

National survey of Merino producers

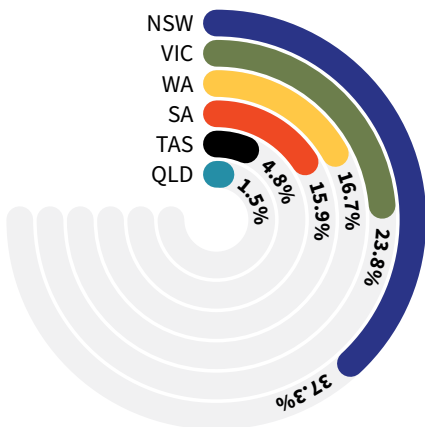
to determine the prevalence and suspected causes of Merino ewe mortality

Background

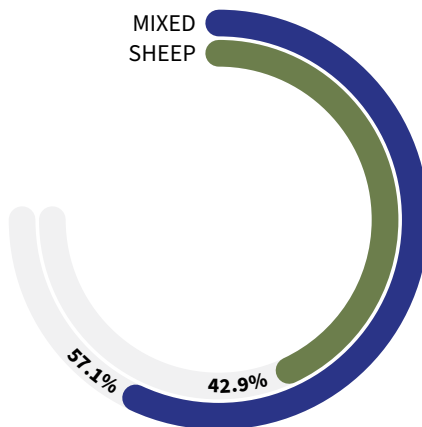
In early 2024, a national online survey of sheep producers was run as part of the AWI- and MLA-funded *Merino ewe mortality – prevalence, causes and mitigation strategies* project. The survey was designed to be used to estimate annual adult ewe mortality across a 12-month breeding cycle. Farm-level mortality, from population demographics, and management information, was used to describe annual adult ewe mortality for five years prior to survey completion.

160 surveys were returned from which data was analysed

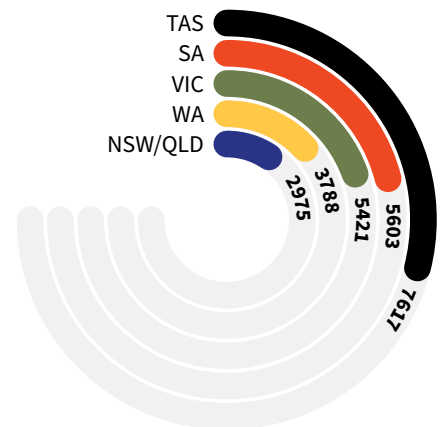
Demographics of respondents



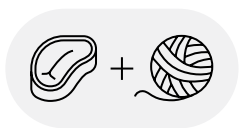
Main farming enterprise on the property



Average number of sheep managed by respondents



Main commodity of sheep enterprise



63.5% respondents reported wool and meat as equal commodities in their sheep enterprise.

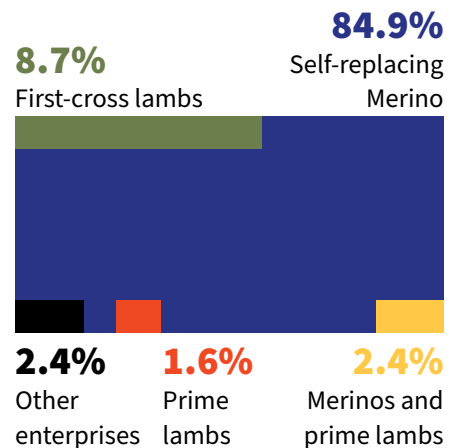


31% respondents listed their main commodity as superfine or fine wool.




5.5% respondents listed their main commodity as red meat.


Main sheep enterprise



Farm management factors

83% 
of respondents practice scanning for multiples¹

77% 
of respondents condition score their ewes

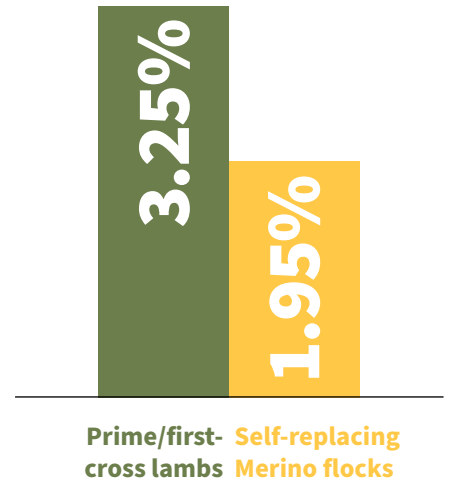
94% 
of respondents differentially manage ewes according to scanning or condition score results

1 Note: 36% of respondents in the 2024 National Producer Survey scanned for multiples. Source: Sheep Sustainability Framework Annual Report 2024

Mortality rates

The reported average mortality during lambing for producers who had a primary enterprise of 'self-replacing Merino flocks' was 1.95%. The average flock size for these producers was 2025 ewes.

For producers whose primary enterprise was 'prime/first-cross lambs', the reported average mortality during lambing was 3.25%. The average flock size for these producers was 3550 ewes.



Average ewe mortality rates during lambing across the complete dataset for all enterprise types (i.e. wool, meat and a combination of both) were less than 3.5%, while annual mortality rates were less than 4.5%.

Time of lambing



Of these, the lowest reported lambing mortality was during autumn (2.2%) and the highest during spring (2.8%).

Next steps

Merino producers around the country participated in the next phase of the project throughout the 2024 lambing season, where they monitored flocks and recorded mortality rates. A team of vets worked with these producers and conducted postmortems to determine causes of death.

Next lambing season, producers will select intervention strategies to trial on farm, to see which strategies will reduce Merino ewe mortality during lambing.

The groups for the next phase are located in:

- Northern wheatbelt WA
- Central wheatbelt WA
- Northern NSW
- Southern NSW
- Central NSW
- South-east SA
- South-west Victoria

Scan the QR code for more information and resources

