



**DAMARA SHEEP BREEDERS SOCIETY OF
AUSTRALIA INC**

not so...

DAMNEWS

February 2013



photo: peter trent, vice president NSW

Upcoming Events

**World Coloured Sheep
Congress** in Rambouillet
France 19th -22nd May 2014
(I have been asked to submit a
paper for this conference)

**Lambex Adelaide
showgrounds** 12th-14th July
2014 (Maybe an opportunity for
the Damaras to be represented
and members to get together)

Welcome everybody to the first national Damara sheep newsletter and thank you for all your contributions from across the country

The situation in WA regarding the marketing of Damara type sheep and other fat tail breeds is at a very crucial stage with the introduction of the Federal Governments ESCAS system which is a whole of supply chain system

This means sheep can only go to an approved abattoir and cannot be sold in the wet markets

In most cases the Damaras have been going to approved abattoirs which as producers we are more than happy with the sticking point is some of these abattoirs are only small and the cost of the Australian Government auditing

is very expensive and they can source the sheep from other countries

Some countries such as Saudi Arabia at this stage have decided not to be part of the scheme

Currently there are no fat tail type sheep being loaded on live ships to the Middle East region from WA and it does not look like this will change in the short term

In the meantime two export abattoirs have commenced some trials processing and are investigating air freighting carcasses into Middle Eastern markets

Please find a copy of a letter sent to Sue Cairns from the Black and Coloured

Sheep Breeders Ass I am sure Sue would welcome any comments or if you have encountered a similar situation

There is also a copy of the new registration form from the Rob Martin Secretariat.

The upcoming events are worth considering.

I have been asked to submit a paper for the **World Coloured Sheep Congress** in France in May, and the **Lambex Adelaide showgrounds** event in July may be a good opportunity for the Damaras to be represented and members to get together.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter and any comments would be greatly appreciated email shrewton12@hotmail.com

Matthew Young
Editor



Victorian Damaras

The damara breed in Australia is becoming more widely known, accepted and appreciated resulting in an increase in the number of enquiries regarding the sheep. Some enquires are very unusual to say the least - one guy wanted to buy the rams so he could get the heads taxidermied and sell them as trophies (they do have a great set of horns)!!! One guy just wanted tails for their fat!!! And of course, there are plenty enquiries from farmers (and hobbyists) who are after breeding stock. The popularity of the breed has increased dramatically over the past twelve months – probably as a result of many high profile information articles and sheep showing of the breed.

For example, due to market interest, last year's lambing saw Victorian member Sue Cairns sell all their ram lambs before they were even weaned. As breeders, this was great and also they were able to sell all their extra ewe lambs which were for sale as well.

Among other enquiries regard on how damaras perform in mountain areas where they can get snow. If anyone has had experience with the damaras in cold climates please let us know.

Damaras are a very hardy, resilient and quick sheep that using flocking as a protection strategy. Like with any breed of sheep, breeders need to be prepared for their idiosyncrasies and behaviours.

In one case a buyer had them in a 30 acres paddock without corners or internal fencing and was trying to catch them in make shift yards in the middle of the paddock. As he just couldn't handle them or show them correct amount of animal husbandry, the flock ended up being bought back by the original sellers. As a result of this experience the sellers now try to teach their buyers on how to handle the sheep before selling damaras to them demonstrating that once you understand the breed they are great to handle.

Many buyers are after registered stock which has been a bit frustrating as the Association has been changing to a new system and the registrations have taken quite some time. We hope the new breeders are also joining the Association - the more members the better.

The Rego system

A new RAHS exclusive online data base is expected to be operational within 6-12 months. It will provide all of our customers with the capacity to undertake online registrations and transfers, annual returns and membership updates using the latest technology available. The database has also been designed to record and produce flock book data with minimal handling from staff.

This is and has been a large and expensive job and taken longer to deal with than anticipated. Until we are operational, all members intending to register and transfer animals are urged to use the forms attached to this Newsletter and which are also located on the website www.damaras.com.au from there we will allocate the rego number and forward it back to members.

Once the system is operational, the data uploaded into the new system will provide certificates and to build pedigrees.

Our Members - (from The President Len Cargeeg)

- Last year saw Ros Scott from Victoria and Matt Young from WA joined the National Committee. The members of the committee are Len Cargeeg, WA, President, Peter Trent, NSW, Vice President, the Secretariat, Rural Services of RAHS SA with Rob Martin the Secretary, Committee Gerry Pauley, WA (Treasurer of the Western Division), Matthew Young (President of the Western Division); Sue Cairns and Ros' Scott, both from Victoria.
- Ian and Alison Tutt from St George in Queensland have rejoined the Society and are very welcome back.
- Mark Challans from Karoonda, South Australia reported that since becoming a member of the Society he has had many more enquiries. Michael said the cost of the subscription was truly covered by the extra business received.
- The website continues to attract enquiries concerning health and animal husbandry subjects. The vets from the WA Department of Agriculture and Food have been most helpful in assisting growers nationwide with their concerns.
- October 2012 was a very good month for the website attracting an average of 362 hits per day with a total of 11,232 hits for the month.
- Sue Cairns was successful in displaying her sheep at the Bendigo Sheep Show. Many enquiries were made and much interest was shown towards the sheep.
- There has been very good articles in rural magazines in Victoria featuring Sue Cairns' and Catherine Hargreaves' studs.
- This is the Society's sixteenth year since incorporation. Rob Martin is the longest serving officer with about 11 years as secretary.

WA Damaras - Wet summer issues

During a wet summer the sheep, and especially damaras that make good use of low quality roughage, are very useful to keep the trashy weeds down to enable winter cropping .meaning less herbicide spraying.

However one problem to be aware of at this time is the possibility of poisoning from the weed caltrop. Last summer at "Narkalbudin" Gerry Pauley lost 12 young sheep to caltrop poisoning. (See *more about caltrop in CAR Ag Tactics Nov 2012 by Roy Butler*)

In other news, WA Damaras got an order for two poll damara rams from a grower with a small damara flock south of Yelbeni. His sheep came from Arther Heal. He has mostly had dorper crosses but has had a gut full of them getting out so is looking to breed towards a stay at home sheep like the damara. This shows the interest in damaras quietly persisting despite marketing challengers.



photo: peter trent, vice president NSW

Exhibition of Coloured Fibre Shedding Sheep Breeds

The Committee of BCSBAA(Vic) Inc., regularly reviews our participation in the Sheep and Wool Show to consider outcomes and feedback and plan for improvements. The following are the Committee's concerns regarding the exhibition of the damara Breed under the Black and Coloured banner:

1. The damara is a fibre-shedding breed. Within the white wool industry this fibre is considered a dangerous contaminant requiring specific Clip Preparation steps and declarations to protect the integrity of the Industry.
2. Black and Coloured Sheep, whilst a colour contaminant to white wool, produce wool fibre which can also be seriously contaminated by shedding breeds, to the detriment of our craft and commercial customers.
3. The damara should be supported by its Breed Society. The A.S.B.A. permit the competitive exhibition of other Breeds, with only one breeder exhibitor. Why not the damara Breed?
4. The damara, as a Pure Breed, does not meet the Statement of Purposes under the BSCBAA(Vic) Inc Constitution, within which several clauses refer to: '*... the production of good wool types ...*'; '*... black and coloured fleece wool..*'; and '*... improvement of all black and coloured sheep for the production of good wool types*'
5. The Committee feels that the inclusion of the damara purebreds under the Black and Coloured banner may not be in the best interests of the promotion of our sheep, wool and products.
6. Technically this breed is an exotic 'Meat Breed'. They do not produce wool fibre. They are valued for their skins. To cater adequately for such a breed would require separate classes and a separate Judge.

It is noted that following the 2012 Dandenong Show there were results listed for "Meat Breed with Colour Section" with a separate classes and a different judge to the Black and Coloured Sheep Section. I have tried to access a copy of the schedule however the website says that the 2013 schedule is not yet available.



(photos courtesy WA members Gerry pauley and colleen scally)

In brief

- Interest in damara sheep continues to grow in NSW but mostly among small scale and hobby farmers;
- An organic lamb farm was started in Bungendore NSW using damara sheep. Over the longer term, this will assist with the profile of damara lamb in restaurants;
- Drought conditions in much of NSW have created a difficult summer for pasture but 180mm of rain in 36 hours (and still raining!!!!) during the Australian weekend along much of coastal NSW and some inland areas has given much needed relief.



Damaras are alive and well

Extracted from A Short History of Damara Sheep in Eastern Australia by Viv Forbes

“The virtual closure of the live export trade for central Qld, threw a lot of Damaras onto a domestic market unskilled in handling Damaras - they were not well received. The reasons given were:

- too difficult to handle on and off trucks; truckies and sheep got stressed.
- in feed-lots, “too much feed went into the tail, and what do you do with it”.
- flighty in sale yards and harder to handle and draft.
- different shape on the hook.
- dark hairs show up more on carcasses.

All of this led to severe buyer resistance in the domestic lamb and mutton markets. Damaras were bad-mouthed by agents in sale yards – “the cane toads of the sheep market”. Any sheep with a bit of colour (often from Dorper) was referred to as “Damara” and marked down.

But anyone who has handled Damaras a lot can say: “Damaras are different but once you learn how to draft, load and unload them, they are very predictable and easy to handle.”

The loading and handling problems are mainly a matter of yard and lane design and are greatly assisted by having a mob leader. This is mainly a learning problem – Damaras ARE different.

Damaras do have two more substantial issues in the domestic meat market.

Firstly, a proportion of Damara lambs cut their adult teeth (and thus are no longer defined as lambs) before they reach market target weight.

Secondly, because Damaras are taller and thinner than say, Dorpers, their boning yield is often lower, leading to lower prices per sheep.

Neither of these affect meat quality or profit per hectare, but they are market realities. Mainly they just illustrate that: Damaras are different.

According to MLA, goat meat is the most widely consumed meat in the world and Australia is the world's largest goat meat

exporter. Damara are similar but superior to goats in every way. Country and people who can handle goats, will find Damara better in every way.

People who taste well-prepared Damara meat love it. It is the best meat we have tasted – better than Dorper, better than Merino, better than beef and better than dairy goat (we have not tasted feral or Boer goat). And Damaras will survive in outback conditions better than any meat animals except feral goats, wild pigs and wild camels.”...

...“There will always be a demand for Damara from small farmers – their attractive appearance, their good meat quality, their flocking instinct and their quick intelligence are attractive features to this market. And despite their deserved reputation for being flighty, they can become quieter and more affectionate than any other sheep breed, and they are far less prone to be nasty or fractious. And they are not fence crawlers.

They also have a place in the big meat-sheep industry. Carcass type is a real issue for pure Damaras in the domestic market. This is a market reality which will not disappear quickly. And the South Africans seem to have shown that there is more profit in 50% Damara than in either parent breed. We have always seen the greatest value of Damara was to create cross-bred or composite sheep to survive and thrive in harder outback natural pasture. The South African Meatmaster breeders believe their sheep need 50% Damara content, and Australians are coming to recognise the value of Damaras there. But there is a danger that, by the time the value of Damaras in composite Meatmaster sheep is widely recognised, there will be no pure Damaras left in Australia and no ability to import more.

Someone needs to be able to supply the Damara content. So we will help retain this valuable endangered landrace species in the land that was built on the sheep's back”...

