

## Leading Sheep Dubbo Bus Tour 26<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> August 2014

Last week Leading Sheep, with the help of Landmark, took 16 sheep, lamb and wool producers on a bus tour to Dubbo. The bus, or our glorified cattle truck as some liked to call it, departed in Charleville on Tuesday and headed for the NSW border picking up passengers along the way. We were all delighted to be reminded what green grass and storm clouds look like once we got down around Nyngan. While we were travelling down everybody got a good chance to meet each other and we also had Graeme Murray from Heiniger talk to us about workplace health and safety in the shearing shed. Graeme identified why safety in the shearing shed is so important and how Heiniger products are leading the way in this regard.

We arrived in Dubbo at 6pm and quickly checked into the Blue Lagoon Motel before heading down to the local RSL for dinner. During dinner we had Lee Toohey from Bayer do a presentation on lice control and also talk to us about their new dip product, 'Parana'. It was good to hear of a new lice control product coming onto the market and also interesting to understand the time and costs that go into registering a new product and making it available to producers.



*The group of Queensland producers at the start of the National Merino Sheep Show and Ram Sale.  
Participants ranged from Meandarra in the east to Winton in the west.*

Wednesday morning we headed to the Rabo Bank National Merino Sheep Show at the Dubbo showgrounds. We were welcomed by the president of the show society, Stuart McBurnie, who gave us a quick overview of the show and were they see the show heading in the future. Everyone was kept busy looking through the stud displays, fleeces, fashions and trade machinery displays. Later in the morning we had Karen Huskisson, the president of the QLD Merino Stud Sheepbreeders Association, talk to us about preparing, showing and judging sheep. Karen took the group through the show sheep and explained the judging process.

Come Wednesday afternoon we had a very interesting group discussion with Luke Harrison and Russ Davis. Luke is a Landmark nutritionist that spoke to us about feeding sheep to improve productivity and the cost benefits. Russ from Ceva Animal Health spoke about achieving for more lambs and joining ewe's out of their natural cycle. This was a very interactive session and our group got a lot of questions answered and new information to think about.



*Karen Huskisson "Wattle Downs" The Gums, Richard Harries "Wiralla" Cunnamulla and Bob Brown "Heather Station" Bollon. Karen is the president of the Queensland Merino Stud Sheepbreeders Association and spoke to the group at Dubbo about preparing and showing sheep.*

Wednesday night we all scrubbed up and went to the AWI cocktail party. Here we watched a fashion show of different clothing made from wool and also saw the sashing of the supreme merino ram of Australia which was won by the Rayner Family, Grathlyn Merino Stud of Hargraves NSW. It was a very enjoyable night which for some flowed into the early hours of the morning.

We had an early start Thursday morning and headed out to Fletchers to tour the abattoir. Our tour guide Josh Laurie gave us a good insight into how the abattoir is operated and how Rodger Fletcher built his business. Fletchers kill 44,000 sheep per week at Dubbo which on average is 10 sheep per minute. Approximately 2 million sheep per year are processed between both the Dubbo and Albany abattoirs. They employ over 700 people just to run the Dubbo operation and manage to find a market for the entire sheep including all the offal and blood.

Mid morning Thursday we headed back into the show grounds to watch the Rabo Bank ram sale. 48 out of 64 rams sold for an average of \$4,839. The top selling ram was lot number one from Roseville Park Merino Stud which sold for \$25,000. That afternoon we headed back out to Fletchers to hear about the farming side of the operation and how they run their properties. Fletchers have more than 250,000 acres in pastoral holdings which include 100,000 acres of cropping, 10,000 acres of irrigation and more than 140,000 acres of prime grazing land.



*Richard Harries "Wiralla" Cunnamulla, Josh Laurie Fletchers International, Ben Wilson "Wilgunya" Dirranbandi and Nicole Sallur DAFF Extension Officer Charleville*

Thursday night we had dinner back at our motel where Emily King from AWI give us a presentation on a general overview of AWI and how the wool levy money is being spent. The next morning we hopped back on the bus and headed for home. We were lucky to have 3 presentations on the bus while we were travelling home. First Scott Miller from Novartis spoke to the group about fly and worm control and the new KlikZin product coming onto the market. We then heard from Sue Mortimer from the Trangie research station. Sue gave us an overview of the history of the research station and what current studies they are carrying out. Lastly we heard from Allan Casey from the NSW DPI. Allan ran the group through how to set a breeding objective for their own sheep enterprises and also how to select and prepare rams for joining.

The group as a whole really enjoyed the tour to Dubbo and all said they got a lot out of the trip. Everyone came back with a lot of new information and plenty to think about with their own businesses. Leading Sheep would like to thank those who managed to take the time off to come on the trip during such a dry time in QLD which made the trip the success it was. Thank you to the Dubbo sheep show society for their hospitality and we would also like thank the various companies and the presenters who spoke to our group during the tour. A special thanks must also go to Bruce Lines of Landmark Wool as this bus trip was originally his idea and I really appreciate all his effort and input that went into the trip. Leading Sheep looks forward to organising other bus tours in the future.

Amy Brown – Leading Sheep Coordinator for SW QLD



*One of the judges at the National Merino Sheep Show explaining to the group why he chose this ram as champion.*



*Kerrie and Rod Cribb "Murra Downs" Cunnamulla checking out the fleeces at Dubbo*