

3 . From the beginning

There is no real beginning to the Angora/Mohair story. There is always some previous story which could be told but I have to start somewhere. So, it's the beginning of the current industry in around 1970.



Figure 1. and 2. Purebred Angoras introduced to Cudal in 1971

Getting started at Cudal. It seemed that there was something interesting there and in early 1971 I found myself accompanying my father to Moree to look at a herd of Angora goats. We purchased 3 four-month-old weaners (a buck and two does) for a total of \$1000 and brought them back to Cudal in the back of a station wagon. I chose the animals with the scant knowledge that

In 1970, while in my third year of Rural Science at the University of New England, my father asked me to look up Angora goats. This was a bit of a stretch in terms of Australian agriculture and all I could find was some vague references to Texas and South Africa. My father had heard of Angoras in Texas when travelling across America by Greyhound bus and on a study tour of commercial turkey breeding (which, as it happened, didn't go anywhere - but you never can tell about new ideas!)



textile fibre production was all about white fleece and animals which had white fibre over most of their bodies. (Some didn't.) The purchase was surprising, but it turned out that the 4-month-old animals were quite happy to ride home without that much restraint in the back of the car.

**Figure 3. Pure bred twins in 1973 - jackpot!
With Max Stapleton**

What was even more surprising was that the two does produced two doe kids in November 1971.



Figure 4. To expand we started at the bottom with 30 odd milk does and back crossed

In the mean time I had been convinced to take up a post graduate position in the Department of Animal Science at UNE while undertaking a Dip Ed for the NSW Government. It turned out that the NSW government did not really need more Agricultural graduates as High School teachers, so they agreed to me moving sideways into University teaching in 1973 while I began work on a PhD.

Of course, I chose to study Angora goats and mohair. This subject was new to Australian science and I wanted to know about the production characteristics of the breed. This meant working out what, and how, to measure mohair production and fibre quality, and importantly where the Angoras actually were, because there really weren't many in the country. I also wanted to know about the productivity, skin structures and seasonality of fibre growth.

Expanding interest

It turned out that my father and I weren't the only ones interested in Angoras and mohair. From about that time, or possibly a few years earlier, groups of people in Victoria and New South Wales

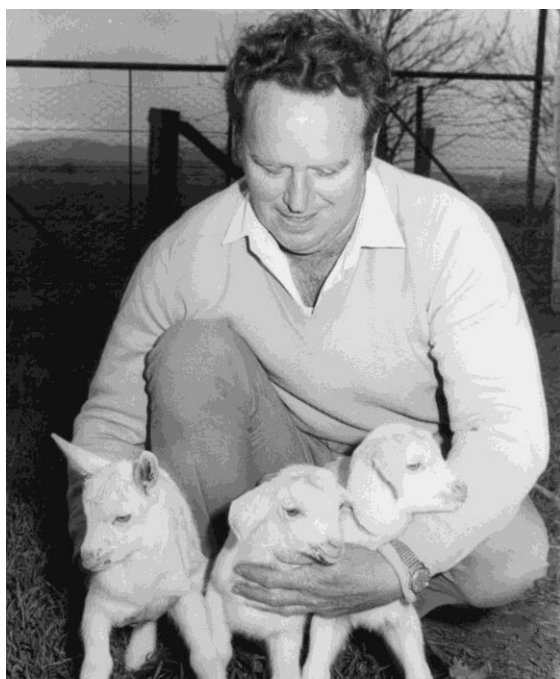


Figure 5. Milk does often have triplets, even when mated to Angora bucks. First crosses show pendulous ears, or not.

had come together to discuss and breed Angora goats. The story is much told of the Barton family and the **Banksia** flock (and, to a lesser extent, the **Woura** flock in north Queensland). These two flocks really were the remains of an earlier industry which had some prominence pre-1920. It may be of interest to readers to look through library copies of the NSW Agricultural Gazette from 1890 to 1920 to see how that story unfolded. Wilson, Kemp, Kidman and others dabbled in breeding Angoras.

In any event the **Goat Breed Society** (a national organisation of dairy goat breeders) had a Herd Book which contained an **appendix** of Angora animals. These were given a Herd Book number with an "A" suffix. The first entry was F C W & F J Barton's Banksia Caesar FCB 28, HBN 1A which was born in 1948 with Sire Comet, out of Banksia Snowdrop, by Mac.

No doubt there is quite a story of the early spread of interest particularly in Victoria and South Australia from that time. After Banksia, there was E Fowler's Nangarra and J A Naylor's Raywyn studs

followed by Mrs J Heap's Capella. There were several more studs registering Angoras in the 1960's including Ankara, Australis, Brac, Crescent Reach, Glenroy, Hawkesbury, Riversleigh, Sirrah, Wandarra, Wattle Bank and Woura. Big names like, Capella, Floreat, Manilla, Osory, Valpet, Wanda Mount, Wongala and a group in Western Australia including Andeena, Almaree, Boojerakine, Harfield, Holmfield, Mannagum, Mokami and Newhaven all started registering animals in the early 1970's among many other less significant studs like Cudal.

From the Foundation AMAA Herd Book begun in 1972 Airlie, Aroona, Bangalay, Barwidgee, Rostock, and Wilbertree seem to have early entries from the 1960's. Many of the animals in the AMAA register had previously been entered in the GBS Herd Book though there are some exceptions. Several studs had listings with "registered buck" and "herd doe" as parents (often with Flock of origin name). Whether this was because the early philosophy wished to use Merino ideas of unidentified individuals but blood line origin details, or that individual kidding was not recorded is hard to say. While such recording was not permitted under GBS and later, ABS rules, sooner or later pedigrees must start somewhere with unidentified animals.

All these studs were necessarily small with interests in breeding this exotic "farm" animal. But from a small beginning it soon became something of a tidal wave of what might be called a "bubble" though it wasn't seen as such. For at least 15 years animal values increased dramatically. Perhaps it wasn't a bubble but a "balloon" (or a bladder) which might be a more appropriate description. In any event there was no busting bubble or crash; just a slow deflation, albeit from quite a high level.

What saved the situation was that the fact that there actually was a market for the mohair and that it was possible to upgrade from milk goats. While breeders were obviously reticent to give up the soaring prices for animals, at least they could see a way to dilute the high value of purebreds by upgrading and supplying the market with mohair. Something worth working for.

In any event there was a spectacular rise in interest in Angoras and in animal prices. So much so that cross breeding to milk and feral goats became common. From the early 1970's to the mid 1980's average animal prices often reached well over \$1000 and some public sales averaged close to \$5000. Several animals were sold over the time for as much as \$42,000. Such prices were paid at public auctions commissioned by breed organisations in Melbourne (The Australasian) and Narrandera (and later the Sydney Blue Ribbon) and later other venues including Stanthorpe, Keith, Goulburn, Orange and Yass.

Organisations.

Now it got serious. The problem with "new" ideas is that there is a gap between those who are in "the know" and those that aren't. Those "in the know" want to gain power and exploit the idea so they only want the secret to be spread among the favoured. Promotion and wide spread expansion "needs to be controlled". Maybe this was why we got separate organisations in NSW and Victoria.

The first Angora organisation of the modern era was the **AMAA** (Angora Mohair Association of Australia –later "Australasia") which was formed in Victoria (with input from the Border Region of NSW/Queensland) in 1968 as an independent organisation with the objective of promoting and producing mohair. It disregarded the existing breed structure and chose to stand alone with new principles in some sort of copy of what was perceived as the Australian Wool industry.



*Council members photographed at a recent meeting.
From left sitting: Peter Cook, Pres. S.E. Region of S.A.; John Burr, Councillor; David Barratt, Pres. S. Aust. Region and Vice Pres. A.M.A.A.; Tom Hamsworth, Pres. A.M.A.A.; Justine Hall, Liaison Officer.
Standing: Fred Moylan, Past Pres. A.M.A.A.; Nance Gove-Jones, Pres. Sunraysia-Riverland Region; Margaret Piccoli, Councillor; Andrew Wenborn, Pres. Central Vic. Region; A. Newman, Pres. East Gippsland Region and Bruce Harding, Imm. Past Pres. A.M.A.A.*

Figure 6. One of the very few photos of the early AMAA Council. The Council was an enlarged group from the actual Board and sought to extend representation to State organisations. From the Mohair Australia (Journal) Volume 8 no 4 December 1978.

In NSW, the Angora breeders operated as club within the **GBS** (NSW Goat Breed Society) but eventually in 1974, negotiated an independent and national, **Angora Breed Society** (ABS) with its own Herd Book based on the GBS records. My father Max became the first President and later, the CEO. There was quite a strong Angora organisation in West Australia and this group opted to join the newly formed ABS. This followed considerable discussion and was probably assisted by the then GBS National President (R W Bryce) who was a Western Australian.

All this presupposed that a mohair industry could be developed from (almost) scratch with a combination of partisan experience of the wool industry and a limited knowledge of both the world mohair industry and the specific breed of goat – the Angora.

There was a good deal of competition between the two organisations. There was competition for members (and their buying power), and there was a good deal of “one-upmanship” to justify claims of being the first to do something, the best group to carry out work, to be a better service provider, to be the most authoritative organisation etc, etc. The competition became heated and there was a good deal of animosity. Of course, right was on “our” side. “We” were the real deal. In fact, many people belonged to both groups and registered animals in both Herd Books.

With hindsight it would seem there was a real philosophical difference between the two organisations when it came to governance. The AMAA was led by a number of people from the corporate world. They saw themselves as “directors” of a company. As such they had independent power to make decisions for the membership and instruct, or commission, others to do the work. On the other hand, the ABS was much more a grass roots organisation lead by a committee of representatives with limited independence to make big decisions. These people saw themselves as the workers whose job it was to get things done. Undoubtedly this difference between the two organisations made an attempt in 1975 to amalgamate into one organisation, untenable. The AMAA

board just could not understand why the ABS Board could not make the decision without reference to their members.

But, to be fair, the ABS saw its role as protecting the philosophy and authority gained from the GBS which the AMAA had disregarded when it set up an independent group in 1968. A quick compromise might well have been seen as a betrayal of the negotiated GBS/ABS separation.

There was another philosophical division. That, perhaps grandiosely described, as free market capitalism v's socialism. I believe the AMAA saw members as private commercial entities that should be free to operate in a commercial world without much restriction. The ABS saw their members as partners in an industry who needed to be guided in a cooperative way to achieve a common goal. This may seem too strong, but it goes some way to explain a number of conflicts and policy directions which developed. In particular, the development of animal inspections, registration, and mohair marketing. It should not be forgotten that this was the time of Whitlam, Fraser and Bond.

Figure 7. National Mohair Council formalised the Angora Breed Society with charge of the Angora register from the Goat Breed Society 1974



INAUGURAL NATIONAL MOHAIR COUNCIL MEETING ----- Sydney April, 1974.

Left to right - W.Charles, L.M. Stapleton, C.J. Mackay, E. Coad, C. Bradley, A. Harley, R.W. Bryce, Cpt L. Meyer, F. Harris, E. Bradley, A. Fletcher, J.A. Lloyd, Miss MacDonald, J. Harrap.

Why the interest in Angoras?

The origin of interest in Angoras is perhaps complex. A number of enthusiasts actually believed that they were working to provide an alternate industry for wool growers (the wool industry having serious problems at the time). No doubt the rise of the hippy movement and a general trend towards hobby farming and natural living also had an effect and many owners of small blocks round major cities wanted to grow something. Angoras were small (you could have a decent number on

any small holding), they responded well to humans, they were expensive, and rising in value and there was social activity around showing and breeding them. Just the thing for people getting away from city living. Perhaps one problem was that the people were also intelligent, resourceful, competitive and contrary. And, they wanted to do it from first principles; they wanted to do it **their way**.

“Be reasonable. Do it my way. If you don’t do it my way, I will set up something that does!”

The ABS was very strong on the **Herd Book** and animal **registrations**. The AMAA was initially more interested in whole herds and **Herd Returns** which seemed more in tune with an objective of larger scale mohair production. However, it soon became obvious that AMAA members thought that individual registrations were important also. In both organisations the high prices of stud stock seemed to demand paperwork. Perhaps one could ask why?

It seems that new breeders required reassurance that they were buying something with a history and a future. These new breeders had little credibility in stud breeding, and registration linked their efforts to the historic herd and had the paperwork to prove it. The organisations also wanted to provide a service for the ongoing recording of pedigrees based on historical records thus raising their standing and attractiveness.

The demand was so great that both organisations needed to provide a way to get more animals into the system. Obviously cross breeding to milk or other goats was a way and so “up grading” by backcrossing to “pure” Angora bucks was permitted though with different rules and recording methods. ABS used the term Appendix D (and up to A), allowing purebred status for the doe progeny of Appendix A animals. All female animals were individually recorded. The AMAA stuck to its Herd Recording model and only required crossbreds to be listed on an annual return. This was referred to as the G4 route with females progressing to G1 and then to full registration in the AMAA Herd Book. From the notes I published in “**The Australian Angora Goat and Industry**” in 1978, the following descriptions of the appendix animals is recounted. These were not rules but simply my attempt to describe what might be expected.

Appendix D (first cross to milk or feral doe)

No colour in the adult fleece. Showing some mohair, albeit short, on the body. Mohair of soft but usually poor structure and is kempy. Ears may be upright or pendulous.

Appendix C (second cross or 1st backcross)

No colour on adult fleece. Showing considerable mohair on the body and neck though neck and belly may not be covered in older animals. Mohair may still be kempy but staples have some structure and are of greater length.

Appendix B (third cross or 2nd backcross)

No colour in adult fleece. Well covered body with neck covered and mohair present to a degree on the belly and head (though the head cover may not be required). A backline may be present, and the breech cover could be short and hairy. Mohair should be of good length and structure with good density. The animal should not shed or the fleece cot in spring.

Appendix A (fourth cross or 3rd backcross)

No colour in the adult fleece. Well covered animal on the neck and belly with variable head cover. A degree of evenness in length and staple structure should be evident with little backline or coarse hair on the breech. Mohair should be of good character and style and

density (the staples should have a solid feel when compressed in the hand and not be tippy. Older animals should retain a reasonable fleece.

Herd Book animals.

These unfortunately show a large variation from the equivalent of Appendix B to superior quality to that described as Appendix A.

Then there was what became the contentious issue of **animal inspection**. The ABS required first crosses and Progeny of A's to be inspected. Appendix D's had to show some Angora features and have no pigmentation in the coat. "Progeny of A" had to be equivalent to traditional purebred registered Angora does. Inspectors were drawn from the longer-term members but there was considerable suspicion about their competence, especially if does were knocked back. Nevertheless, this added some additional control over the quality of animals entering the ABS Herd Book.

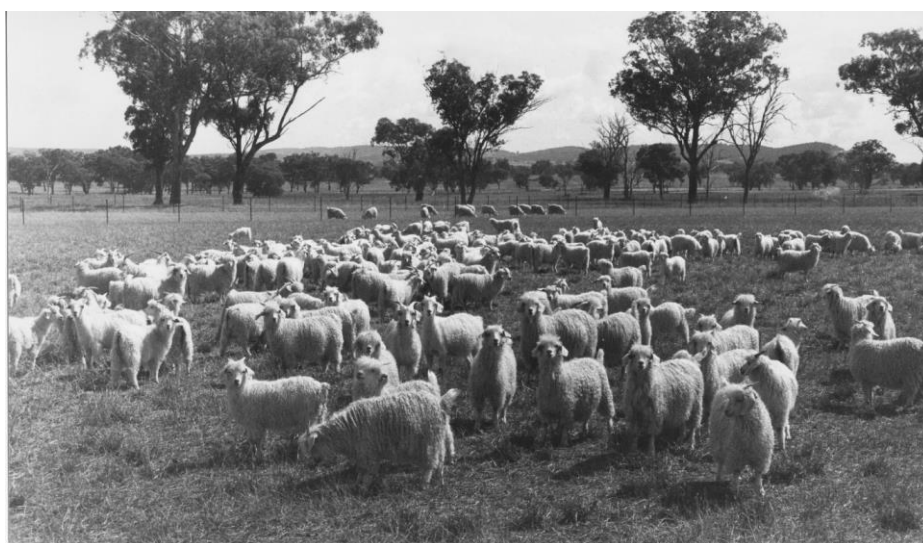


Figure 8. The Cudal flock grew quickly with both "purebred" and upgraded "Appendix" does

In 1977, I published these figures for the performance of the crosses at 18 months of age in the Angora Breed Bulletin #3 (1977). Two comments might now be made. Firstly, there is a lot of variation so only gross trends might be significant. Secondly, the "purebreds" were just as variable, or more so, and this probably reflects the breed where everything was bred for sale.

Table 1 Production characteristics of Australian Angora Goats – at 18 months of age pre-1977

Appendix/Cross	n	Clean fleece wt kg, SD	Staple Length cm, SD	Fibre Diam um, SD	Kemp %
D 1st	19	0.58 0.18	11.6 2.1	24.6 1.7	5.8
C 2nd	15	0.60 0.21	10.7 2.1	25.0 2.8	7.7
B 3rd	13	1.03 0.26	13.3 1.5	29.4 2.5	4.8
A 4th	15	0.98 0.20	14.3 2.3	27.2 1.4	3.4
PoA 5th	14	1.35 0.49	15.0 2.0	28.8 2.7	4.4
PB	74	1.29 0.45	14.0 1.9	30.9 4.1	3.9



Figure 9. Appendix animals characterised by bare heads and bellies, kemp, lighter fleeces and high reproductive rates. Crossbred animals had an accentuated spring shedding characteristic

The two Registration/Herd Book systems were run by the **NSW** and **Victorian Royal Agricultural Societies** using manual, paper-based recording methods with templates to facilitate printing. Demand for paperwork overtaxed the RAS secretariats and the ABS moved its Herd Book to the AIS Society office in Kiama and then to its own offices at Cudal, then to Orange. At that time, my father was the CEO and I remember driving our van to Kiama and lifting the draws of record cards from the AIS vault and taking them to Cudal.

Some years later the development of computing resulted in first, the ABS and then the AMAA, to undertake the huge job of capturing all the Herd Book data and taking the registration process digitally. Data cleaning was another huge job since human operator errors and data inconsistencies required resolution. ABRI at the University of New England did the ABS data and the RASV processed the AMAA data. Eventually all the data was held at ABRI which did the new entries. This was relatively expensive with errors requiring postal contact to resolve failures and omissions.

Eventually the ABS and AMAA amalgamated (in 1983) under the name of **Angora Mohair Breeders of Australia (AMBA)** and the office was moved to Canberra. This was not a simple procedure. Much negotiation was required to sort out an agreeable constitution and treatment of breed records. Since both organisations had incorporated under similar articles, the merger required agreement on just what breed registration rules and representation rules were to be adopted. The vast amount of registration applications for the 2500 members was something of a bottleneck. Registrations relied on previous applications and processing with step-wise resolution of problems. In Canberra, a staff of 14 was required and it still took a long time to sort out problems. The lesson there was that you had to keep up with the process otherwise it rapidly became tangled.

[The published book refers to landline access to ABRI. This happened later from the Canberra office.]



Figure 10 Coverage and fibre quality from poor to better- 1979

The show scene.

Angora goats have their own personalities and appearance. Not only were owners (breeders) keen on their animals but they wanted to show them off. Competition was seen as promotion to the public, so everyone wanted a broad ribbon and even a continuous run of show successes. Very quickly, showing some animals from your farm turned serious so you had to “fancy them up”. Wash them, strip out “dead” fibre, split locks which were too flat, supply extra feed, house them to keep the dew off and polish their horns etc, etc. What started out as a friendly display of favourite animals soon became a race for prettiness and show success.

Just what were show judges looking for? One year a breeder washed his animals “whiter than white” and won some ribbons. Next year everyone washed their animals with varying success. Ever since then, preparation techniques have been refined with housing, washing, oiling, stripping – whatever - anything to attract the judge’s attention.



Figure11. The author with parents, Max and Hazel Stapleton and Cudal Sindar in Sydney 1982



Figure 12. The author some weeks later with Cudal Sindar as Champion buck in Melbourne 1982

Impressing the judge is obviously important. Speaking of that, there was the issue of the handler’s role (or not). So mechanical handlers were introduced to compete with white coated handlers or even school student handlers to separate owners from the judging arena. The inference, true or otherwise, was that owner handlers could influence the judge either by superior handling, or by identifying the stud involved (not to mention particular tags styles and preparation techniques).



Figure 13. and 14. White coated handlers with Gielie Grobler and Helen Carruthers at the 1982 Australasian (RASV Showground). Checking the bellies was common then.

desirable characteristics. Perhaps the highest desired characteristic (given no other perceived deficiencies) in the animal are fine ringlets and it may well be that the show ring has been responsible for the transition from blocky and flat, webby staples, to ringlets with a twist in the lock which reverses at some point allowing a clear “pencil” staple over the whole body.



Superficially, judges seem to like big, fine, clear and even stapled animals with ringlets to the skin and a free-flowing fleece. Most judges were well aware of kemp, particularly on the back-line and freedom from pigmented skin on the ears and muzzle. Wide spaced, scimitar shaped horns are also favoured. The difficulty is that getting all these characteristics in one animal is almost impossible so, it's up to the judge to find the animals which have the most acceptable combination of

Then there are the **international judges**. Obviously, they would not know the competitors and should provide independent opinions on quality. Well yes; but only in terms of the animals in the country of origin. Nevertheless, the importing of judges has continued. Not such a bad idea really because of unique evaluations and a supposed superior interpretation of breed quality. But I still ask, just what concepts were we importing and with what validity? Given the world trade in mohair, it is not surprising that Australia saw the value in seeking international opinion of its own offering.

Having experienced some 18 years commentating in the Sydney Royal show ring with many judges, I can report that some judges require assistance in interpreting quality in terms of local issues, and some are totally confident in their own opinions. None, however, seem to be familiar with **fleece classing** requirements, objective or otherwise, when it comes to **fleece judging**. But they certainly have an opinion!

Fleece judging seems to be something even more of an inexact science. Perhaps this reflects the confusion and conflicts of philosophy when it comes to animal fibre textiles. The big picture relates to the visual techniques developed in Bradford vs the measurement technology approach of the French and Italians. Breeder/farmer (often the judge) interpretations of fleece quality which flow to the show ring are largely based on **visual approaches** and rely on concepts of evenness in both fineness and staple length.



Figure 15. Animal holders (yolks) used at regional and national shows.

Figure16. Early morning judging at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Steadfast use of white coated human handlers



Figure 17. Mr Daryl Bishop (Osory) and Pat Gill judging fleece at the Australasian (Seymour 2006)



Figure 18. GT Ferreira judging teams at the 2011 Royal Easter Show.

Strangely, absolute **staple length** is usually disregarded since longer fleeces supposedly demonstrate mohair quality in terms of **character** (crimp) and **style** (twist) which are seen as absolute expressions of quality. Maybe it is true that using fleece weight would encourage the mysterious issue of composite entries but there seems to be a constant disregard for productivity (which may also be true in animal judging). Not surprisingly, fleece competitions are largely made up of fleeces shorn from the previous year's show animals. Such fleeces have obviously been washed (on the animals) and are usually overlong, which in textile market terms is discounted in value (except for the demands from doll wig makers for small quantities of long staples).



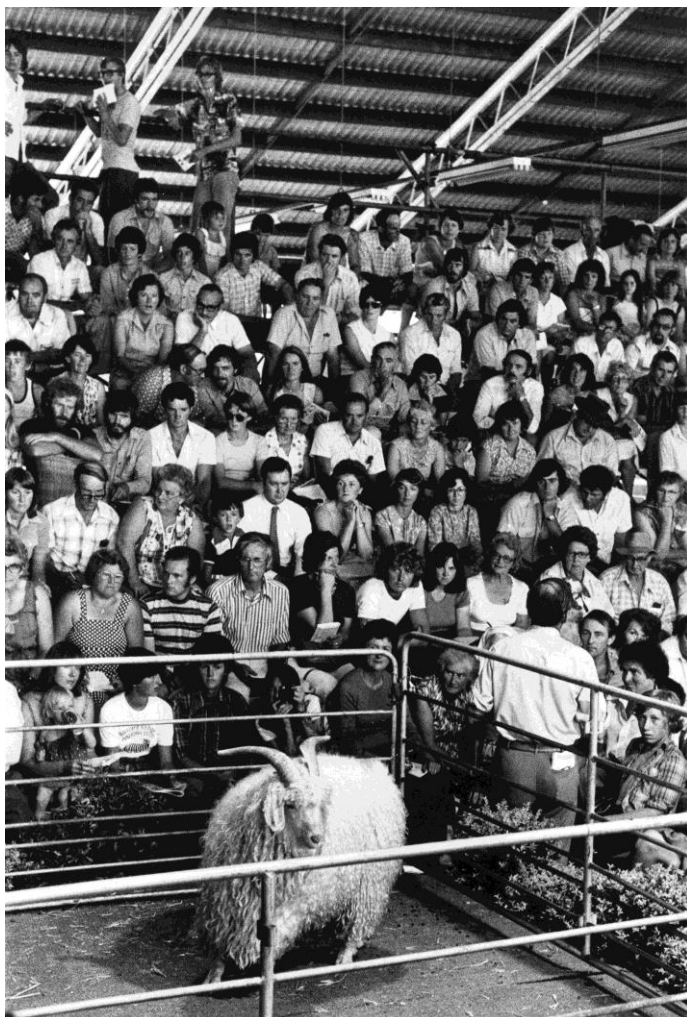
A packed gallery at the 13th Premier Angora sale in Melbourne in February.

The sales During the late 1970's and early 1980's animal sales attracted spectacular crowds. It was difficult to tell who were the buyers. While animals sold at high prices and at a remarkable speed, clearly the crowds were not all buyers.

Figure 19. The Sale crowd at the Melbourne Showground auction of Angoras



Figure 20. A sale at Narrandera on a very hot February.



Sales were organised and run by stock agents for a commission. Elders and Dalgety's and their subsidiary companies were prominent and there seemed no end to the market for stud Angoras. One agent told me **"It was ridiculous – on Sunday afternoon we had \$2m in the boot of the car, mostly in cash, and we did not know what to do with it."**

Figure 21. This photo appears in the Angora Breed Bulletin issue 10, March 1979 with the caption stating it is Glenroy Tamir Peter which sold for \$18,550 to Tam-O-Shanta, Dural, NSW. Presumably at the Melbourne Show Ground but maybe RAS Sydney.



Figure 22. Even at this on- property sale at Cudal Mohair Stud in the "Mohairium" the crowds were amazing. And this was in the early 1990's

Capital development.

Efforts of the then AMBA Board including the offering of 10-year memberships enabled the purchase of an office in Melbourne and move from Canberra. Ken Slatter and Geoff Murray-Prior worked hard to achieve this development and reduce the costly rental of office space. Even in Canberra, AMBA had a dedicated computer link to ABRI in Armidale to allow uploading of registration applications and this was continued from Melbourne.

Whether because of maturity or flagging membership, the strain of a full-time administration led to another move - to ABRI at Armidale and the leasing of the office space in Melbourne. But again, the expense of a hired commercial staff (and a wish to place an office in a main street accessible to members) then led to another move, this time to Narrandera and shop front premises. Registrations were still done from the office on a landline to Armidale but the expense of this service and the development of desk-top computing and the internet resulted in the development (in 2005) of a server-based, on-line system which was considerably cheaper than the ABRI system and allowed full breeder data entry.

Of significance was the recreation of the logic processes (by Steve Roots and myself and a programmer) which vetted entries and allowed individual breeders to make entries and edits of the computer Herd Book record. Instantaneous registrations and transfers, as well as membership updates, were a feature and sometime later, a number of performance recording and animal treatment modules were added. The system was attached to the web site (www.mohair.org.au).

Perhaps it could be noted that communications have always been difficult. Despite incredible developments in desk top publishing and web site availability, there still seems to be great reticence to publish current material by the organisation and, as well, an apparent lack of interest in reading either newsletters or web site articles.

Relevance of the Herd Book

When prices for animals were high and there was considerable crossbreeding to increase numbers (and total flock value) the **Herd book** offered an independent record of breeding. Of course, breeders had to enter animals with other details but, once there, the story was set. Cost was an issue at the time but now with the on-line system, most of the work is done by the breeder and costs are minimal. With very little crossbreeding except for the recent interest in weaving quality animals, it could be argued that Herd Book recording is now somewhat irrelevant.

Registration is still required by Royal Agricultural Societies as a condition of show entry but this qualification has largely been dropped for regional and local shows. There is also a requirement from many buck buyers that **bucks** should be registered and have a **traceable pedigree**. As Registrar, I would argue that a published registration history is a valuable addition to any stud's credibility. Routine registration of kids provides, over time, a history and an indication of the direction of breeding. As a geneticist on the other hand, I would generally argue that it is the animal's own **performance** which is most important. To that end, I have worked to include a **performance recording** module in the Herd Book system. This provides a way of ranking animals from particular annual drops and different management groups. This can be used to formalise and record the overall performance of various drops and individuals.

Like all data base systems, the trick is to keep up to date. It is not about data entry, it's about using the speed and capacity of computing to assist decision making.

Restructures

There has been a succession of industry restructures. These were mostly driven by the various Boards adapting to developments in the industry. **AMAA** and **ABS** merged to form **AMBA** based on a single Herd Book. AMBA became **Mohair Australia** to expand the commercial production side and improve focus. However, the gradual decline in membership has been an ongoing problem. There were multiple shifts in address designed to make the organisation more efficient and more prominent. Eventually it became apparent that the Board could see the problem but could not come to grips with what could be done to reverse the declining trend. It seemed that the decline was unstoppable since the membership included a large number of retirees "having fun" with some recreational agriculture but still getting older and becoming unable to continue their activities. There were also a number of energetic investors who chased the high prices with the advantage of animals breeding and with increasing numbers (to sell). Ultimately these people became aware of the trends and made the decision to cash in and leave the industry. There remained a smaller group of committed fanciers, serious breeders and real mohair producers who stuck with the industry through the transition from boom in breeding stock to mohair production at commercial prices. But their interests were largely small-scale and predominantly involved show activity.

The organisation (now named **Mohair Australia Ltd**) was still structured with a National Board and Division/Region components. Accounting traditionally separated funds and it became obvious that the cost of the National component had depleted that portion of the funds. There was little option but to sell the Melbourne asset and invest the funds. Much later, with the fall in interest rates, this led to the purchase of a substantial share portfolio which thus established a secure funding source.

Things came to a head in 2008

The events surrounding the 2008 AGM raises many issues relating to Board actions and attempts to change administration. The apparent caucusing of the Board with a sub-group discussing changes and excluding some members is one thing, and this raised arguments about Board confidentiality. Board unity is a fundamental of Company structure and caucusing is inappropriate!

Failure to address the financial drain of a full-time administration and shop-front service led to a challenge to the Board at the Annual General Meeting. Undoubtedly the Mohair Australia office was privy to proxies and on the morning of the AGM, the staff resigned and deleted material from the email files and “by mistake”, a lot more.

There were two groups of protagonists. Those nominating for election to the Board and those members moving motions of no confidence and dismissal. This last group included myself. The Presidents report was turned down and most of the Board resigned rather than face dismissal. One Board member who remained was dismissed but the President had ruled that, on solicitor’s advice, only the nominated Board members could replace resigned members. The ability of an AGM with due notice to dismiss Board members and elect replacements remains largely untested.

In any event there were sufficient Board members nominated for election before the meeting which allowed an operational Board and with several members nominated as advisors, a working Board was established. It was only after the meeting when the new Board examined the office records did it become apparent that the old Board (plus some associates) had moved to split the company and form a “Growers Association Ltd” apparently with the intent of gaining wider representation and so control of the Statutory Levy Funds in an attempt to fund the expansion of the production of mohair from commercial growers. This may have worked in theory but there were many assumptions.

This effort was clearly a breach of company standards which requires company directors to act in the best interest of the (current) shareholders or members. It could be suggested that such a split in roles could have been legitimate had the move been foreshadowed for discussions and motions presented to the AGM. This obviously was not done.

The upshot of all this was that the new Boards was left to close the office and move the files and equipment to the premises of the newly elected President who volunteered to carry on the administration of Mohair Australia Ltd. This finally resolved the administration cost issue.

While this action removed the large drain on funds, it relied on a huge voluntary effort and had related consequences for the succession process. Perhaps a saving grace has been the very much reduced membership (to a little over 100 as opposed to some 2500 members in the late 1980’s) making single handed administration workable.

International relations

Mohair production was dominated by South Africa and the US during the 1970 and 1980’s but processing was split between the UK and France with a number of other countries involved certainly in down-stream fabric construction. The **International Mohair Association** (IMA) was a significant high-level organisation which had, as its leading roles, the promotion of mohair and the use of the **mohair symbol**. In some ways, the mohair symbol was a similar logo to **the pure wool symbol** and both were used to guarantee the wool/mohair content of garments.

Meetings of the IMA were held regularly in various countries round the world. The organisation relied on levies paid by each member country and by trade licenced logo users. Support for, and the activities of, the IMA waned, and the organisation was wound up in 1996.

In more recent years Mohair South Africa has taken the leadership role the with international “expos” in 1999 and 2009. Australian contingents attended both as well as the International Goat conference in Pretoria in 2004.

Imports to Australia and international politics changed the game in the 1980's.

In 1983, AQIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service) signalled a change in policy to allow importations of sheep and goats from the USA. Seventeen syndicates purchased Texan Angoras and 74 live animals were eventually landed in Australia in 1984 (along with a couple of Suffolk sheep and a Ramboulet ram). More of this incredible story later in Chapter 7.

A second event probably had just as much impact on the Australian industry. The collapse of the USSR and its government-controlled textile industry in 1988, had dire consequences for Australian wool and mohair as the markets failed and the world found itself burdened with a vast oversupply of raw textile fibre. It was not until 1994 that mohair markets regained some credibility. More of this in Chapter 6.

At the same time as the Texan imports, several importations of African Angoras in the form of frozen embryos also occurred. The first effort from Zimbabwe was supposed to form the basis of a public company float, but this failed, and the embryos were sold to New Zealand. The second importation was from South Africa, which had relented on its ban on exports and included a consignment of **Improved Boer Goats**, which, arguably, became the next “big thing” for fanciers and investors.

The Texan animals were released from quarantine in early 1992 and African animals followed the next year. Many syndicates found the cost of the Texan imports very hard to sustain. Nevertheless, nearly all the Angora does in the country were mated to Texan bucks or had access to Texan buck semen. The next few years followed a similar process with African sires. This had a profound effect on the Angora population. Apart from several small flocks of **Heritage Angoras**, the entire Angora population in Australia now originates from the imported animals released in the 1990s. More about the production characteristics of these “strains” later.

There were later importations of African embryos and one additional but small importation from Texas. The Texan embryos failed but a small amount of viable semen from two Texan bucks has contributed to the otherwise, largely African based Australian national flock.

What then?

In 1992, there was the release of the progeny of the Texan imports and this should have been a great stimulus to Angora breeding. Following this was the release of the African Angoras. This completed the collection of new genetic material and gave breeders an unprecedented opportunity to combine superior Angoras from both the major Angora populations. Unfortunately, the 1990's also saw a succession of severe droughts in Australia.

Instead of elation, there was a sense of futility. Why had we spent all that money to import Angoras only to find almost no market for mohair and the need to spend more money to get animals with falling value through ridiculously long and wearing period of droughts.

It was a time for the stoic to grit the teeth and just keep going!

Eventually the mohair market recovered (even to a spectacular level in 2001) and the seasons became more rewarding. In many ways, the damage had been done but perhaps it could be argued that animal prices were down making a reliance on fibre production more important. However, falling animal prices and weak mohair prices did not convince many that it was worth continuing. The years 1999, 2004 and 2009 saw significant events in South Africa with the Beaufort West expo, the International Goat Conference in Pretoria and the more spectacular **expo** in Graaff Reinet. On each occasion Australians represented the industry. The restructure of 2008 has already been discussed but in 2009, National Mohair Pool P/L was wound up (because of falling volumes) leaving

AMMO as the only broker of mohair in Australia. At the youth /schools **Junior Judging** competitions were centred on the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Similar events followed in other capital cities and a national finals competition was developed based at the Royal Adelaide Show.

A very significant development in the mohair industry was the development of the **weaving mohair** concept fostered by G T Ferreira. Several workshops saw the introduction of **animal inspections** and



Figure 23. Mohair Australia president Steve Roots manning the expo stand, Graaff Reinet 2009

the **EGT** (every goat tested) classing of fleeces from approved (pink tagged) animals.

This was an attempt to rethink the quality and marketing of mohair and the way the industry is structured. **Weaving mohair** under the brand **Pure Australian Mohair** (PAM) has shown significant increased returns but the concept of unifying the membership under **small** and **large grower** groups has been less successful



Figure 24. The PAM logo first proposed in 2016 with the concept developed by GT Ferreira as part of the Weaving Mohair initiative but with possible extension to general promotion of Australian's Mohair image

It has been something of a roller coaster ride but clearly the hoped-for transition from fad/hobbyist obsession to primary industry has not been achieved in any great fashion. The Australian story of decline in animal numbers is not unique. Angora numbers in Texas and South Africa have followed a similar decline and this has had consequences for the market. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Ancillary support organisations.

An industry is just not made up of farmers. Of immediate need is a marketing structure and some form of organised animal market. **Communications** via news-letter and now, web-site to assist farmers to find out about events and trends were early initiatives and, very early on, it was recognised that there was a need for **research**.

Perhaps the biggest issue for Angora farmers was what to do with old or cull stock. A number of prominent Angora breeders expressed reservation about the development of a mohair industry without an adequate method of disposing of excess stock. A **meat processing** system was required, not for prime stock, but for cull animals. For some time, this was just not available, and farmers resorted to shooting old animals to make room for younger, more productive and more valuable stock.

Fortunately, in the late 1980's a new **meat industry** evolved. It was recognised that in dryer areas feral goats were present and available for capture and slaughter. The claim was that goats were the most desired animal for meat across the world. Well, yes, "as long as goats were cheaper than sheep, they are - just round them up and process them". So, began a major trading system with tonnes of goat meat traded to the USA, the Caribbean and to the middle east and Asia. While Angoras were not especially liked, probably because of fibre contamination of meat works, there was a market, and this largely solved the problem of cull stock.

Research was also seen as a necessary part of a new industry. The **Mohair Research Foundation** was set up in the early 1980s and representations to the federal government for a **statutory levy** on mohair sales were successful in about 1985. A 1.5% levy was imposed on goat fibre (**mohair** and **cashmere**) sales and was collected by brokers and paid to **RIRDC** (the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation) through the commonwealth Dept. of Primary Industry (later the Department of Agriculture Forests and Fisheries (DAFF). This levy was collected primarily for Research and while RIRDC included "Development", the levy was excluded from what some felt necessary as Promotion. An attempt to encourage a voluntary levy donation of 2% for promotion has proved unsuccessful.

RIRDC organised a **Rare Natural Fibre Advisory Committee** which vetted research proposals and requests for research funding and contracted work as thought appropriate. At first mohair and cashmere industries nominated members for the committee but later, the committee positions were filled by individuals invited by the CEO. Interestingly, board members of industry bodies were excluded because of perceived entrepreneurial cross interest. Of course, the decline in mohair production has been followed by a decline in levy receipts and research activity.

Levy funds have been spent on industry organisation, textile processing problems, genetic quality, diversity studies and mohair quality/marketing issues. Such work received additional matching funding from general funds administered by RIRDC.

Perhaps the first major appointment by RIRDC was of J E McIntosh in 1993 as a Market Development Officer. This was a 2-year appointment and covered both mohair and cashmere fibres. Unfortunately, the appointment coincided with a world economic slow-down and the collapse



Figure 25. Kids from the RIRDC funded Sire Reference Trial, Hamilton Vic 2004

Figure 26. Sire Reference Trial researchers, Rowena Doyle and Mark Ferguson



Figure 27. Dr Bruce McGregor with Trial wethers at Werribee 2007



Figure 28. Dr Bruce explaining research findings

Figure 29. Western Wool Ltd Tec with Shayne Cunningham (National Mohair Pool) measuring whole fleece micron using a SIROSCAN machine. RIRDC funded Every Goat Tested and High Specification Marketing of mohair projects



Figure 30. Micro core taken through the whole fleece was solvent scoured before passing through the laser chamber in solvent solution for diffraction measurement

of wool and mohair markets following the withdrawal of the USSR from the raw fibre market. The “McIntosh Report” made a number of recommendations resulting in the refocussing of **AMBA** into **Mohair Australia Ltd** in 1995. This followed several public symposia to establish the industry’s objectives.

Again, unfortunately, the recommendations of the report focused on increased production (following a period of 6 years of almost unsellable fibre), diversifying processing and the fostering of **local processing** to cushion the industry from international trading trends. This was, at a time when Australian textile processing companies were severely challenged. Many of the initiatives attempted by McIntosh and RIRDC coincided in either, a “one chance effort” or one, which, when confronting a problem, resulted in the financial collapse of an operation.

The report itself seemed full of optimistic suggestions for entering what was already happening in the world industry. There appeared to be a fine line between a consultant’s recommendations and what was already being implemented by commercial interests. If the Mohair and Cashmere industries had been single manufacturing companies, the recommendations might have been more appropriate and successful. But when made to a diverse group of growers led by volunteer executives, dramatic actions were not really a possibility.

Perhaps it is worth discussing the role of industry **consultants**. It would seem that the appointment of consultants in a commercial environment might result in an “eloquent statement of the obvious” or a recounting of what is already happening, albeit selectively or in secretive environments. However, consultants in this situation do have a role in focussing the participants’ ideas. The question is how well participants accept the outcomes? There is a difference between the process and the outcome and recommendations. The devil is in the detail!

For some years RIRDC worked to establish an association to represent emerging rural industries (**New Rural Industries of Australia** or **NRIA**). This started with great vigour but failed to capture genuine support, probably because of the lack of common interest and the small scale of many projects.

In late 2017 RIRDC changed its name to **AgriFutures Australia** in its new offices in Wagga Wagga. The corporation has changed its focus to Development and linking new industries to large corporate funding. Just where the **Goat Fibre Levy** administration fits is still being considered.

Farmer organisations. State Farmer Organisations or Associations have industry committees which relate to the **National Farmer’s Association** (NFF) commodity councils. These councils have a product base, but goats have at least four vastly different products, markets and requirements for meat, fibre and milk. The **Goat Industry Council of Australia (GICA)** began with domination by the mohair industry but was eventually overtaken by the huge interest from the “**Rangeland**” goat meat industry. This industry aligns the council with the much larger grower organisation; **Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)** and its associate organisation, **Livestock Production Assurance (LPA)**. This powerful combination is focused on meat and the **National Livestock Identification System (NLIS)**. Chemical use, tagging compliance and transport all impinge on the mohair industry which has little say in policy matters. It is of significance that the Rangeland goats were granted exemption from most of the requirements placed on farmed goats.

To 2017

There is a problem with doing a “current situation” comment. Time keeps moving on so you can’t make a final statement. But, at the end of my career in Angoras maybe I can make a few comments.

In this chapter I have referred to disharmony and wilful radical activity. Some have quipped that “blood on the floor” was standard for Angora industry meetings. I am not sure that this is any different from any other breed organisation, but it certainly provides interest. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates to outsiders that there is uncertainty in the industry. Not a good thing for newcomers to experience.

In 2017, we see an industry in some difficulty. Production has dropped to dangerous, even critical, levels for sustainability. Attempts to change the structure to demonstrate greater unity (the proposed **APMC or Australian Pure Mohair Company**) with small growers, large growers and marketers in the form of AMMO, seem to have stalled because small growers have been dominated mainly by a group interested in the Junior Judging scene, and large growers simply not being interested. This has resulted in a new suggestion that Mohair Australia and AMMO should merge, or be covered by a larger company. While this seems sensible in a contracted industry, and has the potential to make better use of the limited people and resources available to the industry (and allow the solution to the Mohair Australia succession situation), bringing it about may be a difficult job. Over the years there have been four constitutions (articles) and another, but unsuccessful attempt at creating a new model. From experience, “the devil is in the detail” when it comes to writing down a new structure. So, it remains to be seen if it can be achieved.

Undoubtedly the move to sell grower’s mohair directly in South Africa is a serious challenge. Such efforts reduce the effectiveness of a local market and threaten a basic part of the industry. It remains to be seen if shipments and sales can be maintained but it is disappointing to see this approach develop with such efforts undermining the local industry.

Nothing is ever complete, either in industry structure or methods of marketing. The trick is to make the most of every situation and allow structures and industries to move on. I would urge everyone to take a positive attitude to changes and think twice about criticising efforts to lead the industry. Self-interest is obviously a factor, but people should try to see the big picture and help those trying to bring about a progressive and sustainable industry.

Four bits of Company Law

Finally, there are 4 pieces of Company Law which I have learned over the years, sometimes to my cost.

1. Board discussions are binding on all Board Members and discussions are confidential. If you don’t like the decision you can resign, otherwise don’t dissent outside the Board meeting. Board discussions must be frank without fear that opinions may be leaked outside the Board.
2. Board Members must act in the best interest of the Company.
3. Companies must not continue to trade if the company is insolvent (Not that Mohair Australia ever was).
4. Boards are not bound by decisions of AGM’s or special general meetings. However, changes to Articles given due notice and voted with the required majority are binding, unless proved illegal. Perhaps there is a need for a clause covering dismissal and replacement of Board members.

With all associations, there is a danger of pressure from both **passionate advocates** and **bush lawyers**. A steady hand from Chairpersons and the co-operations from all members when it comes to decisions is an essential part of any mature business.