

# The Maidens Monitor (Jan-Mar 2025)

The Making Maidens Weight producer demonstration site (PDS) is exploring ways to improve lamb marking rates from maiden ewes in central west Queensland. Conception rates of maidens in the region are generally good, however, converting these foetuses to lambs remains a challenge. Demonstration properties are exploring condition scoring, weighing, supplementation, scanning and udder assessment of ewes to improve their marking percentage. As part of this initiative, individual animal data are collected using electronic identification (eID) in large-scale, commercial operations to highlight how this data can contribute to improved decision making.

## How are we using WhatsApp?

The Making Maidens Weight WhatsApp chat continues to be a great way for producers to engage with the PDS. This quarter discussion explored Beaconsfield's ram testing results, lower than desired pregnancy scanning results at the demonstration sites, optimising the set up of technology at the yards and challenges with the management of wild dogs.

## Demonstration sites

Demonstration sites Beaconsfield and Dunblane relayed disappointment in their scanning results in early March. Despite efforts to supplement, dry seasonal conditions and poor-quality pasture over joining were thought to have contributed to these results. Rainfall analysis by extension officer Millie Sheales indicated that Barcaldine had experienced a season in the 11% percentile (89% of years, from 1950-present, received more rain than the 12 months to March 2025) and Ilfracombe experienced a season in the 23<sup>rd</sup> percentile for the same period. Late season rain at the end of March was welcome.

In Dunblane's mixed age ewes, the first round of pregnancy testing indicated less than 50% pregnant with second round scanning revealing <40% scanned-in-lamb. Wild dog impact and dry seasonal conditions impacted the Dunblane flock.

At Beaconsfield, the 12-month rolling rainfall was 280mm since February 2024. The long-term average annual rainfall at Beaconsfield is 427mm (BOM). Scanning results were lower than previous years, which reflected the liveweights (or body condition scores) which reflected the poor

pasture conditions at the hands of the season.



Image 1: Pregnancy scanning at Beaconsfield in February 2025 (Image: Peter Thomas).

Refer to Table 1 for Beaconsfield's pregnancy scanning results. Beaconsfield's pregnancy scanner commented that the results at Beaconsfield were around average for the season.

Tag/drop	Empty	Single	Multiple
<b>2023</b>	30%	65%	5%
<b>2022</b>	24%	61%	15%
<b>*Mixed age ewes</b>	44%	37%	44%

Table 1: Beaconsfield pregnancy scanning results. \*Yellow tag (2021 born) ewes are included within the mixed age mob.

It was noted that the yellow tag ewes, within the mixed age mob, that reared a lamb in 2024 were in lighter condition than those that didn't successfully rear a lamb.

Beaconsfield made the decision to rejoin ~1000 empty ewes for 4 weeks. These ewes will lamb out of season but the group is interested to observe the outcomes.

Analysis of pregnancy scanning data will be developed by Dr Gordon Refshauge (NSW DPIRD) and discussed at future events.

To find out more about what these results mean

in the context of previous joinings, you can:

- Read the April grower newsletter (contact David Counsell on 0427 073 606 or [davidjcounsell@bigpond.com](mailto:davidjcounsell@bigpond.com)).
- Hear more at the PDS field day: 14 August 2025, in Isisford.
- Hear more at the Leading Sheep Forum: 2 October 2025, in Longreach.

## Topics of discussion in the chat

### *Ram testing at Beaconsfield*

With the poor pasture conditions and high temperatures experienced across the region in November, Gordon thought a semen analysis for the rams may assist with understanding joining success. With the expertise of a veterinarian, Beaconsfield decided to test a proportion of the ram flock. 18 rams (20% of the ram team) successfully tested with 70% were found to be sound at that time.

Amidst the tough environment, these results were concluded to be sufficient (by the producer) when mitigated with a +2% joining percentage, the use of teasers and a joining period allowing for up to 3 mating cycles.



Image 2: Ram semen testing at Beaconsfield in late 2024 (Image: Peter Thomas).

Gordon explained that semen analysis results have 3 characteristics:

- 1) Swirl: the wave motion of the sperm, where the more intense and vigorous the swirl the higher the score from 0 (dead/motionless) to 5.
- 2) Density: the abundance of sperm in the sample, the higher the better.
- 3) Motility: the average motion of individual sperm in the sample. Motile sperm are more successful.

Beaconsfield has made the ram testing results available in the WhatsApp chat.

### *Wild dog management*

Dunblane reported sustained pressure from wild dogs and dingos over summer which, compounded by dry

seasonal conditions, was suspected of contributing to the low pregnancy scanning results.

The history of the use of electric fences in addition to exclusion fencing was explored. Several properties trialled electric fencing in previous droughts prior to exclusion fencing however the maintenance demands, the difficulty of identifying faults in a timely manner and managing the impact on non-target species limited its uptake.

### *Optimising technology in the yards*

In response to images of an eID reader setup at Dunblane, Prattley rep Paul Tindall provided feedback to improve the efficacy and longevity of the tech. Amongst comments about power supply, antenna location and how different settings will impact battery life of an eID reader, was some useful advice about looking after technology in the heat. Gear, such as readers, are designed to work in the heat but prolonged direct sunlight, sitting on a metal drum and western Queensland summer temperatures will affect the technology.



Image 3: Image of eID reader setup at Dunblane that sparked useful commentary about setting up the gear to maximise accuracy and looking after the electronic gear (Image: David Counsell).

Timely support from various reps (such as Prattley, Allflex, Elders etc.) has been an unforeseen benefit of this chat, broadening observer's understanding of technology, animal health and nutrition. The interactions between the demonstration sites and such companies in the WhatsApp chat demonstrates how producers can maximise the outcomes of implementing new products or technology in their business.

### *Leading Sheep Forum*

The PDS had prepared to present an update of results from the demonstration sites at the Leading Sheep Forum. Late season rainfall at the end of March resulted in postponement of the event. The rescheduled event will be held on 2 October 2025. Stay up to date with events by visiting the [Leading Sheep website](#).