

RSPCA Australia - Animal welfare organisation

TOR 1c (meeting the planned outcomes and targets of its strategic plan) and TOR 1f (monitoring and evaluation of investments): The AWI strategic plan 2016-19 (p56) states that an investment focus will be that “Growers availed of the basis for practical genetic and chemical control programs for control of internal parasites and fly strike.” However, the proposed relevant target does not go beyond “Development of an ASBV for faecal consistency, so fostering development of non-allergenic genetic resistance to internal parasites.” The key aim of AWI’s investment focus in the flystrike prevention space should be the breeding of a Merino flock that is resistant to flystrike. This can be achieved through proactively breeding for low wrinkle, low dags, low breech cover as well as low urine stain as appropriate for the local climate and pasture quality/availability. The importance of populating the MerinoSelect database with this information from all studs to facilitate and expediate this process cannot be underestimated. Indeed, including a breech strike resistance trait would be beneficial as well. In addition, a proactive awareness and education campaign to help producers understand good flock husbandry, management and breeding practices and make the transition away from mulesing is imperative. The recent report “Planning for a non-mulesed Merino enterprise” is a good first step in this direction but it cannot be the last. With around 75% of Merino lambs still being mulesed (albeit with a similar percentage having pain relief applied according to AWI surveys), it is disappointing to see that AWI’s efforts since 2006 (when the breech strike prevention program commenced) and that of stud breeders and wool producers generally, have not led to a significant increase in flystrike-resistant genetics and a concomitant decrease in the need for mulesing across the Australian Merino flock. If AWI is interested in aligning “with evolving consumer expectations” and mitigating “trade continuity risks” as stated on p56 of the AWI strategic plan 2016-19, then the urgent focus must be on ending mulesing (with or without pain relief) and other breech modification practices in favour of breeding for flystrike resistance.

TOR 1d (delivering benefits to woolgrowers and, where appropriate, the community in general): It is widely acknowledged that livestock industry research, development and extension (RD&E) is important to the long-term viability of the sector. RD&E is recognised as a long-term source of new technologies and a key driver of productivity growth. RD&E programs should also reflect an awareness of emerging issues and a responsiveness to growing consumer expectations that may impact the wool industry. Genetics, with the aim of ending mulesing, must remain a priority in AWI’s research program. An essential aspect of industry and government-funded research is peer-review and publication of research results. We encourage AWI to ensure all research is peer reviewed and published in reputable journals in a timely manner. Ongoing investment in research will ensure that wool producers have access to best practice technologies that will improve productivity, their long-term viability and, importantly, animal welfare.