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EDITORIAL / MARKETING

Trevor Pavlovich
PO Box 757, Glenelg, SA 5045
p: 08 8294 9151
m: 0415 908 321
trevp@worldofalpacas.com
www.worldofalpacas.com

DESIGN

Scott Hutton

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"Happy New Year to everyone"

This is our first joint Summer Edition, I do understand that many of you have retained all of our previous World of Alpacas Publications 18 Years young this year. I believe that the editorials published in this edition are amongst the most informative to date, may I suggest that you retain this World of Alpacas for your future reference. This is a 'GENTLE REMINDER' that our next NATIONAL is only 7 MONTHS AWAY, if you wish to thank me for the reminder CALL ME I enjoy having a chat!

If you are on the road over this holiday period drive carefully.



Message from the President

As we start a new year, it's an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved in the past twelve months, and plan ahead for the year to come. The year 2017 ended on a high note with demand for fleece very strong and prices very acceptable, and there is no reason

to think that this trend will not continue through 2018 and the years to come. Mills in China have already intimated that they are falling some 3,000 tons short in their global purchase of fibre, and whatever percentage of this total shortfall comes from the Australian market will be a huge shot in the arm for our breeders. This applies to huacaya and suri, over a range of micron and colour, from pieces to saddle.

Already we have a group of NSW breeders banding together to form a co-operative, to facilitate the purchasing of fleece, both huacaya and suri, and on selling to local and overseas purchasers.

This means that no matter how small or how large your operation is, there will be a facility to sell your fibre clip, providing you present it correctly. Hopefully other States will watch closely as this unfolds and perhaps replicate in their own State/Region. This initiative of the NSW breeders has arisen from the amalgamation of five Regions into one and pooling their knowledge to take the industry another great step forward.

Over the past twelve months we have seen many changes that will strengthen our industry and again take us another step forward. The introduction of eAlpaca; amendment of the AAA's Constitution; the new format of our national show – the Australian Alpaca Spectacular; some changes within showing and judging, including the implementation of a show entry levy to enable our judges, who are recognised worldwide, to continue in their training and always be recognised as amongst the best in the world. However, perhaps most importantly, is the return to being in the "black" again on our financial results, with a positive surplus for the last financial year and a continuation of that upward trend in the 2017/18 financial year.

The Board is continuing to work hard with a focus on making both the AAA, and the Australian alpaca industry in general, commercially viable long into the future.

The show season has commenced again across Australia, and will reach its climax with the holding of the Spectacular in Bendigo in August. Start making your arrangements now, this year will be bigger and better than ever and we are hoping for 700+ animals!

So, on that note, may I wish all breeders, whether exhibitors or not, a very successful year

and I hope to catch up with as many of you as possible over the next season.

Take care, and thank you for your continuing support - here is hoping 2018 will be a great year for all alpaca sales, be it animals, fleece or meat.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and the mix of articles our authors have contributed.

Kind Regards

Ian Frith



FRONT COVER

Fleur De Lys

Photographer Karen Davies,
green green grass

BACK COVER

Tumi Alpaca Transport

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Sarcocystosis

(SARCO) IN ALPACAS

by **DR ABDUL JABBAR**

Associate Professor of Veterinary Parasitology
Melbourne Veterinary School, The University of Melbourne
Werribee, Victoria 3030

WHAT IS SARCOCYSTOSIS?

Sarcocystosis is a parasitic disease of alpacas caused by a microscopic organism, *Sarcocystis*. To date, at least 196 species of *Sarcocystis* have been described from a variety of animals worldwide, and they have indirect life cycles involving carnivores as the main final hosts while herbivores such as alpacas, humans, birds and reptiles serve as intermediate hosts. Two species of *Sarcocystis*, *S. aucheniae* and *S. masoni* are known to infect alpacas and they form macroscopic and microscopic sarcocysts (a bladder in the flesh), respectively. Macroscopic cysts commonly occur in skeletal muscles while microscopic ones usually appear in heart muscles. Generally, sarcocystosis remains asymptomatic, although fatal clinical cases have been reported in alpacas.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SARCOCYSTOSIS IN AUSTRALIAN ALPACAS?

Over the last two decades, the Australian alpaca industry has grown remarkably from a few flocks in the late 1980s to more than 150,000 registered alpacas in 2013, and the production of alpaca fibre and meat have become one of the major emerging animal industries in Australia. The use of alpaca meat is increasingly becoming popular in Australia and elsewhere as it contains lower cholesterol content than red meat from sheep, goat and cattle, so it is potentially a valuable product for both Australian and international markets. However, the alpaca meat can be downgraded or even condemned due to the presence of sarcocysts. Currently, very little is known about sarcocystosis in Australian alpaca and this article aims to provide an overview of sarcocystosis in alpacas in the light of published information on the disease in alpacas, guanacos and llamas worldwide.

HOW SARCOCYSTOSIS IS TRANSMITTED IN ALPACAS?

Sarcocystis requires two hosts to complete its life cycle. An alpaca becomes infected with *Sarcocystis* by ingesting parasitic stages available in the environment (e.g. on the pasture) and following asexual reproduction at different sites, millions of parasites are produced which form cysts within different muscles of alpaca. A canid host (e.g. dog) acquires infection following the ingestion of infected alpaca meat containing sarcocysts, and then parasites undergo sexual reproduction in the intestinal tract to form eggs that are passed in faeces which are infective to alpacas. Currently, no evidence is available for the transmission of sarcocystosis in alpacas from mother to foetus via

placenta/milk. Thus, the main source of disease transmission is food/water contaminated with infected dog faeces. However, animal husbandry practices and host related factors can also play a pivotal role in the transmission of *Sarcocystis* in alpacas. For example, poor on-farm hygienic conditions, the presence of pastoral dogs in an alpaca herd, feeding of dogs with raw alpaca meat, aged and pregnant animals are potential risk factors for the development of sarcocystosis in alpacas.

It remains elusive that how *Sarcocystis* was introduced to Australian alpacas. One plausible explanation of sarcocystosis in Australian alpacas could be the importation of alpacas with asymptomatic sarcocystosis which then led to the establishment of the life cycle of *Sarcocystis* spp. between alpacas (as an intermediate host) and dogs/dingoes/wild cats (as final host). To date, the final host(s) of *Sarcocystis* spp. that infect alpacas in Australia are unknown. Experimental studies in other countries have shown that dogs could serve as the potential final host for *Sarcocystis* in alpacas and other South American camelids. It is likely that *Sarcocystis* species infecting alpacas in Australia, has acquired new final hosts such as wild cats, dingoes, foxes in addition to farm dogs; however, research is needed to test this hypothesis to understand the life cycle for designing an effective control strategy.

WHAT DOES SARCOCYSTOSIS DO TO ALPACAS?

Dogs infected with sarcocystosis generally do not show clinical signs which makes the diagnosis difficult. In case of infected alpacas, clinical signs are also rare but fatal sarcocystosis has been reported where inflammation of muscles, low body temperature, shivering, difficult breathing, reduced milk production and abortion have been observed. At necropsy, white macroscopic sarcocysts (2-8 mm) are observed in skeletal muscles throughout the entire body.

Alpacas can be infected with two types of *Sarcocystis* spp. resulting in two types of sarcocysts, including macroscopic cyst (caused by *S. aucheniae*) and microscopic cyst (*S. masoni*) in skeletal and cardiac muscles, respectively. Grossly, macroscopic sarcocysts appear as rice-sized and shaped cysts in various skeletal muscles (Figure 1) of alpacas while microscopic sarcocysts are commonly found in heart muscles. Most of the studies conducted to date have focused on macroscopic cyst and so far, only two studies have described microscopic cysts in heart muscles of alpacas. It is possible that sporadic deaths observed in alpacas could be due to these microscopic cysts as very little is known about them.

Overall, a review of the literature indicated that *Sarcocystis* spp. can account for significant pathology in alpacas, although the infection usually remains subclinical or asymptomatic. Further studies are

required to understand the pathogenesis of both macro- and microscopic sarcocystosis and their impact on musculoskeletal and cardiac function, immunity, reproduction efficiency and productivity of alpacas.

HOW SARCOCYSTOSIS IS DIAGNOSED IN ALPACAS?

Currently, no standardized and/or commercial test is available for the diagnosis of sarcocystosis in alpacas. The identification of macroscopic sarcocysts in muscles of alpacas at necropsy and/or meat inspection has been used as the sole final diagnostic method. However, this holds less value than a method of detecting early sarcocystosis prior to the development of cysts in muscles. For this purpose, a few studies have utilized serological (detection of antibodies in serum) methods for the diagnosis of sarcocystosis in alpacas; however, none of the studies defined the precise nature of antigens used or verified serological diagnosis with molecular or histopathological diagnoses, and these tests had low sensitivity and cross-reactivity with other *Sarcocystis* species from production animals.

A variety of methods aiming at the detection of parasite DNA in sarcocysts and alpaca blood have been developed to diagnose sarcocystosis; however, these tests have not been validated in the field for the diagnosis of *Sarcocystis* spp. from the blood of naturally or experimentally infected alpacas. Furthermore, the assessment of sensitivity and specificity of the new tests is challenging due to unavailability of existing validated techniques for the diagnosis of sarcocystosis in alpacas. A validated test that could allow the early detection of *Sarcocystis* from blood in SACs would be a benchmark for the diagnosis of sarcocystosis.

SARCOCYSTOSIS IN ALPACAS AND PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

Alpaca meat infected with *Sarcocystis* could infect humans but limited evidence is available in the literature. It has been suggested that sarcocysts contain a toxin which can cause gastroenteritis, diarrhea, nausea, and respiratory problems in humans if the uncooked infected meat is consumed. Physical and chemical methods have been used to inactivate this toxin and to abolish the viability of cysts. Freezing at a very low temperature (-18°C to -24°C) or cooking (above 60°C) but not refrigeration have shown to be effective in inactivating sarcocysts in alpaca meat. Similarly, boiling, baking and frying have also been shown to be effective in neutralizing the toxicity of parasites. Therefore, alpaca meat inspected and processed per Australian standards at abattoirs should render alpaca meat safer; however, further research is needed to support this statement.

HOW CAN SARCOCYSTOSIS BE CONTROLLED IN ALPACAS?

Various drugs have been used to treat sarcocystosis in dogs and camelids. For example, a severe form of sarcocystosis was prevented when camels experimentally infected with *Sarcocystis* sp. were treated with Amprolium®. Other drugs such as salinomycin and halofuginone

have also been used to reduce or prevent acute sarcocystosis in experimentally infected herbivores. Notably, such drugs could be effective only in treating intestinal stages of *Sarcocystis* during the acute phase of the parasite's life cycle which is almost impossible to detect under field conditions. Furthermore, anti-parasitic drugs might not have value in treating sarcocysts developed in muscles and some of them might be toxic to alpacas. Therefore, prevention is the only practical solution to control sarcocystosis in alpacas.

To date, no vaccine is available to protect alpacas and other domestic animals against sarcocystosis. The research focused on immunizing domestic animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs have shown that animals inoculated with *Sarcocystis* parasites were protected against a challenge dose of the parasite that normally would have been fatal, indicating that a vaccine could potentially be developed against *Sarcocystis* spp. of alpacas. However, a thorough understanding of immune responses of alpacas against *Sarcocystis* spp. is required before attempting to develop such vaccines.

Alpacas develop sarcocystosis by ingesting infective stages of parasites from a contaminated environment due to the infected faeces of carnivores. Although the life cycle of *Sarcocystis* in alpacas is not precisely known, the following steps could be followed to potentially disrupt the life cycle and control sarcocystosis in alpacas:

- (i) domestic and feral carnivores should be prevented from animal housing and from the feed, water, and bedding for alpacas
- (ii) farm dogs should be prevented from defecating on pastures and animal food/bedding storage sites
- (iii) uncooked/untreated alpaca meat should not be fed to dogs as it may contain sarcocysts, and
- (iv) alpaca carcasses and their foetal/placental material should be kept away from dogs and wild carnivores by burying or incineration.

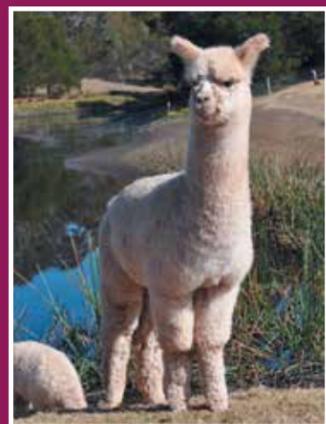
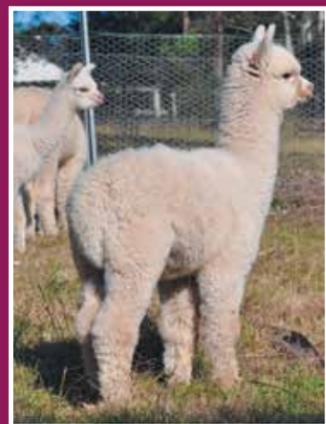
Several diagnostic tests have been used to diagnose sarcocystosis in alpacas but a diagnostic method for an early detection of infection with *Sarcocystis* species is yet to be developed. Currently, no effective methods are available for the treatment and control of sarcocystosis in alpacas.



Figure 1. Macroscopic sarcocyst in skeletal muscles of alpaca. The arrow shows a macrocyst resembling rice grain.

Acknowledgment: M. Saeed is gratefully acknowledged for sourcing the literature on the topic.

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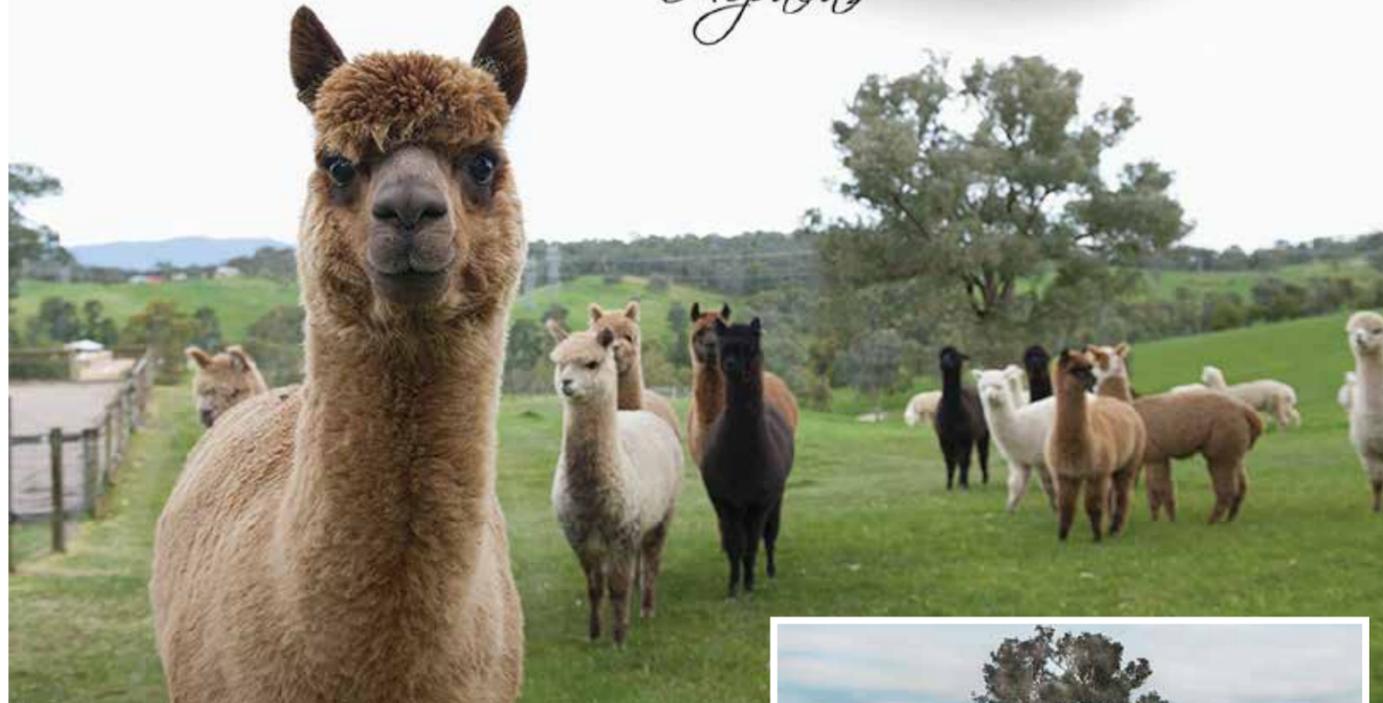
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Adelaide Tarp Specialists P/L was first established in 1979 by Tony Pavlovich, who has remained associated with the transport industry and the manufacturing of tarpaulins and specialised load covering systems since 1968 to the present.

Tony has always been an innovator and one of the mainstays of the tarpaulin manufacturing industry in South Australia for over 40 years having been responsible for the training of a great many of employees in the industry today.

Adelaide Tarp Specialists Pty. Ltd. has grown to become the most innovative and flexible load covering manufacturer in South Australia, producing excellent quality innovative product at very competitive pricing

In the late 90's, laws for tipper operator/drivers became an issue with the need for the fitting of ground operated tarpaulin to vehicles becoming a priority to cover RTA requirements initially, but the more important issue of Occupational Health Safety and Welfare in relation to operator safety, and limitation of safe operating heights has now become the focus with significant penalties for operators who do not comply.

Adelaide Tarp Specialists P/L took this news in its stride, and from 1999 to 2015, Tony's eldest son Mark (who is a qualified Welder/Metal Fabricator) came on board to help develop the business' own metal fabrication and welding department. This was done to create time saving for companies that were required to meet major deadlines while tarp systems were being fitted to their trailers, as well as allowing for further research and development of specialise covering systems for a broader range of bulk carrying equipment.

Over the coming years, Adelaide Tarp Specialists P/L developed the Roll-A-Way and the Winch-A-Way tarp systems. Both are fully ground operated and waterproof. These systems not only met strict Safety Guidelines, but increased drivers productivity by increasing loads per day by nearly 25% compared to the old tipper tarps that were manually handled.

Changes were made, and for those not requiring a waterproof system, the Side Cable Winch-A-Way was created for those who needed fast operating systems without having to worry about ropes and rubber rings. Still maintaining the quality and style of the waterproof system, the Side Cable system became one of Adelaide Tarp Specialists P/L most popular load covering alternatives.

In 2005, Tony's youngest Son Wade (now General Manager) returned to the family business after becoming a Sign Writer for 7 years and created Adelaide Sign Tech, a sign design company that enables customers to see signage on their Sliding Curtains, Tippers, Trailers, Vehicles etc. and have it all manufactured in one location, further saving time & costs. Wade's previous experience & knowledge of the Tarp Industry worked hand in hand with Mark's knowledge of Steel and brought it all together.

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In 2008, Adelaide Tarp Specialists P/L relocated into a larger premises at 662 Port Wakefield Road, Green Fields. This move has not only proved to be beneficial for the company, but also for customer's convenience with very easy access.

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Australian Youth Education (AYE)

by **KAREN CALDWELL**

During 2017 a concept was put forward and accepted by the Australian Alpaca Association (AAA) Board pertaining expressly to the recognition, continual importance and financial support of our industry's youth.

This concept aims to bring together all facets of youth education and involvement within the alpaca industry, all the while attempting to identify other areas of learning and interest that engages our youth's participation.

I have been asked to transform this concept into a working committee, aided by interested persons from each state across Australia with expertise and experience in the fields of youth education, curriculum establishment and leadership. A range of specifically selected persons from across the age range have been selected to participate in this new initiative.

With two active and important youth activities already well established within our industry (Youth Judging, formerly Junior Judging, and Paraders) we are well placed to build on these sections of the Youth Education and determine if there are other areas within this area that need both recognition and resources to come into the light.

It is my personal belief that there is an opportunity to reach out to our most amazing, reliable and enduring commodity...our youth! The establishment of this new initiative will light the way for our industry to embrace its future....our YOUTH.

I believe by bringing together both the Youth Judging and Paraders sections, we will be in a position to co-ordinate these teaching formats on a National level within the AYE committee. Each of these groups will be able to cross reference their resources and share information regarding their educational formats, to evolve into a more structured curriculum, assisting their ability to apply for appropriate funding for events, workshops or guest speakers in a more orderly and youth friendly atmosphere.

Ten interested spokespersons have been selected from across our states and regions (excluding NT) to come together as a like minded working group to assist me in the roll out of the AYE initiative Australia-wide.

All state representatives will be invited to a convenient location for our



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Wagga Wagga Show Rural Youth Judging Workshop



Youth Judging competitors

inaugural meeting where a single spokesperson will be formally elected and become the liaison between the AYE Committee, myself and the Board of the AAA.

Mr Ian Frith, our AAA President, Mr Andrew Hulme, our Director for the Alpaca Education portfolio and myself will also be in attendance at this exciting meeting.

We will be aiming to formulate a working calendar of events for both the Youth Judging and the Paraders, Australia-wide. The setting of annual youth camps, workshops and competitions will all be on the table for discussion.

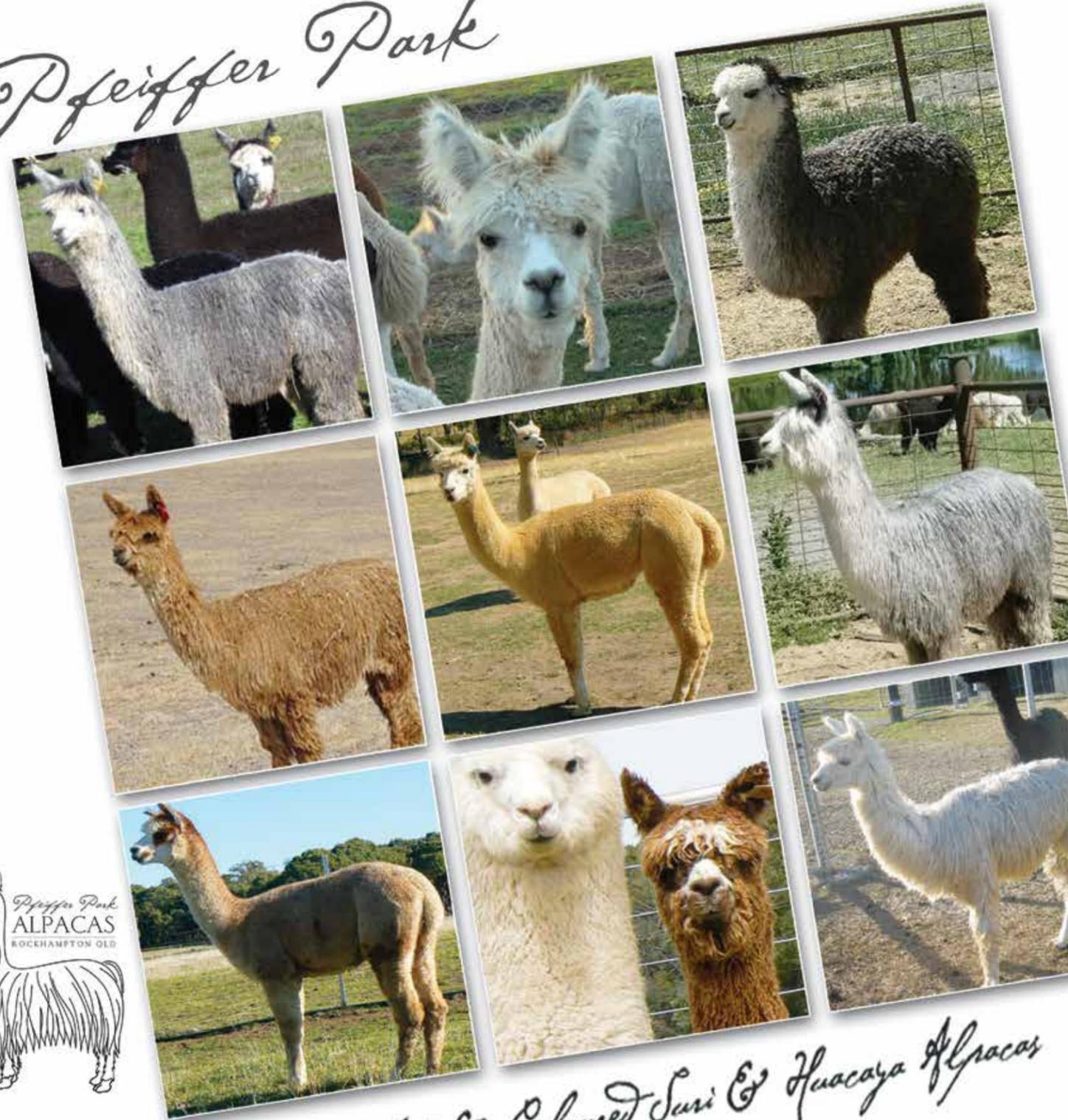
Updated manuals for both these groups will also be open for discussion and completion.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the many, many people who have been involved in the Youth Education section of our industry before the formation of the AYE Committee.

I know of many breeders, parents, teachers and industry specialists, who have given freely of their time and knowledge to educate, inspire and involve our alpaca youth to bigger and greater achievements.

Thank you. You have made a difference to their lives and our industry.

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NSW Moving Forward...

Five NSW AAA Regions unite to become One

by **DEB SMITH**, Vice President NSW Region.

At the 2016 AAA Council and Presidents meeting, the future of the AAA Regions was put on the agenda at both meetings, so clearly a topic of interest from a number of perspectives. A proposal was put forward by one President at the Presidents meeting that all states with more than one region should amalgamate into state regions. In the Council meeting that followed, the then Board, led by Michelle Malt as President, tabled that there was a need to re-examine the structure of the AAA in relation to the regions and outlined the reasons why.

As one can imagine, some lively discussion ensued in both meetings, with some widely varied but equally passionate viewpoints. Three options were discussed - a national structure only, state regions only or a merger of various regions within the existing states that were not one body. A national only structure was not generally supported in the discussions. It was agreed in Council that the Regional Presidents would go back and consult with members on what their preferences would be if changes to the regions were to happen.

Jump to 2017, in the lead up to the annual Council and Presidents meeting, one of the NSW Presidents contacted a number of the Board, including the then new President Ian Frith, and put forward that a discussion be held to make decisions regarding the future of NSW Regions, due to growing concerns that some regions may not be viable to survive into the future and a need for higher rates of collaboration to continue moving the industry forward in NSW. This resulted in communications between the Board members involved and all 6 of the then Presidents for each Region in NSW (including Southern Qld/ Northern NSW who uniquely cover areas in both states), and it was agreed to hold an additional meeting while at Council between the AAA President and Company Secretary, the Directors responsible for the various NSW Regions and the 6 Regional Presidents in NSW.

Everyone at this meeting agreed there was a need for change and were passionate about wanting to see a sustainable structure for NSW into the future. The Presidents presented the differing viewpoints gleaned from consultations with members (even though they were not necessarily their own) and an eventual vote determined that a motion be put to all NSW Regions members that the 6 Regions merge into one state Region. All 6 Presidents then committed to establishing a NSW Region if the vote was passed. And so followed the initial planning for what a NSW Region might look like and how it could operate should the motion be passed. Ian Frith informed the meeting that mergers would not be forced if the majority membership in NSW did not want to go ahead.

But go ahead it did for all but one region, that being Southern Qld and Northern NSW. In 4 of the 5 other regions the vote to merge to a state region was unanimous and in the 5th region it was passed with a clear majority. Clearly NSW has a lot of progressive thinking members who understood the need for change. As one member in one of the regions said on their day of voting "the industry is evolving, if we do not move and change with it we will be left behind".

A series of communications, including a FAQ sheet, were shared with all 6 regions members explaining the reasons for the motion, why a state

merger was being proposed and the benefits of merging into a state region, prior to the vote taking place. Members who attended ORMS were also given a presentation of information pertaining to each of the NSW Regions that demonstrated why there was a need for change.

Why consider any changes or merging at all?

- The current regions were set up at a time when the demographic of members was very different to what it is now and as a result a number of nuances had resulted in some regions
- Membership numbers have been steadily declining in the last 4 years or more, in all regions across the country with the exception of one. Some regions, as at the 2017 Council meeting, were close to or had already fallen below what is allowable under the Constitution. Given the trends, other regions were forecast to fall below the required numbers in 2017 or soon after.
- Aligned with falling membership numbers is a decline in revenue, not only at National level but regional; as many would be aware, the regional budgets are based on capitation each year, which means the budget allocation is directly dictated by number of members in the region, some regions have hovered near becoming financially unviable in continuing all their activities in recent years
- All regions have also seen a steady decline in volunteerism, be it for shows, educational events or regional committees (how many times in recent years has there been no need to vote between nominees due to lack of nominations at ARMs?). Some regions had become at risk of folding due to lack of volunteers to form a committee; a region cannot exist without a committee
- Like any organisation, the more layers there are in a structure, the more it costs; meaning the more regions there are, the more of AAA members' funds go on administration costs, rather than on activities for members and promotion of the industry.
- Also, like any organisation with many layers, there is more likely to be silos develop and parochialism creep in - a "them and us" attitude. Whilst most regions do work collaboratively as needed, amalgamation of regions allows for increased collaboration, a pooling of resources and a more united approach, after all, we all belong to the one AAA at the end of the day

Birth of the NSW Region

After the vote was passed to form a NSW region, a meeting was held between the 5 Presidents, or their representatives, of the merging regions and 4 AAA Directors, to put in place what was required in readiness to commence the NSW Region. This meeting saw the establishment of the NSW Region Working Party; this group was tasked to perform, from the day the NSW Region commenced, the roles (in an acting capacity) and functions of a regional committee until the ARM meeting where the inaugural committee would be voted in through the

usual process. Additionally, the Working Party committed to undertake the many preparatory activities required to launch the NSW Region and oversee the transition.

The Working Party consisted of 10 members, with 2 representatives each from each of the merging regions. These representatives included the 5 now former Presidents and one committee member from each of the regions. The make-up of the group enabled continuity and knowledge of each of the former regions activities and processes.

On the 1st July 2017 the NSW Region was launched!! This date was chosen to allow for a more seamless transition of each of the previous regions finances into new NSW accounts at the commencement of the new financial year.

The NSW Region is now the largest region in Australia by membership and has over 400 herds and over 500 members, this includes the now largest herd in Australia right through to members with less than 10 alpacas, each one just as important within the NSW region. We are now placed in a robust position to overcome the downward trends that informed the need for the merger and has brought together the resources of the 5 former regions; this will carry us into the future in a much more efficient and sustainable way - we are already seeing improved cost efficiencies and a collaboration of ideas and activities from across NSW.

In forming the NSW Region, and with active support and in consultation with the Board, we have been able to structure the committee and its functions in order to be able to offer some new and innovative approaches, along with maintaining the expected functions, roles and governance expected of a region. We have also been able, through the changes to the Constitution and a subsequent vote at our inaugural ARM, to form a committee of 10, thus ensuring ongoing representation from each of the 5 former regions.

Steve O'Keefe, the current National Treasurer and a Board Director, is also the Treasurer for the NSW region. Whilst Steve does not sit on the NSW committee itself, he works in full partnership with the NSW committee and is responsible, along with the committee, for overseeing the governance of the NSW region's finances. On a day to day level, Janette Law, one of the paid office staff, is responsible for processing financial transactions for the NSW Region. The NSW Regional committee, like any regional committee, has maintained responsibility for receiving any event proposals and requests for asset purchases, screening them to ensure they meet the AAA event guidelines, WH&S requirements and are sound in what is being proposed from a financial perspective. Whilst the NSW Region has its own bank accounts (combining the funds of the former 5 regions), the NSW Regions funds are now "attached" to the national AAA books.

The above arrangement has been possible due to the merger into one large region and has brought about some significant advantages for the NSW region. By placing the NSW funds under the national books, this has allowed us to reap the benefits of being able to claim and charge GST; it is forecast that this will bring in an extra \$10,000 approximately in revenue annually based on current figures. Another key advantage is that it has freed up the Regional Committee from having to perform the work involved in governing the region's finances, thus allowing the 10 committee members to focus on the other areas of governance we are responsible for plus develop some new initiatives.

As newsletters/magazine Editors do not have to be part of the regional committee, we have been very fortunate to have Erin Marsden, former editor for the CWR newsletter, volunteer to take on the role as NSW Editor, thus freeing up committee members further for other tasks. One

committee member acts as the conduit between Erin and the committee and to provide Erin with support as required.

Prior to the vote to merge, concern was expressed by a number of members in NSW, and some of the now committee, regarding the workload for volunteers on the committee; however to date, this has not been an issue as we have been able to share the workload across a larger committee that does not have to manage the workload of day to day finances or the compilation of the newsletter. We are very grateful to Steve for his foresight, skill and time in bringing this arrangement to fruition. It should be mentioned that Steve is also a NSW Region member. We also much appreciate the work Janette is performing on our behalf and to Erin for being our newsletter Editor.

Further cost and time efficiencies have also been made through the consolidation of assets, one website instead of five, one Facebook page instead of multiple pages, one newsletter and so on. Some of the former five regions had also seen some of these activities go by the wayside due to lack of volunteers and expense and they have now been able to be reintroduced in the NSW region.

As well as the usual portfolios within a regional committee, we have also been able to add some new portfolios such as Commercialisation and Industry liaison. The commercialisation portfolio aims to support members, via education both formal and informal (through newsletter articles) and other activities, to support members in developing the skills, networks and knowledge to move their enterprises to true business models, and to increase the volume of the commercially available fleece clip in NSW, leading in time to better returns for all NSW members and a more coordinated and advanced alpaca fibre industry in NSW.

The Industry liaison portfolio is focused on forming key alliances with other bodies for the benefit of NSW members and the Alpaca industry generally. There are a number of government agencies and non government farming, agricultural and livestock organisations that only work with organisations at a state level; in forming a NSW Region this now allows us to form alliances with these organisations and apply for funding grants that were not otherwise available to the five smaller regions. One example of this is the NSW Farmers Federation with whom preliminary discussions have already taken place.

The NSW Region Committee and former Working Party have had a huge amount of work to do in transitioning and establishing the NSW region; a major part of this has been in setting up systems, processes and record keeping. We have also needed to develop systems to enable accessibility and filing of the legacy records from the former five regions so the history is not lost and to comply with governance record keeping requirements. An online library has been developed for these records and is accessible by the current committee and will be available to future committees.

We have taken a "best of the best" with our forms and processes i.e. adopting or amalgamating systems and forms that were already in place in the former five regions.

The transitional work is nearing completion and we can then focus solely on the ongoing governance of the region and support and provision of services to NSW members. It is not anticipated within the systems and structure we have in place, that the work will be particularly more onerous for any committee member than it was in the smaller regions and we have identified some committee roles to be "back up" for our Secretary, or indeed other portfolios at peak times as required.

To ensure equitable representation of the five former regions, we now have five zones within the NSW Region which reflect the boundaries of the five former regions - those being Sydney Coast & Highlands,

Hawkesbury Blue Mountains, Central West NSW, Southern NSW and Central Coast & Hunter (now known as Northern NSW zone); zones are not part of the official AAA structure but were put in place to support the transition to a state region. The future and ongoing function of zones remains to be seen, however it is anticipated that they may phase out in time as the region progresses further, the enthusiasm from some members to work as one is such that some have not seen the need for zones right from the outset.

Given the large number of members in the NSW Region, the Board has agreed that two NSW Region committee members will attend future Council and President meetings rather than the usual one, so as to ensure a more equitable representation for the number of members in NSW.

NSW Region into the future.

Whilst there is still some work to be done to have all our systems finalised, we are seeing great progress; our web site is moving closer to being fully operational and the first NSW Region Newsletter is taking shape for circulation before Christmas. Systems are in place for monitoring our assets and managing their movements, likewise the coordination of events in NSW at the regional committee level.

The region can boast over 12 shows being planned in the NSW Region at this stage in 2018, including two Royals, and we invite our members who are willing to volunteer to stage new shows and other events to put forward proposals to expand on the existing planned events. Through the amalgamated resources we now have at our disposal we have capacity to grow the number of events and activities that can be potentially offered, with willing volunteers from the NSW membership.

The Committee have a range of ideas for the future and from the outset have been sharing ideas from each of the five zones; once our systems and processes are finalised we can then look at some strategic planning to formalise our discussions and ideas, prioritise and then action some of these ideas as well as consolidating the development of each portfolio. We also invite and welcome input from any of the NSW Regions membership who would like to make suggestions in our strategic directions.

A hugely exciting development for the NSW region has been the recent announcement of the Waratah Alpaca Fibre Coop. Whilst the Coop is not an AAA venture, the NSW Region Committee is forming a strategic alliance with the Coop in order to support NSW members to optimise the opportunity that Waratah Alpaca Fibre presents. We congratulate the founders of the Coop on their initiative and drive to bring the Coop to fruition and in the fabulous opportunity they are creating for their fellow NSW Region members and the alpaca industry in Australia.

The alliance between the Coop and the NSW Region will build on a shared vision to see NSW become a more collaborative and coordinated collective of alpaca fibre growers, that are progressing to the reality of a truly commercial and sustainable alpaca industry within NSW and that offers ongoing potential returns for NSW Region members. Through merging the five former regions in NSW that now form the NSW region, we are well positioned, both in our structure, resources and size to form such an alliance with Waratah Alpaca Fibre.

The future for the NSW Region and the alpaca industry in NSW is looking rosy and our merger and subsequent planned activities bodes well for a strong, exciting and resilient future for NSW and its members, we would not have been able to reach this position had we remained as a fragmented and increasingly unviable group of individual regions in NSW.

New NSW Fibre Growers' Co-op

by **STEVE O'KEEFE**
Australian Alpaca Association Ltd
Director

All NSW AAA members would recently have received correspondence from the NSW regional secretary advising of the proposed formation of a new Fibre Growers' Co-op and seeking expressions of interest from breeders to join the Co-op.

This Co-op which will be known as Waratah Alpaca Fibre will purchase and class fibre from its members and then market and sell the pooled fibre to both domestic and international purchasers with a particular focus on developing Asian markets for Australian fibre. As a members' owned Co-operative the main objective of its formation is to maximise the returns to growers. A secondary objective is to assist fleece purchasers & processors through the increased supply of quality assured Australian fleece in all colours and classes.

Members will be able to sell their fibre to the Co-op at commercial rates with a small deduction for classing and selling costs in much the same fashion as other agricultural co-operatives. The Co-op will then class and sell the pooled fibre and look at value add options to increase the members' returns such as scouring and product development. Members will share in Co-op profits in the form of dividends.

To date the founding directors have been successful in obtaining \$15,000 of federal funding to assist with the formation of the Co-op and for business planning purposes. This funding will be provided by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources through its Farming Together program. In addition a number of teleconferences have been held with the Farming Together staff together with the appointed independent expert Mr Sam Byrne of NSW Co-ops.

As secretary for NSW Co-ops Mr Byrne has worked with and been involved in the establishment of many NSW Co-ops including agricultural cooperatives. His experience in this area should be invaluable.

In his submissions to Farming Together Mr Byrne has been very supportive of the proposed Co-op commenting that the project could be a very good one for both alpaca farmers and the Farming Together pilot scheme adding that "those involved in the initial discussions are a committed, impressive group that could deliver a lot of benefits to farmers in their industry".

The initial business planning meetings will be held later this month. The founding key stakeholders will be in attendance in these meetings together with Mr Byrne and a specialist business planning consultant Ms Suji Upasena. Mr Byrne has advised that the business planning process and the establishment of the Co-op will take approximately 3 months

meaning that the meeting to establish the Co-op and to appoint the initial directors will be held in late March, early April.

Prior to the initial meeting of members the rules of the Co-op will need to be drafted and a disclosure document issued to all prospective members. The Co-op will be a for-profit Co-operative with profits to be returned to members in the form of declared franked dividends. Members will be asked to purchase shares in the Co-op with this share capital providing funding for working capital purposes.

All shares will provide members with voting rights. Members will be required to purchase a minimum of \$1,000 of shares, however they may acquire up to \$10,000 worth of shares which will provide additional voting rights and additional rights to dividends. Under the rules of a Co-operative no member will be able to own more than 20 per cent of the issued capital. Only members will be able to supply fleece to the Co-op. The Co-op will also be autonomous to and independent of the Australian Alpaca Association. Membership will be open to both AAA and non AAA members.

The Co-op founders are currently exploring options in regards to employing a classer and are hopeful of additional funding later this financial year to employ a full time project manager and to assist with further market development. Approaches have been made to Austrade to assist with introductions to Asian fibre purchasers. Further funding applications will be made to fund a possible trade mission in 2018 to assist with developing Asian markets. Scouring facilities and a potential investment into such facilities are also being explored.

To date a number of domestic and international enquiries have been obtained with potential fleece purchasers expressing significant interest in dealing with a Cooperative rather than farm direct due to the advantage of volume of supply and quality control assurances associated with professional classing and pre-classing standards. Enquiries have been received for both Huacaya and Suri fleece. Membership will be open to both Huacaya and Suri breeders.

To assist with the quality of supply all members will be required to skirt their own fleece prior to delivery to the Co-op. In addition to their capital investment, prior to supply all members will be required to have attended an approved fleece preparation workshop. A workshop was recently organised by the Sydney Coast & Highlands zone representatives on the NSW regional committee with Mr Bob Kingwell presenting at this hands on workshop. This workshop held at Mittagong was very well attended and those in attendance all obtained significant benefits from their attendance. It is understood that the NSW regional committee is now looking at running similar workshops throughout the State.

To assist with quality control upon supplying fleece to the Co-op members will need to obtain their own Fleece sampling results which will need to be submitted with all supplied fleeces. To assist with classing, these fleeces will again be tested by the Co-op upon collection. Saddle first shearing will be encouraged and possibly made mandatory to assist with reducing contamination with secondary cuts. Classing will



be on-farm for larger studs providing significant cost benefits to such members in addition to the other benefits of membership.

Whilst Waratah Alpaca Fibre is open to NSW breeders only, at a national level it is felt that this Co-operative will provide the model for other States to follow. Further the founders of the NSW growers Co-op encourage this and would like to formalise ties with similar interstate Co-ops to share classing, administration and selling costs and to add to the overall pool of fibre for supply purposes. The writer shall be pleased to assist interested parties with funding applications should they so require.

Waratah Alpaca fibre will be collecting and storing its fleece in Mittagong, NSW however a variety of drop off and collection points will be sought from members throughout the state with the view of classing fibre at these collection points and then transporting to the central storage facility in Mittagong

Two of the main issues that led to the demise of the former national Co-op was a lack of supply and decreasing market fleece prices. Interestingly the latter has improved in recent years due to increased demand for Australian fibre (both wool and alpaca). In fact the Australian Wool price index this month reached a record high of \$16.83 per kilo after reaching a low of \$4.65 per kilo in November 1998. Enquiries to date from international purchasers are in excess of the Australian wool price index due to the premium nature of Australian alpaca fibre.

In regards to supply it is noted that the size of the Australian registered alpaca herd in 2002 was approximately 33,000. As at today's date the registered herd has grown to 180,594 with probably double that number when including unregistered animals. Furthermore the Australian herd has seen significant genetic improvements since the days of the former Co-op leading to improvements in both the quantity and quality of Australian Alpaca Fibre. Additionally both classing and shearing standards have also seen significant improvement.

In addition the founders of the original national Co-op were indeed pioneers. Markets had to be sought and obtained from scratch with significant investment in product development as well as shearing and classing standards. There has been much development in these areas over the last 20 years. Accordingly it is felt that now is an opportune time to establish the NSW Co-op.

For further information and updates interested members should refer to the Waratah Alpaca Facebook page or alternatively contact Mick Williams via email i.e.

waratahalpacafibre@gmail.com

LET'S KICK START OUR FLEECE INDUSTRY!

by DEBRA TROSTIAN



There has been an exciting resurgence of interest in the Australian alpaca fleece industry.

“LET’S KICK START OUR FLEECE INDUSTRY!”

Was the message sent loud and clear at a Fleece Workshop, held in Mittagong NSW in November, and participants overwhelmingly responded.

The workshop was a great success and focused on skirting skills necessary to supply fleeces to meet the requirements of buyers. The fifty attendees are set to supply fleece at two separate collections, organised in conjunction with the workshop, to be held two months apart to allow adequate time for fleece preparation.

Bob Kingwell from Monga Alpacas, a respected and knowledgeable man in Australian fleece circles, presented an interesting and informative presentation, explaining the different qualities of alpaca fibre and how to improve fleece value by careful pre-shear planning and proper preparation of fleeces prior to sale. Highlighted was the necessity to remove vegetable matter and skirting with the buyer in mind, to guarantee the best monetary return possible.

Three buyers expressed interest in purchasing saddles and pieces from the two fleece collections. They attended the workshop and reinforced the significance of skirting to manufacturers and explained their individual requirements and pricing. The buyers involved, pay following delivery and fleece assessment, not on consignment; the result is timely payment for members.

Unfortunately we were unable to offer an outlet for Suri fleece, but, hopefully the future will see an equally exciting opportunity for Suri breeders.

Under Bob’s watchful eye, attendees took to the skirting tables, where it was hands on fleeces, skirting and learning to identify tenderness, contamination and undesirable traits within the fleece. Buyers wandered around the tables, assisted with skirting and interacting with those present.

Australian Alpaca Fibre (formerly Alpaca Ultimate) brought along a display of their high end quality alpaca yarn and products. Dairy Road Alpacas represented the craft and handmade market, demonstrating the variety of uses, versatility and different options available to utilise alpaca fibre.

The day attracted members from different geographical areas, new breeders, members who had been in the background for years and some higher profile breeders.

A very social BBQ lunch followed, with a variety of alpaca meat (kindly supplied by Prime Alpaca) and beef sausages for those not game. Attendees and buyers networked amongst themselves, swapping alpaca stories, facts and advice.

Organisers stressed: “there are buyers out there, we have an opportunity to get fleeces out of the shed, into a collection and sold. There is no need to throw out or store fleece, a market exists for all microns, colours and lengths”.

We all need to embrace the beautiful fibre our alpacas produce and do the work necessary to sell it, to facilitate the production of beautiful yarns, garments and furnishings.

International manufacturers crave alpaca fibre, it is necessary to stamp our place in the overseas market to increase their hunger for our quality fleece. Creating future markets will ensure an ongoing industry and financial return from our alpaca; after all, they are first and foremost, fleece producing livestock.

The intention is to encourage the organisation of fleece workshops with this format across the country, held in conjunction with collection days, providing participants contact with buyers, the necessary education, skills and consequent sale of fleeces. These workshops reignite the passion and interest, with members able to appreciate the possibilities available and rewards that can be obtained in a timely manner.

We are fortunate that AAA members entrusted the leadership of our Association to a Board that is progressive and forward thinking, leading us onto a path toward industry development and security. Remember we need to participate in the industry to share in the success.



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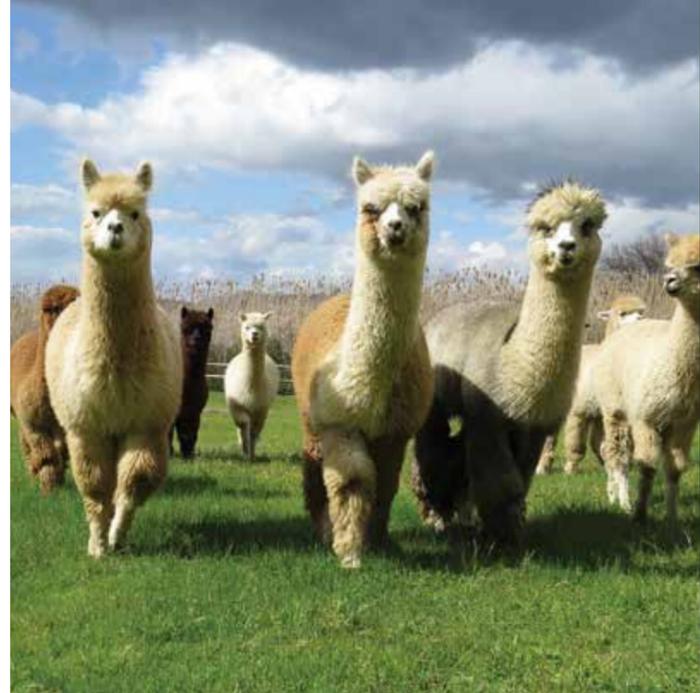
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Alpacas around the World

The AAA recently wrote to other alpaca associations around the world asking them for an update on the industry in their country. Here are the first three contributions – from New Zealand, Great Britain and South Africa.



Alpaca Association New Zealand (AANZ)

Alpacas were first imported into New Zealand in 1865 when the Wellington Provincial Government purchased 10 alpacas for 15 pounds each from New South Wales. These were from the group Charles Ledger had taken to Australia in the late 1850's. They were not a successful venture for the Provincial Government and they incurred serious financial loss as a consequence. Alpacas, as we know the industry today, began in earnest in 1985 when Ian Nelson organised their change in status from zoo animals to livestock. The first imports were sourced from the Chester Zoo in the UK. In 2001 the Llama and Alpaca Association separated to become two separate entities and the Alpaca Association New Zealand (AANZ) was born.

In 2015 when the registry was last analysed there were approximately 20,000 alpacas on the registry, 14% of which were Suri and 86% were Huacaya. Looking at colours: 29% are white, 16% are black, 14% light fawn, 11% mid and dark fawn, 15% brown and 14% grey. These are approximate figures and the remainder will be fancy and appaloosa.

Membership is approximately 400 partnership members and there are other non voting levels of membership too, which are categories we hope to grow through digital marketing.

There are two or three herds with numbers as great as 400+ but 28% of the membership run herds of 10 or fewer alpacas. This serves as a challenge when trying to implement commercial initiatives to the association but is evidence that they are a much loved and easy to manage lifestyle choice.

The majority of members raise alpacas as a lifestyle choice, they enhance the quality of their owners lives and they are not kept for commercial reasons. Having said that the demand for alpaca fleece has increased greatly in the past 5 years and with some thought and communication there is no excuse for members to have unsold fleece in their sheds. There is a suitable outlet for all fibre types. Only a minority

of owners are successful at selling internationally, but every sale, to whichever destination, brings positive benefits to the membership through a trickle-down effect. Stock moving at the top often results in purchases made through the middle and lower tiers of the association. Meat is still an untapped marketplace and to a degree the fact that so many members own small herds as lifestyle choices has slowed down the development of a meat industry here in New Zealand.

The AANZ has maintained the IAR (initially alongside Australia, but for a number of years now has the IAR(NZ)). The registry is visible and searchable by anybody around the world. There are no restrictions of access to view. We see this as a sensible marketing strategy to benefit our members. We put no obstacles in the way of buyers wishing to carry out genetic searches before contacting members.

There are 22 shows across New Zealand per year. The majority run sections as part of Agricultural and Pastoral association's (A&P shows) annual livestock shows. They vary in size and in levels of sophistication but they are enjoyed with enthusiasm by breeders and the public alike. We have three stand-alone shows that are not associated with A&Ps, these are the AANZ National show and the South Island and North Island Colourbration shows.



British Alpaca Society (BAS)

The first alpacas were imported into the UK from Chile in the late 1980s. They were kept by a handful of breeders, and in zoos, but with growing interest in their potential as fibre animals, and as pets, numbers grew steadily.

The British Alpaca Society (BAS) was set up in 1996 and has recently celebrated its 21st anniversary. Its founder members

began the alpaca registry which included most of the UK alpacas as the foundation herd. A screening programme for imported animals was also put in place to ensure imports met a good standard. The pedigree register is now maintained by Grassroots Systems Ltd

There are now around 40,000 BAS registered alpacas. It is estimated that there are about another 10,000 unregistered animals. Most are

Huacayas (92.5%) with Suris accounting for the remaining 7.5%.

The main focus for breeders in the UK is showing and fibre. Breeders aim to produce animals with excellent fibre quality and conformation and BAS aims to ensure the UK is a leading source of top quality alpaca genetics in the EU.

The average herd size for BAS members is 11.2 animals with a large number of very small herds and a smaller number of breeders with more than 100 animals.

Showing is important to UK breeders and BAS regional groups organise 17 shows a year throughout the UK. The flagship BAS National Show takes place annually over two days in March with 560 alpacas, international guest judges and visitors from the UK and Europe .



The South African Alpaca Breeders' Society

The South African Alpaca Breeders' Club (SAAB Club) was inaugurated in 2001 and was promulgated into a society in 2007 as the South African Alpaca Breeders' Society and is registered under the SA Studbook & Livestock Improvement Association making

alpacas a registered herd in South Africa.

It is difficult to accurately assess the number of alpacas in the country since not all alpacas are registered with Studbook, but through sales records it is estimated there are between 3000 and 4000 in South Africa.

We have both Huacaya and Suri in South Africa although there are only two main breeders of Suris - one in the Western Cape close to Cape Town and the other in Gauteng Province. The herd in the Western Cape has approximately 50 animals (with just a handful of Huacayas) and the Gauteng breeder has 42 Suri and 53 Huacaya. Other Suris are to be

found but in very much smaller numbers. So probably less than 5 per cent of our alpacas are represented by the Suri phenotype.

Amongst SAABS members the average herd size is between 40 and 50, with some members having as few as four and the largest herd being around 300. Then there are herd guard male alpacas, pets as well as alpacas kept in smaller numbers at hotels and lodges.

South African alpaca owners are very fleece oriented and some of the larger breeders breed for stud stock and a certain number for pets. Products launched into the South African fashion and interior design markets include a range of machine and hand made knitwear, wovens, exclusive handworked felted items of apparel as well as alpaca-filled duvets and rugs. The meat market has not taken off in South Africa ... yet ... although it was mooted recently that a restaurant close to Johannesburg was offering alpaca meat. I know of none of our Society members selling alpacas for meat.

The SA Studbook and Livestock Improvement Association updates and maintains the register and information is fed to them by individual owners.

Regrettably alpaca shows have not taken off in South Africa. Members do not seem to be keen, perhaps because we have no qualified alpaca showing judges here, or fleece judges, and limited funds with which to bring any in. We have only one Society in the country (no branches) and distances are significant. As a Society we are very bio-security conscious particularly with the movement of animals between provinces.

As a Society we are keen on veterinary improvement and education and to this end in 2015 we brought camelid specialist Professor Chris Cebra from Oregon State University to South Africa to run a two-day workshop. In 2018 Australia's Dr Jane Vaughan will be coming to present a three-day workshop to veterinarians as well as to Society members. We are most excited about Jane's visit.

wonderful whites to
fabulous fawns

WHAT ABOUT ALPACA?

People purchase alpacas for many reasons – as herd protection for sheep, goats and chickens, as pets; and as part of an exciting lifestyle change.

Alpacas are perfect for all these things.

They are gentle animals which are kind to the environment and don't challenge fences.

They are easy to manage and are perfectly suited to small acreages.

Alpaca people are friendly and always willing to share their knowledge and expertise with newcomers to the industry.

New markets for alpaca fleece are constantly emerging and, for the foreseeable future, demand will exceed supply for good quality fleece.

The Australian Alpaca Association is proactive and supportive and has its annual show – The Australian Alpaca Spectacular – in Bendigo each winter. Smaller regional groups around Australia organise many shows each year.

WHAT ABOUT SURI?

Many people are unaware that there are two types of alpaca. This is because the suri, with its amazing silky locks, remains very rare... and coloured suri rarer still. A herd of these animals, running in the paddock, is an amazing sight.

The Australian climate suits the suri better than the harsh climate of its homeland and some breeders have chosen to specialise in suri.

The fleece from the suri alpaca is unique in the animal world. It has a natural lustre and softness that is unsurpassed and commands premium prices on world markets.

Initially, many suris were white or light fawn, but some breeders are now producing stunning coloured suris with outstanding fleeces.

WHAT ABOUT TICKENHALL?

At Tickenhall, we specialise in white and fawn award-winning suri alpacas. We usually have about fifty animals on farm.

Suris are no longer as expensive as they once were and quality animals are available at very reasonable prices. Older females or cross-bred females (those with huacaya parents, grandparents or great-grandparents) will give you cria that are often worth far more than you initially pay for their mother.

Purchasing from Tickenhall means that you become part of our extended family, enabling you to access our stud males at reduced rates and additional purchases come with a discount.

We have considerable experience as breeders and our animals are generally quiet and well-mannered. They are all trained to walk on the halter. We will help you with husbandry and general advice. We are only ever a phone call away.

FURTHER INFORMATION

We believe in straightforward, honest communication with our visitors and clients alike.

Once you make the decision to purchase an animal from us, you can do so with confidence. Until you are able to visit and see the alpacas for yourself, we are happy to send photos and fleece samples to help in making your selection – a wether, a maiden, a female (empty or pregnant) or a potential stud male – and we are open to discussing special financing plans to meet your needs.

We have several award-winning herd sires available to use over your female. If agistment is required for your new purchase, your animals will continue to receive the same excellent care experienced by all our alpacas.



99 Riley's Road, Snake Valley, Victoria 3351

tickenhallalpacas@gmail.com

Ann – 0408 539 359



BREEDING FOR SUCCESS

Science, Art or Roulette... ?

by **LEE SADLER**

At the 2017 AAA National Show in Bendigo, we were delighted with our success in the show ring, the auction ring and the fleece judging. With a small show team, our intention was to showcase the breeding at Fleur de Lys alpacas. As the show was drawing to a close, fellow exhibitors asked me to write about our breeding choices and to explain how we have the “long game” in mind, when making breeding decisions. It’s easy to agree to this request in the afterglow of a National Championship, but when faced with a blank screen, it has proven to be quite a challenge ... How can I find the words to enunciate our strategy ... ?? Is it transferable to other breeding programs ... ?? How much is science ... ?? How much is intuition ... ?? And how much is luck ... ??



These deliberations are not the best place to explain the advances in the heritability of colour and pattern genetics, nor do they explore the intuition that is also brought to these decisions, but they are an endeavor to convey some of the variety of influences that may be encountered while making breeding choices.

Despite my hesitation, upon reflection, I have condensed our core breeding strategy to a few key points:

Maximise genetic diversity to maintain vigor and as broad a genetic pool as possible

There is a range of views regarding the risks and benefits of line breeding vs. genetic diversity, and many of them have been espoused in alpaca publications and other authoritative livestock breeding resources. From our perspective, genetic diversity

contributes more to the overall health and vitality of our herd than the potential benefit of line breeding. Given the modest genetic pool from which the Australia alpaca herd originated, we have chosen to cast our genetic net as broadly as we reasonably can, in order to optimize the hybrid vigor of our herd. We have achieved this by seeking a number of “outside matings” each year. Acknowledging both the potential risks and benefits of this, it also ensures we are regularly introducing new blood lines into our herd.

Know your breeding objectives – colour / style ...

When I visit other studs and the paddocks are awash with the wonderful range of colours of alpaca, I doubt my decision to “continue the pursuit of excellence in white and fawn huacaya”. This has been our focus, and despite occasional lapses into reveries about colour, I return to our original intention.

For us, the breeding objective is “excellence in white and fawn huacaya”. The rationale is based on the aspiration that alpaca will be a viable and sustainable fleece industry and by definition, white huacaya will be foundational in this endeavour. As the registry will attest; white + white = fawn, about 20% of the time, hence our herd also includes fawn huacaya.

As our young industry continues to develop apace, I am impressed with the considerable advances we have collectively made to improve fleece characteristics. Judges espouse comments pertaining to the “frequency and amplitude of the crimp”, the “density of the staple / lock” and the variations of “lustre, micron and handle”. Those who process alpaca fibre also have characteristics they prefer, as this makes the processing easier and more consistent.

Each year at the Royal Adelaide Show, in the days following judging, we can be found loitering in the sheep pavilion. No, we are not tempted to extend our enterprise to include sheep, but we do aspire to some of the fleece characteristics on display. The bundles of high frequency, high amplitude crimp on kilos of fleece is truly impressive. I wonder how long it will be before a sheep breeder bothers to check the alpaca fleece display – won’t that be a coup ... !!

In essence, it matters not what your objective is, just that you know what it is and that it informs your decisions ...

Know how you will measure your success – show ribbons / histogram results / sales ...

How will you know that you have achieved what you set out to achieve? Will you need to build a trophy room, or will your records show impressive histograms as you attain a consistent and lucrative commercial fleece herd? Will you measure your success by the number of “likes” on Facebook (more easily done by those who are adept at the “cute cria photo” ... !!) or by the number of your alpacas sold overseas ... ??

For us, the competitive nature of the show ring is tantalizing and we aspire to have our breeding decisions objectively validated by someone whose opinion we esteem – the judge. Even so, each December the ribbons and trophies are cleared away in preparation for tinsel and tree, and there is a fresh challenge for the coming year. We hope that success in the show ring will translate to other breeders wanting to utilise our blood-lines and are enjoying some enquiries along these lines ... fingers crossed.



SPECIALISING IN WHITE HUACAYA

Keep records – what works, what didn't work, do you know why?

This is where the work is done, where the information is gathered, sorted and analysed. The combination of family trees, fleece results, show results and your own ranking system will inform your breeding decisions. For us, the key fleece statistics include micron, SD, length and skirted fleece weight. These are used in combination with a ranking system. The first week of each month includes a day to give the cria their scheduled vaccinations and also provides a chance to "score" them, using a rating system out of 10. This ensures we are monitoring growth, conformation and fleece development and this informs breeding decisions, as patterns become evident – some are worthy to be repeated and some are not done again! Whenever we bring in a group of alpacas, they are ranked. This provides important information about how well the desirable traits are being maintained, as the group ages.

Many of the characteristics that we focus on when breeding alpaca pertain to their fleece and many of these characteristics are heritable traits.

One of our foundation girls, the lovely Jolimont Dutchess, had a soft handling fleece that maintained 23 micron for her 20 years. Our first significant purchase of a stud male was Shanbrooke Churra Kosako, imported from Peru by Diane and Ron Condon and selected for his merino style fleece. At 22 years of age, he still has a soft handling and dense fleece, perfect conformation, if a little angular now with his advanced years and a gentle nature – and yes, he still likes to "work". The reason for mentioning these two alpacas here, is to acknowledge the significance of their contribution to the success of Fleur de Lys alpacas. These two alpacas ensured a consistency in both confirmation and fleece characteristics that is evident in our herd today. Many of our successful lines can be traced back to these two alpacas.

Play the numbers

Most alpaca herds are modest in their size, so breeders can be heard to denounce their chances of "success". True, the "big breeders" have a larger pool from which to draw their show team, but I know a number of small enterprises who have maintained ongoing success with modest numbers. It seems that the challenge is in knowing which of your alpacas will reliably pass desirable traits onto their progeny, and this only comes from "playing the numbers".

For these focused breeders, it is not so much "roulette," as knowing which alpaca will add density, which will reduce the incidence of primary fibres, which will contribute a solid frame etc. The breeding decisions are often about enhancing quality attributes, while compensating for less desirable traits.

Check out the competition

I'm yet to meet an alpaca breeder who was not happy to show another breeder their animals. Whether it's at a show or on their property, we all love to show others the fruits of our breeding

decisions, and I like to look at what others have achieved too. Don't be shy, ask if you can see the alpacas that won the broad ribbons – it's good to see for yourself why the judge made the decision they did (even if you don't agree!).

Keep looking ahead – who will be the sire for your best young girls?

In 2012, the AAA National Show was held in Adelaide and our entries received minor ribbons. I had observed most of the "white breeders" over the years, but my attention was drawn to a lady who did not leave the ring without a ribbon. I checked the catalogue – no I didn't know her or her alpacas. Time to investigate.

After introducing myself and complimenting the haul of ribbons, I asked, "what is your secret?" – and the rest, as they say, is history! We purchased a half share in the stud male who was the sire of many of the Futura show team; Rosedeane Sayonara (son of Somerset Accoyo Challenger).

Like a moth to the light, it is easy to be attracted to success; the deliberations we considered at the time included ensuring we had suitable girls on Sayonara's "dance card" and a suitable sire for his daughters. This is the "long game", the chance to consider how to shape the future of your herd; the chance to invest in your own judgment; the chance to find out how much you have been listening and learning along the way. So we agonized for a few more sleepless nights and also purchased Swan Valley Anacheeva (son of Banksia Park Khan).

More than five years after these sleepless nights, both of these special boys have sired Championship winning progeny, including the 2017 National Champion Intermediate Male. We also have a small number of young alpaca who carry the genetics from both sires. We are quietly pleased with the quality of these alpaca and are looking forward to hearing what the judges have to say about them in due course...

Have fun

Probably the most important element to any success – have fun!

I'm not sure that these ruminations will have resolved the puzzle of breeding success, for I fear it is a conundrum not easily understood. Despite the frequent examination of pedigrees, fleece and show results, sometimes there is a breeding combination that begs to be tried. Sometimes it is a delightful play of science vs. art, logic vs. instinct, or theory vs. intuition. From my observation though, it is seldom "just luck".

In summary:

Be informed – know the detail

Be brave – set audacious goals

Be real and have fun!

Best wishes for your breeding success; may you enjoy the fruits of your good judgment, attain your goals and have fun along the way ...



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ALPACA MANAGER has been around for 15 years now. Feedback from our over 400 users has been central to the continued development of the software. We're now in the position of having a very stable product and an established customer base all round the world.

The computer program is the brainchild of software engineer Richard Williams and his wife Miriam. We and our alpacas live on a rural property near the wine village of Martinborough in New Zealand's Wairarapa district. Ours is a familiar story: in 2000 we moved to the country and purchased our first alpacas.

After a very short time the need for record keeping became obvious. It was more and more difficult to remember who was related to whom, the progress of any particular mating, when cria were due and also scheduling the more mundane tasks such as drenching and inoculations. Richard quite quickly decided to write a computer program to assist us in keeping track of our herd, their ancestors and the husbandry tasks. The first version of Alpaca Manager came into being towards the end of 2002 – originally only intended for our own use.

Alpaca Manager is a Microsoft Access database application and can be installed on a Windows-based computer running Windows XP/Vista/7/8/10. If you have an Apple Mac you will also need emulation software such as VMWare Fusion or Parallels in order to run Windows.

If you are already using another software package or spreadsheets we can usually import the data to Alpaca Manager for a modest additional charge. There are no on-going costs; free regular updates are included in the registration fee.

USING THE PROGRAM YOU CAN:

- Record basic animal details including ancestry, shearing data and husbandry tasks
- Create worksheets to take out to the paddock or yards
- Track matings using your self-defined protocol
- Import data from external sources (eg. shearing stats)
- Schedule and record events using the calendar and diary functions

- Print sales sheets and transfer animal data to the new owner once you've sold them.

Over the years Alpaca Manager has been developed in response to suggestions from users and the changing needs of the industry. As well as the Australasian IAR, the BAS (UK) and ARI (USA) registries are catered for. Tracking ET pregnancies has been possible since

2008; Animal Husbandry Worksheets are increasingly popular and there's even an Email Marketing Campaign function.

Taking advantage of the available technology makes it easy for us to communicate with our customers – Skyping and logging on to computers many thousands of kilometres away has become commonplace. To learn more about our remote support service, visit www.epsilon.net.nz/support

As with any computer package (think accounting, word processing, spreadsheets ...)

while the program is easy to use, sometimes it's not obvious to see creative ways it can help you run your business. We'd like to show you some of those.

As already mentioned, getting to grips with a more 'advanced' function can be a bit daunting – but it makes sense to 'give it a go!' That's why we are developing a series of YouTube 'How to ...' videos, the first of which is an introduction to the program for new and potential customers – to see it go to our website www.epsilon.net.nz/products/alpacamanager and click on the YouTube icon.

We've recently released a video on worksheets and are working on tracking matings and preparing for shearing.

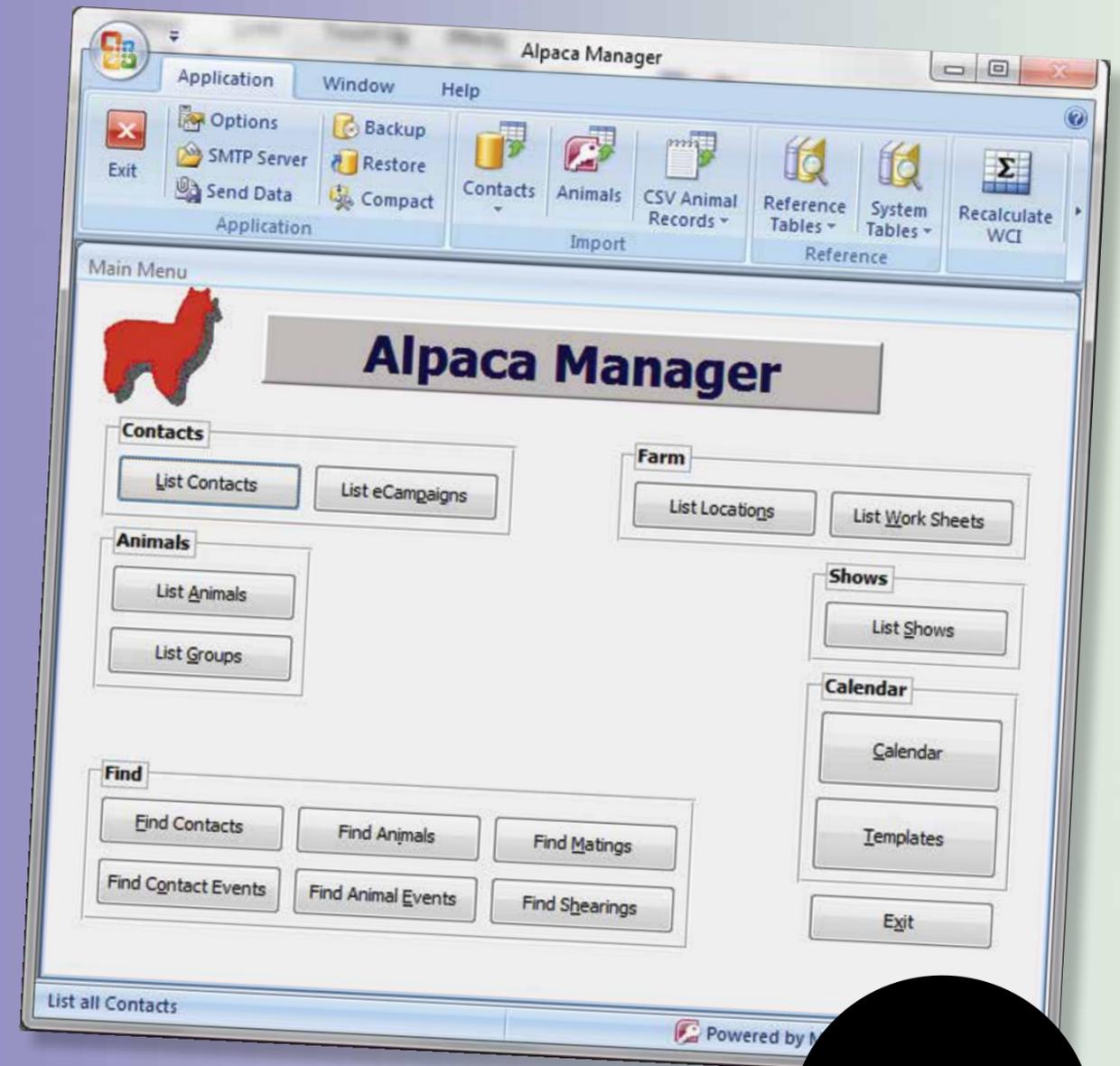
We love meeting other alpaca people and finding out how they are using the program. 2015 saw us travel to the UK, 2016 to South Australia and NSW.

With users all around the globe from Sweden to the USA to Namibia who knows where another trip could take us! In the meantime, we will be at the AANZ National Show and Expo in Feilding, NZ in September so come and say hello.



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AAA JUDGE ACCREDITATION

It has long been recognised that the show ring is a major contributor to the advancement of genetic gain in the national alpaca herd, by the recognition and reward of excellence by the judges. Showing is of utmost importance to most serious alpaca breeders as it represents a major arm of their marketing strategy, therefore, it is incumbent upon the judging fraternity to deliver consistent, accurate and rational experiences for exhibitors every time they enter a show ring.

Historically, AAA judges have been appointed and, apart from irregular judge get-togethers, left to their own devices to maintain their skills and improve their knowledge. Rapid advancement in breeding excellence means that a judge can easily be left behind if they are not in touch with the industry, constantly updating their expertise and having regular hands-on assessment opportunities for alpaca evaluation both in and out of the show ring.

With the advent of the Judge Training Levy, funding is now available for regular judge training so there is a requirement for a clearly understood process to account for how the training dollar is spent.

The responses from a survey of judges, initiated prior to the 2017 Workshop, indicated a desire by most judges that the present system be updated to ensure all judges remain current and competent.

So, it is no longer sufficient to accept appointment as a judge as a lifetime privilege. Judges must demonstrate a commitment to maintenance of knowledge and improvement of skills for as long as they choose to fulfil this very important role in our industry.

Competency, Consistency and Industry Involvement

When submitting their animals or fleece to the scrutiny of a judge our members expect that the judge will be competent to evaluate the exhibit, the outcome of that judging experience will be relatively consistent with other results, allowing for the variables of time, weather and different competition.

In order to deliver these results we now ask that judges regularly demonstrate that they

- are competent in the skill set required to perform the task
- are consistent with other judges in their appraisal of halter and fleece classes
- are involved with the alpaca industry with regular hands on judging and experience with alpacas

To satisfy the requirements of Judge Training and Accreditation all judges will need to submit an annual declaration and checklist to demonstrate appropriate participation in the industry in the previous judging year and attend the annual Judge Workshop.

The workshops are held annually, funded by the show levy introduced in 2016. Each workshop provides a range of training and measurement exercises as well as opportunity for the judges to discuss issues related to their task.

Individual workshops focus on a particular aspect of the judging craft. In 2015 the focus was on fleece judging and micron assessment and this culminated in the creation of a new judges' tool, in the form of the Judges Fleece Handbook, containing all the elements needed by a judge to be ready for the task of fleece judging, including a range of tested fibre samples to allow them to calibrate themselves when preparing to judge fleece micron.

In 2017 we concentrated on presentation of oral reasoning. Exercises included judging a mock class and presenting oral reasoning to a camera. The results were then played back to the group for peer review and comment. Despite some trepidation before the event, this learning method was wholeheartedly embraced by the group of judges.

The 2018 workshop is now being planned and the central focus will be on judging suris, both in the show ring and on the fleece table. As not all judges are actively involved with the suri breed it is important that we ensure the competence that breeders are entitled to expect when they offer their suri fleece or animals for evaluation.

These workshops are designed to ensure that the judge remains current and has demonstrated their ability to carry out judging duties in line with the standard of their peers. Each judge has elected a fellow judge as a mentor to allow the opportunity to review and discuss their performance at the workshops and at shows.

Assessment Process

Assessment of the required attributes is made by a combination of scoring practical exercises at the annual workshop plus accumulating a point score through activities that enhance their experience and industry knowledge throughout the year.

The design of this point structure is not intended to make achieving the necessary goals difficult but is to make sure that each judge remains in touch with the process of showing and judging alpacas. The included elements encompass not only active judging but also activities that will expand the understanding of how shows work.

So, to maintain fully accredited AAA Judge status, each individual must attend and achieve a pass mark at the annual workshop and achieve a target point score throughout the year.

Judge Levels

From January 2018 the methodology of grading judges will be amended. The existing levels 1,2 and 3 will be replaced with:

Apprentice Judge

An AAA member who has successfully completed an approved training induction program and will continue their training in and out of the show ring for a minimum of 12 months, during which time they will apprentice at a minimum of 5 halter and 5 fleece shows.

Accredited AAA Associate Judge

On completion of apprentice training a successful candidate becomes an Accredited Associate Judge for a minimum of 12 months, during which time they must judge at least 4 shows. Two

of these shows must be Grade C shows judged solo and two at any grade in partnership with a fully qualified AAA Judge. In these cases, the fully qualified judge will have seniority in the show ring and will complete a performance assessment for the Associate Judge.

Associate Judges must attend the annual Judges' Workshop and achieve a passing grade before they can qualify as an Accredited AAA Judge.

Accredited AAA Judge

Those who successfully complete the accreditation process and successful graduates from the Associate Judge phase will be accredited AAA Judges.

AAA Judges will be appointed on an annual basis after completing an Accreditation Request and achieving the required point score and pass grade from the annual Judges' Workshop.

Allocation of shows will commence in January each year and continue as Judge Requests are received. Only judges who have completed re-accreditation requirements will be permitted to nominate for shows.

Inactive Judge

A judge who does not complete the Accreditation Request Paperwork by 31st December each year will be deemed Inactive until such time as required paperwork is received and will not be permitted to nominate for shows.

If paperwork is not submitted by 31st March in the following year, the judge will be deemed to have retired.

Retired Judge

It is important that when a Judge retires, we do not lose the valuable knowledge and experience that they have accumulated. Retired Judges may be invited to assist with mentoring and training when suitable opportunities arise.



Training Judges

The role of Training Judges is to mentor, counsel and assist the development of Apprentice Judges, Associate Judges and Judges. As well as demonstrating a high level of proficiency in their own judging performance, Training Judges need to have the skills to pass on their knowledge, which requires excellent communication skills combined with empathy, honesty, confidentiality and patience. Training Judges will be elected by their peers each year.

The Training Judges then elect one from their number to serve as Senior Training Judge. The Senior Training Judge must be able to make the time commitment to playing a major role in developing training plans and preparation for the annual Judges' Workshop and be prepared to be involved with relevant judge communications throughout the year.

Show Levels

Grade A Shows

These are the premier shows around the country based on exhibit numbers or regional importance. This list will be amended by SJC as necessary.

Current Grade A Shows

Adelaide Royal
Alpacafest
Canberra Royal
Charles Ledger
Perth Royal
National Show / Australian Alpaca Spectacular
Royal Melbourne Alpaca Show
SA Colour Classic
SNSW Carousel of Colour
Sydney Royal Alpaca Show

The Accredited AAA Judges who score a place in the top 10 eligible judges, based on marks achieved in structured Workshop exercises at the Annual Workshop will receive priority in consideration for appointment at Grade A shows for the year.

Grade B Shows

All other shows with more than 150 entries for halter classes or 100 entries for fleece classes. Where one judge is appointed for both sections the show will be rated on the halter class grade.

Grade C Shows

Shows with less than 150 entries for Halter classes or 100 entries for fleece classes.

Where one judge is appointed for both sections the show will be rated on the halter class grade.

Conclusion

This major overhaul of judge training and self-development will ensure that Australian alpaca judges remain at the forefront of the industry and will have the competence to earn the respect and trust of exhibitors and show organisers throughout Australia and beyond. We are fortunate to have a dynamic, enthusiastic and committed panel of judges who have embraced this plan, which will benefit all alpaca breeders by ensuring that the best of the best excel in the show ring.

Paul Haslin November 2017
On behalf of the AAA Showing & Judging Committee

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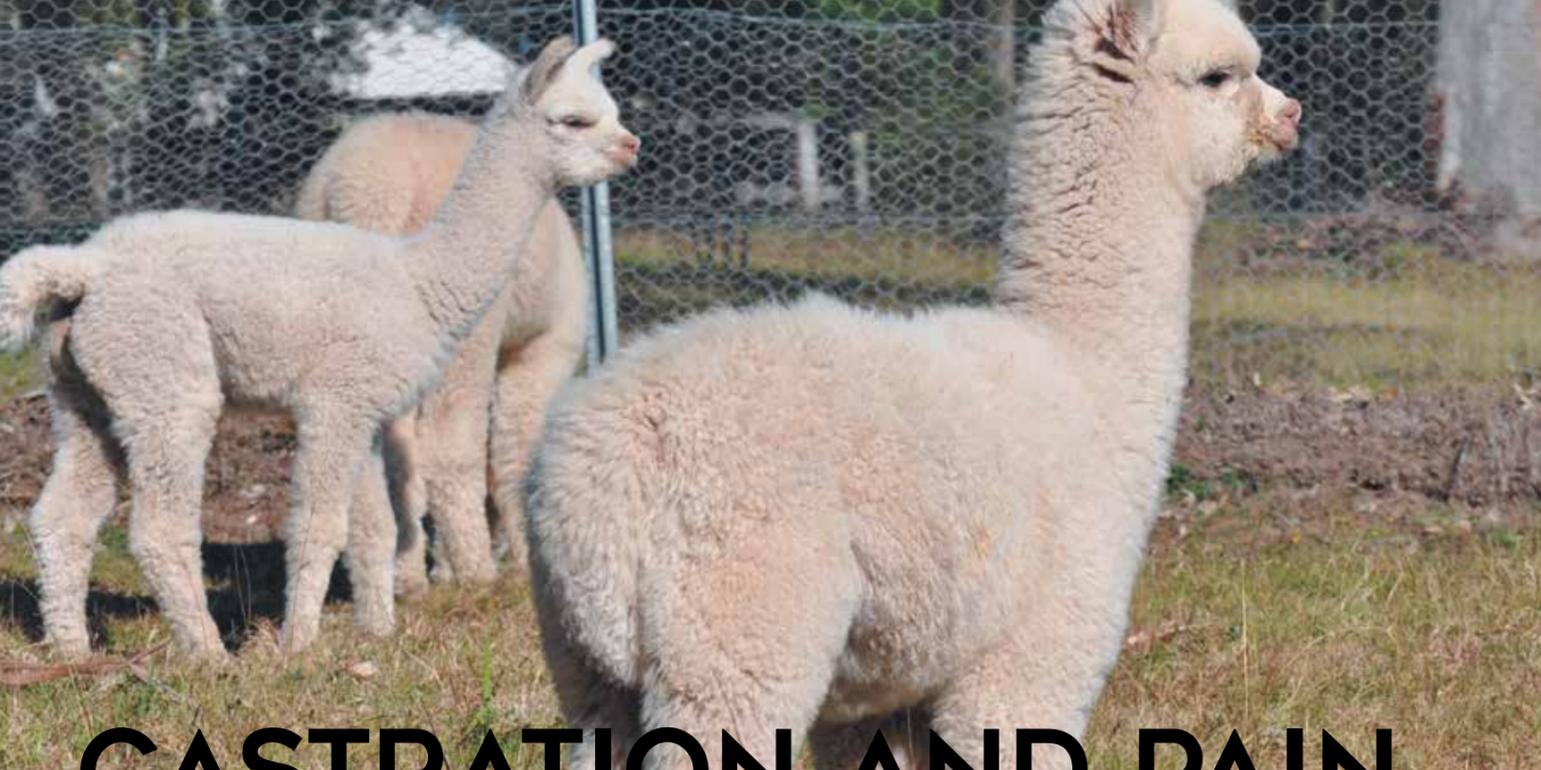
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DAVID & PAMELA PRATT

David 0427 950 262

Pamela 0419 532 615

alpacas@rosehavenalpacas.com.au



CASTRATION AND PAIN MANAGEMENT IN ALPACAS

by **DOMINIQUE BLACHE AND SHANE MALONEY**

Castration is an important component of the on-farm management of male alpacas in Australia. Castration decreases aggression towards other alpacas and humans. It also improves the economic value of the herd because wethers can be directed to several markets, including sale as guard animals, for fleece production, or used in the evolving alpaca meat industry. Several castration techniques are used in other livestock species. The choice of technique usually is based on research into the castration technique itself, as well as pain management. The research helps producers and legislators to make scientifically sound decisions, ensuring that the chosen procedure provides the best possible welfare outcome for the animals without compromising the production and legal requirements. Such data were not available for alpacas.

The research team at the University of Western Australia was commissioned by RIRDC (now AgriFutures Australia) and the Australian Alpaca Association (AAA) to explore potential methods to best manage the impact of castration in male alpacas. The project was run in close collaboration with the AAA and took a 4th generation R&D approach. Industry stakeholders were involved from the start to the finish of the project. An extensive consultation with stakeholders from the industry was first conducted using an online survey and focussed discussions with a small panel of producers and veterinarians that specialise in alpacas and other camelids.

What did the stakeholders want?

The survey was answered by 259 participants (an 85% response rate) who were mostly alpaca producers (54%), with a good representation from alpaca enthusiasts (hobby farmers, 32%), and veterinarians (11%). Most of the participants (91%) owned alpacas with 11% owning less than 10 alpacas, 45% owning between 11 to 50 alpacas, 22% owning between 51 and 100, and 13% owning more than 100. The survey confirmed that male alpacas are castrated for behaviour or market reasons (pet, herd guard, to control breeding). Surgical methods of castration, using double or single incision of the scrotum, were the most used (81%) and the rubber ring method was used by 17% of the respondents. Most respondents used local anaesthesia and painkillers all of the time during surgical castration. The use of general anaesthesia was in reverse proportional to the use of local anaesthesia. Reasons provided for not using anaesthesia were often because anaesthesia is too risky for the animal, drugs are not available to farmers, or that other drugs are sufficient. The principal drugs reported were; ketamine, xylazine, lignocaine, flunixin, meloxicam, and butorphanol. Most of the respondents using rubber ring castration did not provide pain management. When asked about the priorities to consider while adopting any castration method, the first was animal welfare, then practicality and cost. It was made clear that the contemporary method of pain management and castration was the use of surgical castration under full anaesthesia and analgesia using a combination of butorphanol, xylazine, and ketamine. This was the method recommended by veterinarians, including textbooks on surgery in alpacas, but disliked by producers because of cost and potential risk to the animals. However none of these comments were supported by scientific data obtained in alpacas. The possibility for producers to perform castration was a priority for producers that held a large number of animals. Another

controversy was the efficiency and the welfare impact of mechanical castration using rubber rings. From the survey and the discussion with the stakeholders, it became clear that some recently developed analgesics and sedatives might represent a great opportunity for the alpaca industry, since these new drugs are usually available over the counter and can be admixed by producers rather than veterinarians. At the conclusion of the survey results and the panel discussion, it was clear that the project should investigate both surgical and mechanical methods of castration, different pain management strategies, and the possibility for producers to perform castrations.

Which experiments were conducted?

We designed animal experiments to test the efficiency of: 1) meloxicam delivered via an oral transmucosal (OTM - Buccalgesic® see Photo 1) route in combination with ketamine and xylazine during surgical castration, 2) meloxicam OTM alone or with the addition of a topical mixture of analgesic, antiseptic and vasoconstrictor drugs (Tri-solfen®) during surgical castration, 3) meloxicam OTM alone during mechanical castration (Elastrator® rings), and 4) oral sedative/analgesic (detomidine: Dormosedan® gel, Zoetis; xylazine: Ilium Xylazil-100, Troy Laboratories) in combination with oral meloxicam. We used 10 to 12 alpacas per treatment. The impact on alpaca welfare was assessed via both physiological and behavioural parameters. We used classical parameters such as changes in plasma stress hormone (cortisol) known to increase during stress and pain. In addition we measured changes in biomechanical parameters related to the control of balance (Photo 2). We had recently developed this method of measurement for sheep and pigs which allowed us to measure changes in body mass distribution and the force exerted on each limb. In addition to these physiological parameters, ethological measurements, such as body position, time lying down, standing, eating and drinking, were taken intensively during the first few hours following castration and less intensively over the next 6 days. Overall, all experiments followed the same sampling protocol over 2 weeks following surgical castration but up to 9 weeks following mechanical castration.



Photo 1: Application of transmucosal meloxicam (Ilium Buccalgesic®) Photo: A. Gardiner.



Photo 2: A male alpaca on the force plates during a motor balance test. Photo: K. Vadhanabhuti.

What did the data tell us?

In the space available here it is not possible to go through all the data, so we have summarised the data in Table 1. A full description of the project will be available when the project report is published.

Table 1: Summary of the results observed after different methods of castration and pain management. Ket: Ketamine 4.2 mg/kg IM (injected 10 min before surgery), Xyl: Xylazine 0.42 mg/kg IM (injected 10 min before surgery), But: Butorphanol 42 µg/kg IM (injected 10 min before surgery) iMel: Injectable Meloxicam 1mg/kg IM (injected 10 min before surgery), oMel: Ilium Buccalgesic Oral Trans Mucosal 1 mg/kg (applied 90 min before surgery). Coding for welfare outcomes 1: poor to 5: very good.

Group	Castration method	Treatment	Sedation quality	Recovery	Balance	Behaviour	Cortisol
1	Surgical	Ket + Xyl But	3	5	5	5	3
2	Surgical	Ket + Xyl iMel	3	5	5	5	4
3	Surgical	Ket + Xyl oMel	3	5	5	5	5
4	Surgical	oMel	NA Restraint	4	4	5	3
5	Surgical	oMel + Tri-olfen®	NA Restraint	4	4	5	3
6	Mechanical	oMel	NA Restraint	2	1	2	3

The duration of sedation was significantly longer after meloxicam OTM in combination with ketamine and xylazine (Group 3) than after either injectable butorphanol (Group 1) or meloxicam (Group 2), but the quality of sedation was comparable between the three pain management methods. The indicators that were used during

the visual assessment of pain were not different between the three methods. Neither was there any difference in the behaviours that are thought to be relevant indicators of discomfort such as walking, standing, lying, eating, or investigatory behaviour. Indicators of balance were also not different between the 3 groups. By contrast, while plasma cortisol increased to similar levels in all 3 groups, the duration of the increase was longer in the group receiving injectable meloxicam than in the groups receiving butorphanol or meloxicam OTM. After 100 minutes, the plasma concentration of cortisol increased again in all groups, but the increase in the butorphanol group was higher than in the two groups that received meloxicam suggesting that oral meloxicam was still active while the analgesic effect of injectable butorphanol had waned. The use of oral meloxicam only (without ketamine and xylazine) during surgical castration with or without the addition of Tri-solfen® gave results, for both the behavioural and the physiological parameters, similar to the previous 3 groups with only few short lasting changes in behaviour following herd movements during blood collection and balance testing. After the administration of meloxicam OTM and the application of the rubber rings there were changes in behaviour within about 30 min, with all males lying with their legs extended (Photo 3). Behaviours such as standing, lying down and time spent at the feed trough were all affected after mechanical castration, suggesting that the alpacas were reluctant to move around. Similarly, motor balance was affected after mechanical castration and the total duration (~200 minutes) of the increase in cortisol was longer than that observed in all of the other experimental groups. The amplitude of the surge was similar to that measured after castration with meloxicam alone or with Tri-solfen®, but the amplitude was much higher than that observed when ketamine and xylazine was used. The rings were efficient in only 80% of the males. Tissue necrosis was observed on Day 4 most often accompanied by an unpleasant smell. The time taken for the scrotum to detach from the body was very variable with the first alpaca losing the dried scrotum by week 4, while the last one detached only 9 weeks after the application of the rings. No sign of infection was seen during the 9 weeks of observation. Unfortunately, the trials using oral sedative/analgesic were unsuccessful with no sedation and very little change in behaviour following the oral administration of detomidine gel (Dormosedan® Gel; 60 mg/kg to 180 mg/kg) or oral administration of a mixture of meloxicam OTM and xylazine (1, 2 and 4 mg of xylazine/head).



Photo 3: Alpacas lying down with their legs extended after the application of two elastrators. The behaviour was observed from 25 minutes after application and for the next 60 to 100 minutes. Photo: K. Vadhanabhuti.

Overall our results showed that meloxicam OTM is a good and affordable analgesic in alpacas that can be administered by lay operators. Sedation in combination with meloxicam OTM gave the best pain management after surgical castration. The combination of oral meloxicam and Tri-Solfen® could offer an economical solution to trained lay operators. We have now documented that rubber rings are not adequate for alpacas as they are not reliable and they induce long lasting pain. An important observation is that alpacas should be left alone and not moved during the 24 h following castration since motion had a negative effect on physiological parameters associated with pain.

What next?

From the research there seem to be two options available to the industry that are defensible on welfare grounds. Surgical castration by a veterinarian using full anaesthesia and analgesia with a combination of oral meloxicam in addition to a mixture of ketamine and xylazine is the most defensible procedure, and can be adopted immediately by the industry. A second option is defensible, but its adoption by the industry depends on whether the method of castration using double incision is regarded as an act of veterinary science. That alternative method, involving surgical castration conducted by a non-veterinarian operator after the administration of oral meloxicam and followed by the administration of Tri-Solfen®, is a feasible option, but it will be necessary to have the people that perform the castration to be adequately trained. To this end, a series of training videos, covering the procedures for the application of oral meloxicam and Tri-Solfen® followed by the castration and ligature procedure, were developed at the end of the project. A possible scenario could be that, once the training videos have been studied, the operators could perform the surgery under the supervision of a veterinarian who could then confirm in writing to the AAA that the operator is competent in all aspects of the procedure. Such a scheme would give the Australian alpaca industry a higher standard of quality compared to other livestock industries that practice any form of surgical castration. It has to be noted that when new pre-emptive analgesics become available, either by topical or transmucosal delivery, and therefore available for use by non-veterinarians, these medications will need to be tested and added to the use of oral meloxicam by producers.



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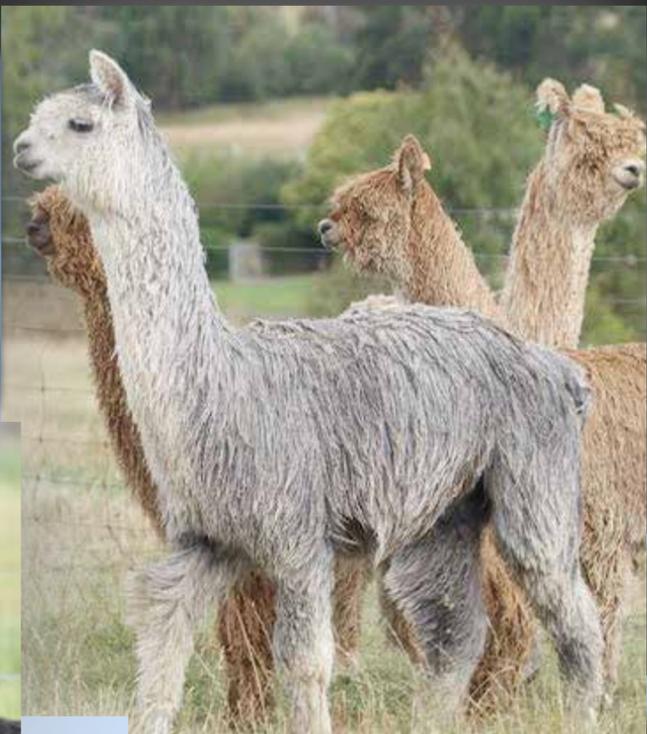
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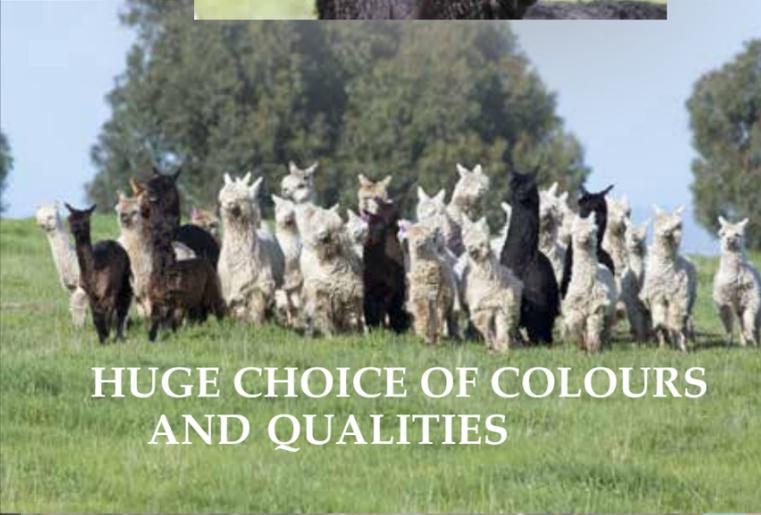


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WHY BIOSECURITY MATTERS

by FIONA VANDERBEEK

What is Biosecurity and why does it matter to me?

If this already sounds like a technical article on a topic of little interest or perceived relevance to you, I ask that you please at least read the case study below...

It is March 2001 on a sheep dairy farm in southern England. A mob of lambs is sent to the local saleyard; one lamb does not sell and is returned to the farm. The next day, an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease is declared, with the disease first detected in an animal at an abattoir which collected animals from that same saleyard. Every animal that passed through the saleyards on that day was traced and destroyed, along with every other susceptible animal on the properties they went to.

Because that one lamb was returned to the property, this farmer lost every animal he possessed – 500 sheep, nine goats, five cows and a pregnant llama - even though a veterinary inspection showed no sign of disease. He then had to sit up all night guarding the pile of carcasses before they could be burned the next day, to ensure that foxes did not prey on any potentially infected carcass.

This farmer lost everything – his sole source of income, the years of genetic improvement in his flock, and also some family pets, such as the llama.

The 2001 FMD outbreak in Great Britain was not over until the end of September, by which time 6.5 million animals had been destroyed.

An alpaca breeder in southern NSW buys a group of animals from a farm in an area known for its high rainfall and issues with high worm burdens and drench resistance. On arrival, the animals are immediately quarantined and faecal samples are taken. On testing the samples many are found to be high, with one young animal being found to be thin, anaemic and with a worm count of 3,500 epg. A count so high the vet was amazed she was still alive, and most likely indicating a heavy burden of Barber's pole worm. The animals were drenched with Zolvix, and kept in concrete floored pens on straw bedding, for a further 10 days.

When a repeated faecal test indicated an egg count of zero the animals were put on grass, but even at this time were kept in a separate quarantine paddock.

Only after a second clear count a month later were the animals integrated with the main herd.

Not only did the most heavily burdened animal make a full recovery, but the property maintained a status free of Barber's pole.

This is the harsh reality of what will happen when an EAD that can affect alpacas hits us here in Australia. Yes, this is the very worst type of incident that can occur... Now read the next case study, for a far more common scenario which could impact on your farm.

Both these case studies, though at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of size and impact, are examples of why biosecurity does matter – to every one of us, whether we own alpacas purely for pleasure, or are commercial scale farmers. Biosecurity is about the protection of livestock at a farm or regional level, but equally is about the management of risk at a national level to protect Australia's ability to trade nationally and internationally with its high level of disease-free protection due to being an isolated island. In the case of an Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) such as FMD, state governments will implement standard operating procedures in line with the AUSVETPLAN, managed by Animal Health Australia (AHA).

All of us, as owners of livestock (be it two or two hundred alpacas), has an obligation to play our part to protect our own animals and the national herd.



AAA's own Biosecurity programs

The alpaca industry has for many years been operating two biosecurity programs – AlpacaMAP and Q-Alpaca, but in recent years participation in both programs has been declining – why is this?

AlpacaMAP

The AlpacaMAP is overseen by AHA and is modelled on the MAPs for cattle, sheep and goats with the aim being assurance that a herd is free from Johnes Disease. Participation includes regular faecal testing by an independent assessor. The CattleMAP has recently been disbanded and replaced by JBAS (for beef cattle) and DairyScore (for dairy cattle) which place the focus of biosecurity management on the farmer. The sheep and goat industries are currently considering whether to follow a similar pathway.

By December 2016, the alpaca industry had only seventeen participating herds who were questioned about their reasons for continuing with the program. Eleven responses were received (65%). Of these, six indicated they would not be renewing their membership and would be supportive of the winding up of the MAP. Four breeders indicated they participated purely as a marketing tool and to facilitate the transport/sale of animals interstate (particularly to WA) or for the sale of herd guards to sheep breeders in the SheepMAP.

On the basis of the above, AAA communicated with the DPI in WA and received an assurance from the Manager of Animal Disease Control that provided those currently in the AlpacaMAP kept up the same monitoring program they are currently undertaking, their animals would continue to be allowed into WA.

In the light of this, there seems little reason to continue with the AlpacaMAP.

Q-Alpaca

Q-Alpaca is the AAA's own biosecurity and quality assurance program and participation involves working closely with a local vet initially to approve the property and then sign an annual agreement, together with undertaking autopsies on most deceased adult animals, and completing an annual stock return.

Participation in Q-Alpaca has also declined, with 110 participants out of a total of 1392 members (8%) of the AAA. The current Q-Alpaca program is failing to connect with alpaca farmers for a variety of reasons:

- Breeders (particularly those with a large number of animals) report that the requirement to autopsy every animal aged between 1-15 years is cost-prohibitive. There is wide variation in the fee charged by vets to conduct autopsies, ranging between approximately \$100-700;
- Many breeders, regardless of the size of their herd, do not understand the rationale for conducting an autopsy on an animal with a known cause of death (such as death due to accidental trauma). The reason is that it can provide valuable information on other underlying diseases in the national herd – did that animal also have a high worm burden, or a damaged liver, even though that was not the cause of death?
- There continues to be a misconception that Q-Alpaca is only about Johnes Disease.

Where to from here?

With the disbanding of the CattleMAP and introduction of new farm biosecurity models the time is right for the AAA to work with AHA to overhaul alpaca biosecurity. A proposal to dispense with AlpacaMap and completely overhaul Q-Alpaca was recently put to the Animal Health Committee (AHC) – comprising the Chief Veterinary Officers of all states and territories – and has received their endorsement. The words below have been provided by Dr Charles Milne, Chief Veterinary Officer in Victoria, and the recently elected Chair of AHC:

The challenge of keeping a healthy herd

Biosecurity is a word that is guaranteed to put the majority of animal keepers to sleep but consider for a moment the implications of getting it wrong. Most of the major epidemic animal diseases that we do not currently have in Australia not only cause significant and distressing disease in the affected animals but are controlled by compulsory culling of all affected mobs and also any animals at risk of being infected either through the movements of animals, people, feed and machinery. Probably the most significant disease of this nature for alpaca owners is foot and mouth disease and whilst the last outbreak of this disease in Australia was in 1872 we remain at risk of introduction of this and other significant livestock diseases. Here in Australia we rely on our isolation as a country and strict quarantine requirements to keep disease out. However, with increasing trade and movements of animal products the possible introduction of disease is an increasing risk and a constant challenge. Some of the most severe diseases can be transmitted by feeding waste food to susceptible animals hence the ban on swill feeding in Australia.

Experience from overseas

I led the pre-emptive response in SW Scotland to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 and remember the considerable distress and heartbreak caused to farmers and people who kept livestock species such as sheep, goats and pigs as a hobby. Many cases such as "Woolie" the sheep and "Misty" the goat are seared into my memory as the owners lost animals that they had reared over years as part of their own families, whilst others lost irreplaceable breeding stock resulting from generations of selection. We did not have many alpacas at the time in Scotland so we saw few of these animals slaughtered for disease control but here in Victoria these animals are often kept both commercially and by hobby keepers and would not be exempt from disease controls. The disease outbreak described above was caused by a pig keeper illegally feeding swill and resulted in a total of six and a half million sheep, cattle, pigs and other susceptible animals being culled across the UK to control and manage the outbreak.

Be good at the basics

So these risks are real and it is important for all livestock keepers to comply with basic biosecurity requirements including not feeding waste food to any species of animals on their property, purchasing animals from reliable sources with known disease status, cleaning and disinfecting equipment between use and if possible only using equipment that has not been used on other premises - if it has then it is important to ensure that it has been disinfected properly.

The benefits of good biosecurity are not only relevant for the epidemic diseases which, whilst catastrophic, are fortunately infrequent events. These measures also reduce the risk of the diseases that are already present in Australia and can impact on the health of your animals. Many diseases of animals are also zoonotic which means that they can cause illness in people too. Simple management techniques do reduce the risk of disease and will result in healthier and more productive stock as well as reducing human health risks to you and your family. So whilst we all assume that "it won't happen to me" a few simple precautions will help to ensure that it doesn't!

The alpaca industry has some specific challenges to address in the re-design of our biosecurity program:

- Despite the growth in commercial scale farms running many hundreds of animals, the majority of alpacas remain in the ownership of smaller lifestyle farmers
- The way alpacas are typically farmed in Australia makes them a very mobile animal, in that they are frequently moved between properties/interstate as the result of private sales, for stud services or to be exhibited in shows. This adds greatly to the potential for disease to be spread.

First steps will be to put together a working party comprising a spectrum of stakeholders, to consult further with AAA members and to look at other modern biosecurity models that have been developed for other agricultural sectors.

Our industry, when compared to other agricultural sectors, is small and the AAA has very limited financial and human resources. To maximise value and chances of success in terms of industry participation, we need to embrace the concept of working with other livestock industries to design and implement a biosecurity program which will suit the needs of all sizes of producer and allow alpaca movements across state borders. This will be a balancing act to ensure:

- Compliance, without imposing excessive regulation or the cost of external monitoring;
- The needs and expectations of varying size of operation are met – perhaps through a tiered program;
- The needs of those producers co-grazing alpacas with other livestock can be addressed;
- Interstate animal movements can occur.

The end result needs to be a program that is meaningful but also not unduly arduous in its requirements. Writing a farm biosecurity plan is easy... ensuring it is acted on daily, not filed in a drawer... is the hard part.

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TESTING FOR COARSE FIBRES

by **BOB KINGWELL, MONGA ALPACAS**

Just when you thought you had your primaries under control, think again. They may be coarser than you thought. If you have been relying on fleece test results to measure the success of your breeding program to control coarse primaries in your saddle fleece then you have probably been making decisions based on false information.

THE PROBLEM

The problem has arisen because the OFDA 2000 instrument (Optical Fibre Diameter Analyser) was designed for the merino industry and up until recently it was assumed that it would be equally suitable for the alpaca industry. It wasn't until 2016 that the inventor, Mark Brims of BSC Electronics, had the opportunity to analyse large numbers of alpaca fleece diameters and realised that they were more variable and contained a greater percentage of the coarse primary fibres than merino fleece.

The instrument was initially programmed to eliminate all diameters that were greater than four times the standard deviation of fibre diameters above the average fibre diameter. This was done by including a setting that could be turned either ON or OFF and was referred to as the 'trim high' setting.

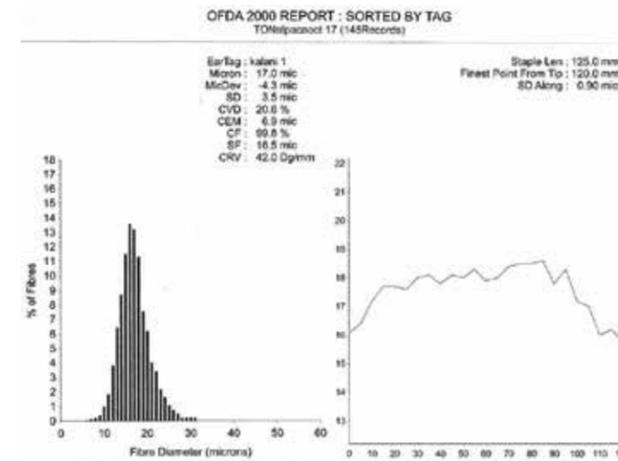
THE EFFECTS

When fibre diameters are symmetrically distributed about the mean, less than 0.1% of fibres will be eliminated when the trim is ON. If however the fibre diameters are skewed towards the coarse edge of the fleece histogram, this can result in as much as 1% of the fibres being eliminated.

Alpaca fibres can be heavily skewed towards this coarse edge which contains most of the primary fibres in the sample. Because about 10% of the fibres will be primary fibres, this means that 1% of all the fibres represents about 10% of the primaries and these will be the coarsest fibres in the sample.

This results in the average fibre diameter (FD) coming down slightly and the standard deviation of fibre diameters (SD) going up significantly. Other results that are calculated from the FD and SD such as comfort factor (CF), coarse edge micron (CEM) and the coefficient of variation (CV) are also significantly affected.

The following two histograms demonstrate the difference in the results when the trim setting is ON compared to when it is OFF. The test was done on a mid-side sample using an OFDA 2000 with the trim high setting OFF. This enabled the instrument to produce the results using all the measured stored diameters. The setting was then turned ON to enable the instrument to delete the coarse fibres from the recalculated test results.



FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

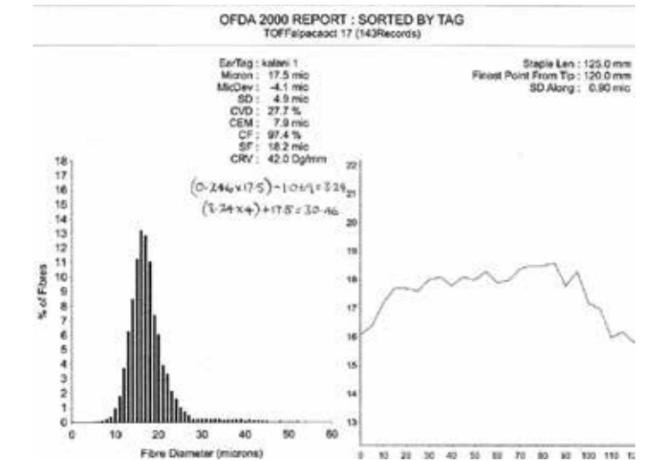
The top histogram suggests that this alpaca has its coarse saddle fibres under control. There are no fibres above 31 microns, the SD is a low 3.5 microns, the CEM is a creditable 6.9 microns, the CF is almost 100% and the CV is 20.6%. Most breeders would assume this was a good female to include in their breeding program. The standard testing procedure using the trim ON that has been used for the last 10 or so years produced these results.

The second histogram however tells a different story. It was produced with the trim setting switched OFF and all the measured diameters in the test sample were included in the results. These true results clearly show that the alpaca does not have its coarse fibres under control. There are coarse

fibres going out to 50 microns, giving it a comfort factor of 97.4%. The SD has gone from 3.6 to 4.9 microns, the CEM has gone from 6.9 to 7.9 microns and the CV has gone from 20.6% to 27.7%. This female should not be included in a breeding program.

THE SELLING RUB

The industry now faces a dilemma. The trim OFF results are essential for making the right breeding decisions in order to reduce the level of coarse fibres in the national herd. However breeders wishing to sell alpacas will prefer to advertise their alpacas using the trim ON results. It will therefore be a case of buyer beware. If you are buying alpacas for breeding and you intend using test results as part of your breeding program then insist on seeing test results determined with the trim setting switched OFF before deciding to buy.



CONCLUSIONS

Good quality alpacas that have their coarse primary fibres under control will not show any appreciable difference between the two different sets of test results. However if all that is available are results produced with the trim setting ON then how will you know if it really is as good as the false results suggest.

Accurate test results can only be obtained by turning the trim setting OFF. The global industry now has a responsibility to ensure that future testing is standardised to ensure that all tests done on the OFDA 2000 instrument are performed with this setting turned OFF.

The Australian Alpaca Association has the opportunity to lead the way by implementing these changes as soon as possible and certainly before the next National Show.

Disclaimer: The views published in this article are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the AAA



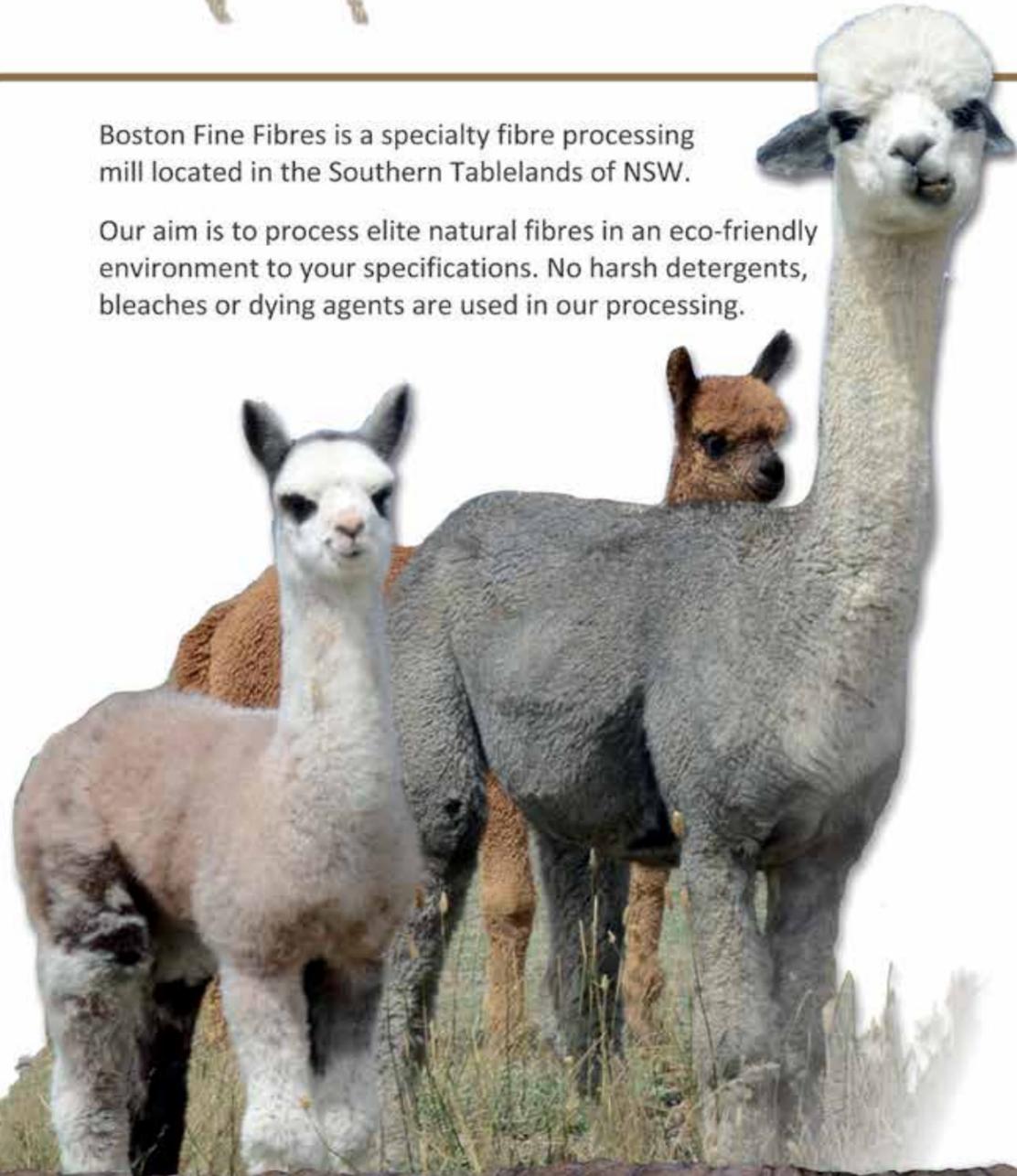
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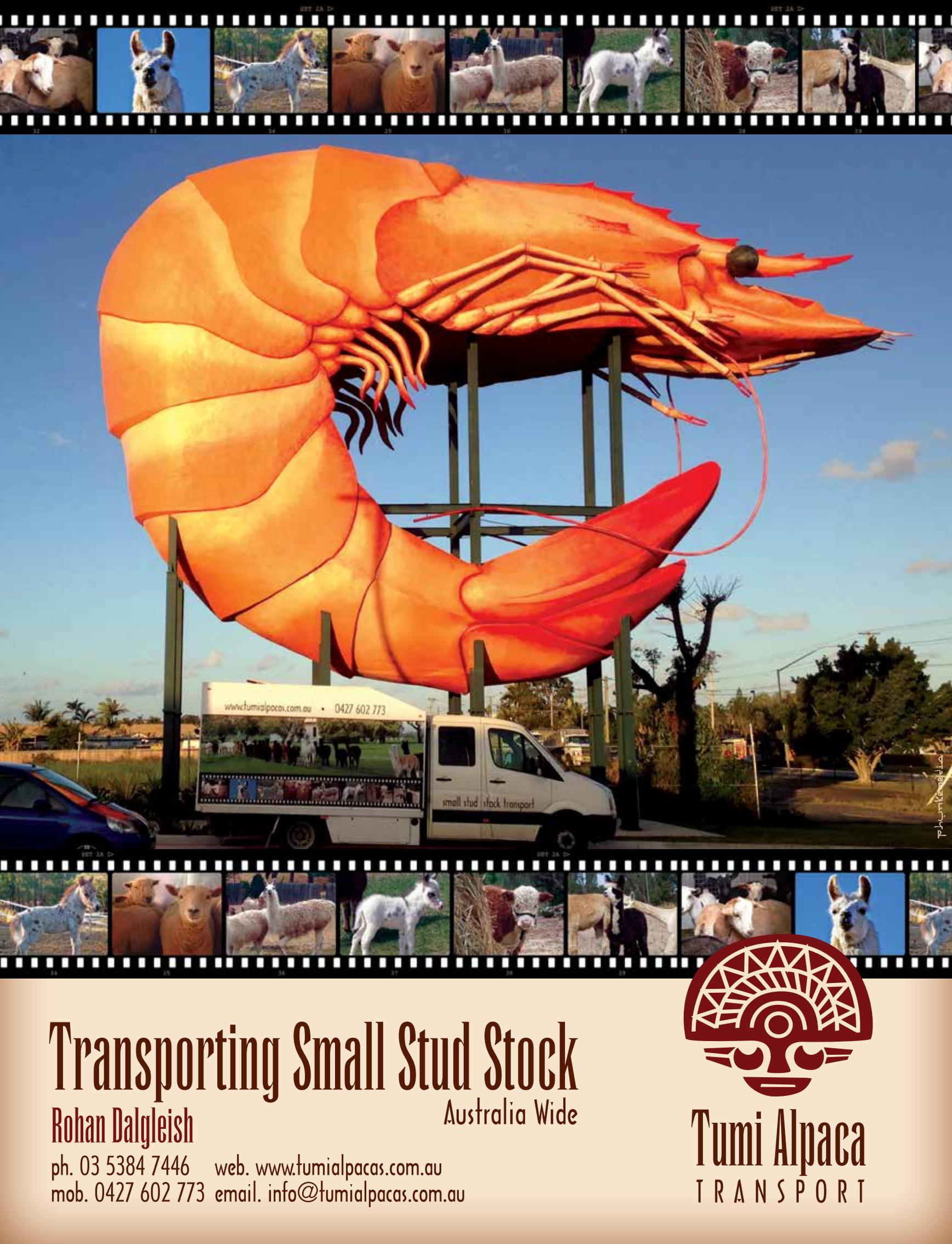
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