



## Sheep CRC Practical Wisdom Case Studies

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## New Opportunities for Merinos

### CASE STUDY

#### Mark Murphy, Karbullah Poll Merinos, Qld

There is enormous potential for producers of the Merino breed to bolster productivity and grow their markets by embracing the genomic technology developed by the Sheep CRC, but current industry attitudes need to change to encourage more producers to adopt.

#### About Mark Murphy

Mark Murphy is the principal of Karbullah Poll Merinos, located 70 km north of Goondiwindi on the Queensland-NSW border.

Showing the adaptability of the Merino breed, the 3200-hectare operation takes in Brigalow and Belah country, ironbark ridges, and a mixture of red and grey soils and native and introduced pastures. Although located in a 600 mm mostly summer rainfall area, the variability in climate means management strategies include sowing more than 150 ha to Old Man Saltbush to assist with drought proofing.

“Unlike a lot of studs servicing the Merino industry, we operate at the geographical periphery of the industry,” Mr Murphy said. “This means we are extra conscious of the production challenges faced by commercial producers, and it is also why we’ve been involved in the Sheep CRC’s genomics projects because they allow us to more accurately target the traits that we need to be profitable.”

Mr Murphy said that in order to capture the full potential on offer from genomic technology, industry should be united in encouraging the uptake of research advances.

“We’ve used genomic data in selecting for shear force and intramuscular fat and I’m busting at the seams to apply the technology to other traits as well, but we have been held back by drought and seasonal conditions,” he said.

“Depending on their individual circumstances, producers will travel at their own speed in adopting new technology, but we should ensure that the leading producers can lead without being burdened by industry structures that hold them back from trying new things.

“Genomic technology and ASBVs will allow producers to increase the speed of genetic gain in their flock by targeting traits that are either difficult to assess visually or can only be measured after slaughter.”

Mr Murphy said genomic research offered the industry the opportunity to make significant advances in the areas of animal welfare and lamb survival, where progress by producers has been limited despite research having shown more than 10 years ago that selecting for positive fat was a major influence on fertility and constitution.

“In our conditions survivability is vital and industry needs to ensure producers are more in touch with research breeding values so that we can get the most out of them,” he said.

### Take home messages

- Genomics offers Merino producers the ability to accurately target specific traits not easily identified visually, which are important to their business and farming environment.
- Opportunities include improving on-farm animal welfare and lamb survival rates.
- Industry should encourage producers to engage with new research, even if it challenges conventional wisdoms.

### Further information

- [www.sheepcrc.org.au](http://www.sheepcrc.org.au)
- [www.karbullahpollmerinos.com.au](http://www.karbullahpollmerinos.com.au)