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Shearing shed upgrade paying dividends at 'Glenroy'

Producers: Peter and Dianne Pidgeon, 'Glenroy', Stonehenge

Enterprise type: 19-to-19.5-micron wool clip; cattle; goats

Land area and type: 13,350hectares (ha); pebbly gidgee, creek systems, flood-out and light Mitchell grass, flats.

Flock size: 2,500 Merinos



A chance conversation with a shearing shed contractor about how they would rate Peter and Diane Pidgeon's shearing shed was the catalyst for a renovation that is proving its worth in improved productivity and shearer satisfaction.

"We had a shearing contractor here one day and I asked him what score he would give our shed. He gave it a five out of 10 and I was a little bit aghast with that," Diane said.

"That got us thinking about what improvements we could make to the shed, due to the fact that there is a shortage of shearers and it's becoming harder and harder to attract staff."

The Pidgeon's researched options to improve their shearing shed at 'Glenroy', Stonehenge, including tapping into the expertise of Leading Sheep's Shearing Shed program and its tips on optimal shearing shed design.

The program saw shearing contractor Raelene Bowden visit the 'Glenroy' shearing shed and provide her expertise on where improvements could be made.

The Pidgeon's then researched options and strategies on YouTube and supplier websites, which they could incorporate into the shed without too much expense.

Expand and improve

The Pidgeon's undertook a range of improvements and modifications including changing the layout of the shed, extending pens, replacing flooring with prefabricated plastic flooring, where possible, installing new swing gates and incorporating a fourth shearing stand.

They did all the work themselves with the help of their sons, Heath and Brodie. The upgrades cost around \$4,500 in materials, which were sourced locally in Longreach, while the EVO stand cost approximately \$2,800.

"We extended our pens out onto the board by a metre because the drag for the shearers was very long and they didn't enjoy that much, especially when they were crutching," Diane said.

"We also removed all our wool bins from where they were located. This has really opened the shed up a lot more and I think it's made it much cooler - the breezes can flow through more readily.

"Now we have a different format in that we have portable wool bins, which we can move anywhere to accommodate what needs to happen."



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The Pidgeon's have also incorporated a fourth stand into the shed, which was one of the major objectives of completing the renovations.

"The new stand we put in is a Heiniger EVO stand, which all the shearers like because of the safety aspects of it. If the handpiece happens to lock up, it stops straight away," Peter said.

"Over the next couple of years, we'll change all our other stands over to EVO stands for safety reasons. Our other focus now is replacing more floorboards, focusing mainly on the wool room area."

The Pidgeon's also incorporated slide-through gates into the back pens to make it easier when penning up sheep. Having the slide through gates means the pens can hold more sheep, with no room required to swing open a gate, as was the case previously.



Big benefits

The Pidgeon's have shorn twice in the shearing shed since undertaking the upgrades 18 months ago, and say the changes are working brilliantly.

"It's certainly a lot more user-friendly and comfortable. The shearers appreciate what we've done and it's all working very well," Peter said.

"We're getting through an extra 200 sheep a day approximately now, so it's much more efficient.

"The shearers also seem to like the new swing gates. The front pens that shearers drag from have lightweight plywood timber gates which are hinged to allow easy access for the shearers. These gates stop sheep from running out of the pens as they are continuously closed unless being entered and exited by the shearer.

"Also, the new wool bins we made are very shiny, so it's not a dark atmosphere and really helps with the light of course."

Top tips

For any producers considering undertaking upgrades to their shearing shed or building a new shed, Peter and Diane have the following tips:

- The internet is a good place to start research, but shearing contractors and shearers are the best people to talk to.
- Find out what works well where, and how you can incorporate that into your shed.
- Find a shed that really works well and see if you can physically go and look at the shed and consider the parts you can add into your shed to improve it.
- Research supplier websites.
- Don't over-capitalise. It does not have to be flash and pretty to work, only spend what your business can afford!

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