

New Zealand Wool Classers Association Inc.



Chairman's Report to NZWCA May 2014

Having started last year's report on a bit of a pessimistic note I thought I would try to be bright and positive this year. One of the most positive things I have seen lately would be the Country Calendar episode featuring Banks Peninsula Farms, where a group of some 45 farmers on Banks Peninsula have taken the initiative to market their product jointly and a bit innovatively. It is inspiring to see this happening but one also wonders why the so called "Marketing Specialists" in our industry have not done this type of thing. Going way back it may have grown into something worthwhile for more of us within industry. It is by the grower having good financial success that gives job security throughout the chain.

I did find some positive price reports from the NZ Merino Classers gateway, but they have not updated since 11 October last year, that showed a good 5 to 9.5% increase for the 20 to 23 micron area, I have been told that these wools are best described as firm/holding at this point. Fine (under 18 micron) is the sad part of the market and can only be described as weak. After some hunting around I found some data on a web site that gave me an indication that mid micron wools had dropped slightly in the last 12 months, even in this "information & technology" age it can be hard to get facts, and sometimes the "facts" are more conjecture. I understand that we can "blame" Australia as their clip varies so much in micron from year to year, depending on the season that it puts different pressure on the market each year, despite being told some years ago that our clip was so much better than Australia's it was differentiated by quality, maybe but not by price. It is a pity that it isn't easy to get this data, especially fresh information. Cross bred wools are steady or slightly better than last year.

To the Wool Classers Association. This year we have been actively working away in the background. Many people, even within the industry don't see that we are even there let alone being at all active. Dave has had to deal with a few issues regarding classers and defending our organisation. Sometimes it would be the most thankless job around, having to justify the existence of an organisation that is voluntary to belong to, which is trying to protect part of what is definitely a fractured industry. Even the less cynical would say it is fractured in several places and keeps beating itself up and infighting which doesn't help anyone, except the competition which isn't others in the wool industry but other fibres that come out of a machine. Carry on the way we (and I mean the industry from grower to manufacturer/retailer) will continue be a shattered industry and we will all lose out. I also do wonder if the wool industry is trying to self-destruct, why can't we all work together to make certain that that doesn't happen.

There has been some discussion, and more recently in the shearing industry publication "Shearing Magazine" regarding restructuring of the training regime. Once again if we don't sort this out and work together for a good solution for the industry as a whole we will all be losers. I don't want to get into a discussion as to who has the best training system or ideas, they all have merits, but arguing in the media won't solve anything. We are grown people here for GOD's sake get around a table and sort OUR future out. We have a role to play in this as an organization, as training replacements for those of us that are approaching the end of our days in the sheds is important. I am sure that no-one here will disagree that the fibre we deal with is special and unique, some is a bit less special, but that is the great thing with a natural product and makes the job what it is. Sometimes creating a good line from what could have all been dumped into a poor line can be almost as satisfying as playing round with a great clip. Making the proverbial "silk purse out of a sow's ear" can be rewarding, and it can certainly be a test of the ability, it is our job as classer to make the best we can from what the grower and the season have created.



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This year has had the usual complaints that as an organisation what do we do to justify the registration fee? Why should we pay it? What do I get for my money? Well I consider that I get the opportunity to charge a grower more than I would get paid as a leading shed hand, to try to gain the best possible net price for the wool clip. If there was no registration scheme the grower has no way of knowing if I have had sufficient training, as well as ongoing training, if I screw up there is someone they can go to so I don't ruin other clips (obviously I won't get invited back to where I screwed up, but does the rest of the industry get to find out?). Unfortunately there are a still few out there classing without being registered, mainly doing a good job, but are they potentially undermining those of us who do participate in the combined strength of being part of an organisation.

I also wonder if the lack of nominations for the board positions is a reflection on our member's non-belief in a united approach. Having had the retirement of a founding member of our organization it is sad to see no nominations. It begs the question do the members really want an organisation to oversee training and quality standards or does the membership want to let the organisation disappear and with it registration and any promotion and protection of the skill we have. If no-one is prepared to run any organisation it has a limited life expectancy.

The day to day running and administration of NZWCA has once again been very ably performed by Annette. Since Annette took over part of the duty that was once all performed by the Registrar the administrative side has run very smoothly which has enabled Dave to perform the side of the job he is very good at as I feel that his knowledge and respect within the wool industry, particularly the "harvesting" side is as good as you will find.

I cannot conclude without a special mention of Graeme Bell who is retiring from the board having been a member of the CRAIG committee that preceded the Association and was the inaugural chairman of our Association. Graeme's contribution has been key to where the Association currently stands. We also farewell Craig Adams (Merino Company) as brokers representative and welcome Don Urquhart from Wool Merchants Association, I am sure Don will have a positive contribution to the board which will also be positive for the Association.

In conclusion I must thank the other members of the board who have willingly given up their time when it could be spent doing things for themselves rather than for all involved wool classing, regardless of the thanks that may or may not be given. Thanks must also go to the partners of board members who have the phone tied up for complete evenings, especially when we have a board meeting by teleconference to ensure our work is carried out at a minimal cost to the organisation.

Thank you

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Together we are strong.