



NZWCA Chairmans Annual Report 2024

As I started to write this report, I looked back to my first report in 2013. In it I spoke of how poor wool prices were, and the strong meat prices. We have progressed from there to weaker wool prices and weaker meat prices, so the sheep industry isn't in a particularly good space at the moment especially considering the onslaught of regulation that has hit many businesses and probably farming in particular in respect of environmental pressures. Our people trying to make enough to live on in the wool harvesting industry are no doubt feeling probably more pressure to keep prices down, partly, or largely through reducing staff numbers so making it harder than ever to present the clips in the best possible way. I have to admit to now watching this from the sidelines as my health has prevented me being able to do even a part day in the shed but that is a frustration I have to live with.

We have had a good year with outreach by again having a stand at the Wanka Show, thanks to past NZWCA chairman Martin Patterson as wool convenor giving us some space and helping in other ways to facilitate this and to Marg Forde & Terence Mulcahy for being there to vigorously wave our flag. Having done it twice it now looks to becoming a fixture in the association calendar. We have picked up several new members, but it is the interaction with people that is the important part of such a venture.

There were also Industry days held in Whanganui and Marlborough. Thanks to Marg and Sonya for the Whanganui day and Ratapu for driving the Marlborough day, to Terence and Mitchell for going all the way up from Timaru and Karen Wilkins-Duff for travelling from Christchurch to help with the Marlborough day. We also made a presentation on behalf of the association to Bob Butt who hosted us at his wool store and has retired after a life of involvement in the wool industry as a merchant and great supporter of our association in the Marlborough/Nelson area.

We have continued to support wool training with the Grading "Q" course being completed in several locations and the NZ Certificate in Wool Technology and Classing course continuing, possibly due to the persistence and temerity of Laurie Boniface and Richard Gavigan. We acknowledge Laurie who is retiring at the end of June and handing the reins to Richard who we will continue to work with on these very important wool training fields.

We also need to acknowledge the contributions that have been made by Wool Impact and the WRONZ scholarships. Promoting these tertiary training opportunities is seen to be an important function of NZWCA. Having the formal training as the pathway to registration as a professional classer gives an insight to the "why" of what we do in the shed as classers and helps with keeping wool handlers on track as you can explain why you want things done, which helps the team understand that there is often a reason for asking for things to be done. Attracting and supporting new classers and graders is essential to the long-term survival of our organisation and it is good to note that the numbers working their way through the Cert Wool Tech course have grown from what used to be about 15 per year to currently 45. This shows there are good numbers wanting to get some formal wool education. With Te Pūkenga/Southern Institute of Technology being allowed to again offer "fees-free" for the course the financial barrier is going, hopefully. The support from Wool Impact and the wider industry (National Council of NZ Wool Interests Inc) for the Grading, or Q course is growing. It is hoped that this can grow to 6 – 8 courses around the country per year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those involved in the winding up the Massey Wool Association (led by Laurie Boniface) who have resolved to vest some of the remaining funds to NZWCA to hold in trust specifically to assist with the costs of running some of these Grading courses. The exact amount hasn't been settled yet but it will be enough to help some courses happen.

On a wider note, with the progress being made by Wool Source (the commercial branch of WRONZ) and Campaign for Wool, it is hoped demand for wool can make the prices lift and some viability return to the wool growing industry. This year we have been suggesting there is an advantage to tying together having to be a registered Grader or Classer to quality assurance programmes (NZ Farm Assurance Programme and Merino Company's ZQ program in NZ). We have been asking for wool growers to have to certify that their Classer or Grader is registered in wool clips where stencil is being put on the bales and the stencil's registration number going in the wool specifications. If this could happen it would be making headway with our aim of having "verified quality control" on the bulk, or at least a good percentage, of the national clip as this should eliminate the practice of the fraudulent use of either a made- up registration number or someone else's number. Doing this is wrong and dishonest, but we have not had any real enforcement powers since the demise of the Wool Board in 2004 and the creation of NZWCA.

We see that recognition of valid registration is important to "proof of quality control" to the harvesting operation. We are going to continue to try to get a checkbox on the paperwork for quality assurance programs that seem to be becoming more essential in the modern world. Just shoving wool in a bag and throwing it on a truck is no longer acceptable, although it seems some are having trouble getting the message.

Before I conclude I have to thank Marg for her work keeping things moving and the publicity happening and who shares the administration with Annette. Thank you, Annette who also does all the agendas, minutes and boring essential stuff, as well as makes sure the bills are paid and invoices sent out which keeps us in existence. Also, to the NZWCA Board members who have helped when needed and contributed wise thoughts to our discussions when holding meetings (nearly all our meetings are online and, in the evenings.)

A special thanks must also go to our patron Allan Fraser for his continued wise council and advice when we look like veering of track. I must also acknowledge my wife who has for some years now had to put up with my "Woolly Thinking" and interfered with evenings especially when we have a meeting or phone calls, that usually happen at mealtimes.

On that bright note I will close off and wish you all well for the next classing season and we continue to hope for a turnaround for the greatest fibre, which is unfortunately battling for survival. Thankyou,

Bill Dowle
Chairman NZWCA.
D1076