

Norman Smith

Our family have been breeding Merinos for 120 years on the same property and a further two generations before that in Australia. I am passionate about the Merino industry including its unique fibre and the important role Merino Sheep can play in our ecosystem when managed sustainably.

We manage 10,000 commercial Merinos, a Merino Stud and my wife owns a very small Merino clothing Company called Love Merino.

The Merino industry has been through a challenging time over the last 25 years since the end of the Reserve Price scheme and only now after a lot of pain are we left with a much smaller industry which includes many passionate Merino Breeders.

The resurgence in price for wool and meat is invigorating the industry and hopefully entices people back to breeding quality Merinos.

The Merino industry I believe has two major challenges when we look to the future –

1. As with every food and fibre industry in the world, the consumer is demanding more and more of their product and want to know where it has come from. This is an advantage for wool as it is a natural fibre which is grown in a sustainable manner, however ethically we are dragging the chain. Mulesing is and has been an issue for the industry for 15 years at least, the issue is not going to go away and other countries such as New Zealand have banned the practice. Because of vested interest and politics in the Australian industry our Industry body AWI has completely ignored the mulesing issue and continues to jeopardise our future by not addressing it to the media and to our customers. I am not advocating a banning of the practice however we could have begun to phase the practice out 10 years ago and today we would not have this issue, but they have ignored it and do not even support those growers who have stopped the practice. We stopped mulesing in 2005, we get no marketing support from AWI, but receive considerable premiums for our wool in the market and run Merino Sheep which require a lot less input than when we were running Merinos which needed to be mulesed. Dr Jim Watts has researched and put into practice the solution to mulesing but is castigated by the stud breeders and AWI because of their vested interest in the status quo.
2. Our industry is aging and is overly conservative, we need to continue to attract young people into our industry otherwise we risk becoming a cottage industry much like Mohair. AWI supports those who are conservative and want to breed a Merino just like their grandfather did, what other industry in the world does that? Our research body's in Australia such as Sheep CRC and MLA have developed many great innovations for Merino Breeders including Breeding Values and DNA profiling, AWI does not openly support a lot of these innovations and employs their own propaganda Managers to indoctrinate their outdated idea of the Merino world on all levy payers.

I want myself and hopefully my children to be involved and passionate about an industry which grows a premium priced product not a commodity (we are less than 2% of the world textile market) which is seen all over the world in all the great clothing labels and encourages innovation from the research bodies, but one which gives growers a choice of their breeding direction and of the markets their wool can go into.

AWI fails on all of these fronts and for the life of me I do not understand why I have to pay a compulsory levy to a bureaucracy which does not support the way I want to breed and market my produce, and only wants to look after their own self-interest.

Last year my Wife and I were lucky enough to visit China to a textile expo in Shanghai , the AWI offices in Shanghai and to a number of woollen processors. Our immediate impression on leaving the AWI offices was what a great job they were doing. However when visiting the processors they told a completely different story and were very scathing of the job that AWI were doing on research and of the marketing, enough said.

There are many more examples of the failures and vested interest in AWI but I hope I have made my point.

I am happy to pay a levy for the marketing of our wool and for research and development; I would pay more if that company was doing a good job, AWI is not that company, and it is time Government showed leadership and makes change.

Kind Regards

Norman Smith