



# Australian Stud Merino Definition and Standards

A GUIDE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF STUD MERINO BREEDERS LIMITED



*Image courtesy Australian Wool Innovation*

## Introduction

As the peak body for Stud Merino Breeders in Australia, the Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders (AASMB) has a major charter to foster unity and advance the breeding of superior stud Australian Merinos. Many parts of the charter are a useful **guide** to commercial Merino breeding operations Australia wide and around the world.

To this effect, the AASMB is providing a definition and descriptive standards that **broadly** encompasses the aspirations of all Stud Merino Breeders in Australia and overseas.

Standards allow the Australian Merino to be differentiated from other breeds of sheep, and provide a system of eligibility for classification as an Australian Merino.

**AASMB's Vision** – That the Australian Merino is to be the most profitable, productive and progressive sheep breed in the world.

**AASMB's Mission** - To act as the peak body for Merino breeders in Australia through advocacy, promotion, breed standards and flock registry (ie AASMB Flock Book)

## Definition

**Australian Merinos** are a dual-purpose sheep, capable of producing both high quality wool and high quality meat. There are both horned and polled varieties. It is an ovine species which has been developed in Australia, over some 220 years from many types of merinos and other breeds of sheep. In modern times the Australian Merino has truly cemented itself as a pure breed and Australia is the leading nation worldwide in breeding superior Merino sheep and Merino genetics.

**Australian Stud Merinos** are those sheep retained for 1) breeding purposes and 2) breeding rams for on property use and for sale. Australian Stud Merinos are those eligible for registration in the AASMB Flock Book.

**NB: Stud Flock Registration** - If planning to register a stud flock, please also refer to the AASMB Flock Book Rules for further information and requirements. For assistance, contact the state Stud Merino Breeders Association in the state the flock will be run/registered.

## Standards

These standards are presented as:

- A guide for people wishing to register an Australian Stud Merino flock and for commercial breeders commencing a Merino flock.
- An aid for Stud Merino Inspectors for registration purposes
- A way to differentiate the Australian Merino from other breeds of sheep.
- A guide for overseas enquiries wishing to commence their own Merino Flock and/or Stud

As a guide to the Australian Stud Merino Standards, the following criteria are recommended:

### 1. Conformation and Structure

It is recommended that merino sheep are bred to suit the environment where they are to be run, so that they can achieve maximum profitability with good conformation and functionality i.e. sheep are able to walk, eat, convert feed into fibre and meat, be fertile, produce a good fleece of wool and be healthy.

### 2. The Head & Neck

- An **alert head** with **good neck extension**.
- **Muzzle** - should be long, broad and soft to touch with large fully open nostrils.
- **Face** - should be covered with short creamy coloured hair with the absence of frosty kempy fibres. It should be free from wool and soft.
- **Jaw** - should be strong and deep, with teeth squarely meeting a wide dental pad.
- **Ears** - should have good thickness, length and be soft to touch.
- **Head** - should have adequate wool coverage over the poll with good width between the ears.
- **Eyelids** - turned in eyelids are to be avoided.
- **Eyes** - It is preferred that there is very little or no tan or dark pigmentation around the eyes, ears and nose.

### 3. Horns (Merino and Poll Merino)

- **Merino Rams** - should carry a strong set of horns with gentle spiral curvature and good clearance from the face and jaw with no dark streaks.
- **Merino Ewes** - should have small horn knobs or an upward bump in the skull (NB: this is a genetic standard for horned Merinos but not a requirement for shows or flock registration. No horn knobs/scurs shows the Poll gene is present)
- **Poll Rams** - ideally should have no scurs or scurs that are less than 25mm width at the base and should be dry and free from yolk. DNA Testing is now available for the double poll gene or horn factors.
- **Poll Ewes** – ideally should have a true cavity in the skull with no horn buttons allowed.

### 4. The Body

- **Chest** - should be deep and broad. The back should be straight with good width and depth, supporting well sprung ribs and loins.
- **Shoulders** - should be rounded.
- **Hindquarters** - should be rounded on top and broad. The twist should be full and deep.
- **Meat Capabilities** - the above points assist good meat capabilities.
- **Skin** - should be loose and soft, excessive body wrinkle is not desirable.

### 5. Legs & Feet

- **Hocks** - should be as wide as the hips and straight when viewed from behind.
- **Front legs** - should be set wide apart depicting a roomy chest.
- **Pasterns** - both front and rear should be strong and upright.
- **Hooves** - should be of good uniform shape and alignment. They should be cream in colour and preferably without black or brown colouring or streaks.

## 6. Wool Covering

This is a matter of choice, depending on the trueness of type of the different basic strains (Fine, Medium or Strong) plus the end use (ie wool only or wool plus meat) Regardless, the covering should be sufficient to support the notion that the Australian Merino is essentially a wool breed. Extreme stripping of wool from the head, belly and legs should be avoided.

## 7. Wool Quality

In essence, it is the wool features of the Merino that sets it apart from other breeds. In particular, the Australian Merino is unique in possessing a luxuriant skin producing an exceptional number of fibres per square centimeter.

- **Density** – fibres per square centimeter should be dense enough to attain good fleece weights and aid protection from rain and dust.
- **Length** – staple length should be consistent with the type or strain of Merino selected. Typically, annual growths of over 100mm for ‘strong wool Merinos’ and over 75mm for ‘fine wool Merinos’ should be aimed for. Short wools are not characteristic of the Australian Merino and are therefore unacceptable.
- **Character** – well defined crimped wool is essential for all types of Australian Merinos. Aim for regular and pronounced crimp throughout the fleece.
- **Softness** – wool should be soft to handle with a good amount of nourishment and not dry or harsh to touch.
- **Colour** – wool of natural white brightness or bloom free of any foreign color pigmentation.
- **Evenness** – all of the above fleece attributes should be evenly distributed over the entire body as much as possible.
- **Condition** – wool fibres should be well nourished with enough lanolin to prevent drying of wool and dust penetration, but not too over-nourished which may cause problems with moisture and colouration.

## 8. Fleece peculiarities

Sheep that exhibit shedding of wool, or grow hair in the fleece or have any coloured wool other than white cannot qualify as an Australian Stud Merino.

## 9. Breeding attributes

All Stud Merino Sheep, whether horned or polled, should be structurally sound and be capable of breeding. The following points are recommended:

- **Rams’ testicles and scrotum** – rams must have two testicles that are well formed of equal size, firm and pliable with no abnormalities in the cord or testicle. The scrotum should allow for correct carriage for cooling and movement. The minimum circumference for an adult ram is recommended at no less than 34cm. It is not desirable for the scrotum to be too close or touching the ground.
- **Ewes’ teats and udder** - teats should be well formed and of a good size. They should not be inverted or too large so that their lamb is unable to latch on to drink. Their udder should be of good even size with no lumps, abnormalities or too woolly.

## 10. Additional Information

- **References** - AASMB acknowledge the following documents are an excellent resource with most traits preferred at a score 1, however it should be noted that not all traits at score 1 are essential or suitable for all Merino breeders across all the different regions sheep are run. Breeders’ individual requirements vary significantly.

- Visual Classing Merino Sheep – Australian Wool Innovation

<https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/about-awi/media-resources/publications/visual-classing-merino-sheep/visual-classing-merino-sheep.pdf>

- Visual Sheep Scores (Version 2, 2013) - Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Meat & Livestock Australia Limited

[https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/market-intelligence/woolcheque/characteristics/2013\\_visual\\_sheep\\_scores\\_commercial\\_awi\\_mla.pdf](https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/market-intelligence/woolcheque/characteristics/2013_visual_sheep_scores_commercial_awi_mla.pdf)

- **Merino Diagram**

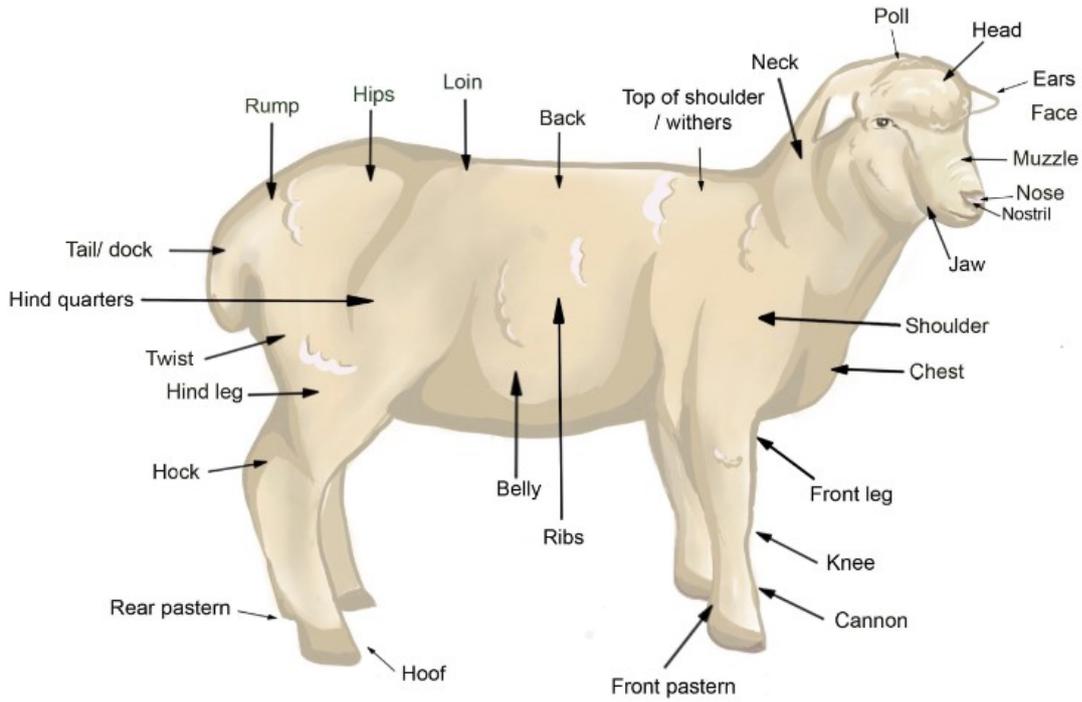


Diagram courtesy Kelsey Pool, March 2020

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