



It all weighs up at Goondiwindi

GOONDIWINDI woolgrower, Mark Murphy, says the common perception about the impact of breeding the wrinkles off Merinos on wool cut doesn't necessarily add up.

"There was a slight reduction in wool weight as we zeroed in on breeding out wrinkles, but cuts are coming back up," said Mr Murphy (pictured with wife, Vicki). "And one client has just shorn an average of 8.2 kilograms of 19.5-micron wool off his two-tooth, low-wrinkle ewes. He says the key to moving to low wrinkle is culling wrinkly sheep and using the right genetics for up-front impact."

Mr Murphy said if the right rams were used, a huge start could be made in the first year, and progress would accelerate in subsequent generations.

"Don't be lulled into thinking plainer rams from an existing supplier will do – the rate of change will be too slow," he said.

Mr Murphy said he had seen one flock go from having a breech wrinkle score of 4.5 to five reduced down to one to 1.1 from just six years of using the right rams. "That operator hasn't mulesed since 2006 and has virtually no fly issues," he said.

Flystrike Management workshops are being conducted across Australia by the Sheep Co-operative Research Centre and participating agencies.

■ Visit www.flyboss.org.au

Breeding strikes flies

POSITIVE proof flystrike prevention is in the genes is on show every day on the Brigalow plains country of southern Queensland.

In a climate where temperature and rainfall conditions can collide to create waves of flystrike in susceptible sheep, Mark and Vicki Murphy, "Karbullah", Goondiwindi, Qld, say they have moved on from a "cure" approach.

"Our sheep have always been plain bodied – though in the past 10 years we've really focused on breeding out wrinkles," Mr Murphy said.

"We reached a point in 2003 where we questioned the need to mules, and Vicki put her foot down and said 'right, we're going to stop'."

"I confess to having a few doubting moments; though when 2004 came around we stuck to the resolve, left the shears in the shed and got on with making sure all management aspects were up to scratch.

"Every lamb drop since 2004 has not been mulesed, and we're not going back there."

The key management practices for

the Murphy's Merinos include using a long-acting fly repellent on the tail at marking time, judicious crutching, shearing all stock when wool length passes 80 millimetres (rather than on a calendar basis), culling stock that develop dag problems, and wrinkle scoring all sheep.

"Karbullah" consists of 1830 hectares of mixed Belah-Brigalow and Ironbark-Pine country, with as much as 600 millimetres of summer dominant rain received in a "normal" year.

The Merino enterprise of 1000 stud Merino ewes is self replacing and consists of the poll stud, Karbullah, and a horned stud, Boyanga.

Both are producing wool of 19.2 to 19.4 microns.

These days, Mr Murphy doesn't even classify flies as a major problem.

"We've learnt the last wrinkle to be bred off a sheep is in the tail area, so we cull any weaners that have bum scribble," he said.

"Since we have no bum wrinkle, there is no need to mules."

Of Karbullah's 2009-drop weaners,

Mr Murphy said 96.5 per cent had a breech wrinkle score of 1, and 3.5pc a breech wrinkle score of 2.

"I can't remember the last time we had a sheep with body strike, and if breech strike occurs, it's mostly related to dags," he said.

"To put numbers on it, we'd be fat out getting 20 breech-struck sheep per 1000 – in bad fly conditions."

"The sheep are now so free of fly-strike risk we're now tending to crutch just once a year, and even then, it's more focused on removing stain before shearing. And we don't jet."

Mr Murphy welcomed the launch of the FlyBoss website (www.flyboss.org.au), which he said was an impressive tool.

"It's very easy to follow and digest," he said.

"The ability of FlyBoss to tailor a management calendar to particular districts and environments is very valuable.

"This is just the sort of tool the industry needs to move forward on this mulesing issue."