

## **Dohne Merinos assist in return to profit**

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With many areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales experiencing the worst drought conditions in decades, many producers will be faced with the prospect of low ewe numbers. The challenge when the season breaks will be to build up ewe numbers as quickly as possible and return to normal stocking rates.

Whilst in theory the quickest way to restock post drought is through purchasing females, history has shown that prices for replacement females often make this decision unviable. For many producers the only option is to breed ewe numbers up over time. For this to be achieved producers need a sheep that is renowned for its fertility and hardiness.

According to Bill and Margie Pye, the owners of the highly regarded Calga and Uardry Studs, the answer for many producers is the Dohne Merino.

Following the purchase of the Uardry Stud in 2012 the Pye family operation based at Coonamble NSW now has one of the biggest Dohne Merino breeding flocks in Australia. With the combined ewe numbers of the Calga and Uardry Studs, a total of 2240 ewes were joined at Calga in 2013.

Mr Pye commented that despite the dismal spring many Calga clients still managed reasonable lambing percentages and through internal benchmarking Calga clients have consistently weaned 15 to 20% more lambs since switching from a traditional Merino operation. This coupled with higher survivability rates in weaners has greatly improved client profitability.

“The wool cheques of many clients have increased since making the switch due to the greater number of lambs resulting in a greater wool cut/hectare. Also as a consequence of higher weaning rates and survivability, surplus sheep sales have increased”.

The industry is now beginning to see differentiation between the different Dohne Merino bloodlines. In the past it has been disheartening for stud breeders to see Dohnes grouped together irrespective of bloodlines. Independent industry genetic data has shown that both the Calga and Uardry studs are well above breed average for both growth and fleece weight.

“It is pleasing to note that the Calga bred ram CA 11 3807 is currently the number one ranked Dohne Merino sire in the country”, said Mr Pye.

“We are fortunate to have a large ewe base that allows greater selection pressure to ensure only the top performing animals are retained in the studs. Importantly, this also ensures that ram clients have a large number of animals to select from.”

Mr Pye noted that Calga is situated in an OJD free area with rams available to go to all parts of Australia and flock rams currently available for immediate delivery.

“Uardry has a long association with Queensland and we plan for this to continue with both Calga and Uardry displaying at Westec at Barcaldine in September”.

The annual Calga production sale will be held in September 2014 with a total of 100 Calga and Uardry rams on offer.