfine wool. To this end I have been negotiating with National Museum of Australia for an exhibit in the foyer of the museum featuring superfine wool, including the top Zegna fleeces with a theme from fleece to fabric. Similar attempts through the National Library were unsuccessful due to major refurbishing next year. A national Australia Post stamp issue featuring superfine wool has been proposed and supported by Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The ACT Department of Education and Training have agreed to establish web-based optional college units to be syndicated to all States and territories featuring the history of growing and processing of superfine wool.

Three documentary film making companies have been approached in the hope one may take up the opportunity to develop a TV documentary featuring superfine wool to commemorate 2009.

In closing, I would like to thank committee members for the broad support I have enjoyed throughout the year and in particular, Helen and Ian Cathles, and resigning Secretary Peter Sekules, Treasurer Kevin Rattigan and Alan Ticehurst. I also thank our sponsors, in particular the long standing support from Australian Wool Network, through Southern regional manager, Mark Hedley and NSW-DPI at the recent wool feature.