WALRC

WA Livestock Research Council

Annual Report

2025 - 2026







walrc.com.au

ABOUT WALRC

The West Australian Livestock Research Council (WALRC) is a structure that was initiated by MLA to improve consultation with levy payers and industry stakeholders for the WA agricultural region and southern rangelands. WALRC considers and prioritises the R&D needs of the region, feeding this information into the national MLA investment priorities. WALRC is a not-for-profit incorporated Association funded primarily by levies via MLA with operations augmented through membership funds from Tier 1 members.

WALRC'S Charter

1. Provide a clear process and structure for WA livestock producers, industry and RD&E co-investor representatives to have input, review, debate and consolidate on-farm RD&E issues;
2. Foster effective communication of on-farm RD&E outcomes and provide advocacy for continued RD&E service provision;
3. Provide representation on the MLA Red Meat Panel to engage in the process of determining national investment priorities and maintaining a balanced portfolio; and
4. Link with WA sheep and beef industry strategic plans to ensure complementarity and cohesion to help drive WA livestock industry priorities.

OPERATING Plan

The WALRC Annual Operating Plan is divided into four core areas of business:

1. Operations (gathering R&D priorities; reviewing project proposals).
2. Communications (ensuring livestock producers of WA are informed and engaged with WALRC activities).
3. Engagement (specific activities designed to nurture collaboration with future researchers, funders and agencies).
4. Governance (ensuring financial, contractual obligations are met; maintaining appropriate processes and procedures in relation to the appointment and management of the WALRC council).

This report documents the outcomes and achievements against the plans set for the period.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Staff



Chair
Bronwyn Clarke
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Executive Officer
Amy Coombe
eo@walrc.com.au

Co-investors - Tier 1 Members



Sienna Doolan
MLA



*Hayley Norman
CSIRO



Caroline Jacobson
Murdoch University



Kelsey Pool
UWA



Beth Paganoni
DPIRD

Producers - Tier 2 Members



Dean Wyatt
Pingaring – Sheep



Hamish Thompson
Coyrecup – Sheep



**Richard Metcalfe
Manypeaks – Beef



Michael Humphry
Walebing– Sheep



Jason Stokes
Chapman V – Sheep



Debbie Dowden
Mt Magnet – Beef



David Roe
Benalong – Beef



Clayton South
Wagin – Sheep

** Researcher Vice Chair / ** Producer Vice Chair*

Industry Council - Tier 3 Non-Voting Members



Alan Peggs
AAAC (WA)



Chris Wyhoon
NRMWA



Jess Schilling
AVA – Production Animals Special Interest Group

CHAIR Report

As Chair of the Western Australian Livestock Research Council (WALRC), it is my privilege to reflect on another productive year for the organisation and the WA livestock industry. Over the past two years, WALRC has undertaken an extensive process of consultation and engagement to identify and refine key research and development priorities for WA's livestock industries.

The process of developing these priorities has been both in-depth and lengthy, requiring considerable consultation, discussion and consideration of the issues facing producers across Western Australia. I would like to sincerely thank the WALRC team for their commitment and dedication throughout this process. Their work ensures that the priorities we put forward are grounded in the experiences and needs of WA producers and have a clear focus on delivering practical outcomes for industry. This work has now culminated in the finalisation and submission of our research priorities to Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), and participation in a Sydney workshop with our producer team to discuss these priorities directly with MLA and help shape future research investment.

Regional engagement has also remained a strong focus for WALRC throughout the year. In March, we held a successful sheep-focused Livestock Matters forum at Hamish

Thompson's property. The event attracted a strong turnout and provided an excellent opportunity for producers and industry participants to come together for important conversations, networking and learning. These forums continue to demonstrate the value of bringing producers together on-farm to share experiences, discuss challenges and contribute directly to the future direction of livestock research and development. I would once again like to thank the Thompson family for their generous hospitality and for helping make the day such a success.



Bronwyn Clarke, WALRC Chair

We are saying farewell to two long-standing producer members Richard Metcalfe and Michael Humphry, along with a long-standing industry member, Chris Wahoon, who have served on WALRC for over seven years. Their commitment, knowledge and contribution to the Council over this time has been greatly valued. On behalf of WALRC and the broader WA livestock industry, I sincerely thank Richard, Michael and Chris for their dedication and service.

At the same time, we are pleased to welcome two new producers to the WALRC team, Vaughn Byrd and Grantly Mullan. We look forward to the experience and perspectives they will bring to the Council and to working with them as we continue to advocate for research that delivers meaningful outcomes for WA producers.

As I reflect on the year, I remain immensely proud of the role WALRC plays in ensuring that WA livestock producers have a strong voice in shaping the future of research and development. The completion of our latest research priorities marks an important milestone, but our work does not stop there. Continuing meaningful consultation, strengthening industry connections and ensuring producer priorities remain at the forefront of R&D investment will remain central to WALRC's role.

I thank all WALRC members, industry participants, producers and stakeholders who have contributed their time, knowledge and perspectives throughout the year. In particular, I would like to thank Amy Coombe, WALRC's Executive Officer. Amy ensures WA livestock producers' voices are heard and industry funds are spent wisely. Together we look forward to continuing this important work and to another year of collaboration and engagement across the WA livestock industry.



Michael Humphry



Richard Metcalfe



Chris Wyhoon

2025-2026
Reporting Period

WALRC successfully delivered its two primary objectives for the 2025/26 reporting period, while significantly exceeding the agreed level of activity.

WALRC successfully planned and delivered three forums over the reporting period, comprising two sheep-focused forums and one cattle-focused forum. Each forum attracted more than 100 attendees, including producers, researchers, service providers and industry stakeholders along with extensive media coverage and online engagement. Comprehensive post-event reports were prepared and submitted to MLA following each forum, detailing participation, outcomes, feedback, lessons learnt and the value delivered to industry.

WALRC also completed the Regional RD&E Priorities Report following a comprehensive two-year producer consultation and prioritisation process. The report captured and synthesised producer- led priorities identified through the Livestock Matters Forums and ongoing regional engagement, providing MLA with a robust evidence base to inform future investment decisions.

The achievements outlined above reflect the strong commitment and collaboration of the WALRC Council, Chair and Executive Officer in delivering high-quality outcomes for Western Australian producers and the broader red meat industry.



Year on a Page

3

Industry Forums

WALRC held 3 Livestock Matters Forums each attended by over 100 producers and industry members

1,200+

Industry Engagement

WALRC engaged with Producers, Researchers and Industry Members through events and our newsletter

25

Top Priorities Submitted

A final list of producer led research priorities were submitted to MLA

815+

Subscriptions

WALRC Newsletter Subscriptions

9/10

Average Forum Rating

WALRC received an average of 9/10 for the overall rating of the 3 WALRC forums held

96.5%

Learnt Something New

Based on feedback froms received from Livestock Matters Forums, attendees have indicated they learnt something new

CONSULTATION PROCESS
Priority Collection

WALRC has been working on the priority collection process for the past 2 years and after extensive review of the priorities collected, the top priorities were submitted to MLA in August 2026. Below are the major WALRC priority gathering and sharing meetings and consultation meetings, both held and attended, for the 12-month period.

Meeting name	Group	Location	Topics/Speakers	Date	Attendees (specify numbers)
Livestock Matters Forum	WALRC	Walebing	Sheep Program	24. 07.2025	*Full Council* *4 Research Members* *3 Tier 3 Member* 100+ Industry Members & Producers
Livestock Matters Forum	WALRC	Gingin	Cattle Program	25. 07.2025	*Full Council* *4 Researcher Members* *3 Tier 3 Member* 100 + Industry Members & Producers
WALRC AGM & Research Day	WALRC	Perth (in person)	AGM, Research Updates & Priority Setting Process	9.09.2025	*Full Council* *4 Research Members* *3 Tier 3 Member* + additional researchers
MLA Priority Setting Day	WALRC	Perth (in person)	Priority Setting Day	13.02.2026	*Full Council + invited guests*
WALRC Livestock Matters Forum	WALRC	Perth	Program: Sheep Strong	18.03.2026	*Full Council (2 apologies)* *4 Researcher Members* *1 Tier 3 Member* 100 + Industry Members & Producers
MLA Priority Setting Day	WALRC	Online	Finalise the MLA Priorities	10.04.2026	*Chair, Full Council + EO*

Meeting name	Group	Location	Topics/Speakers	Date	Attendees (specify numbers)
ABSF Showcase	ABSF	Brisbane	Update on materiality assessment and R,D&E activities relevant to ABSF priorities	3 July 2025	*Chair*
WA Farmers meeting	WA Farmers	CSIRO, Floreat	CSIRO hosted WA Farmers and gave them a tour of research facilities. WALRC updated WA Farmers on priority setting.	28 July 2025	*Chair* *1 Research Member*
WALRC AGM	Sheep Producers Australia	Online	To receive an update from and collaborate with SPA	September 2025	*1 x SPA rep*
WALRC AGM	Cattle Australia	Online	To receive an update from and collaborate with CA	September 2025	*1 x CA rep*
Green Sheep Project Advisory Group	Sheep Producers Australia	Online	To advise on the development of the GSP protocol	December 2026/ June 2026	*Chair*
SRSP Workshop	SRSP	Sydney	Discussion of strategic direction for SRSF 2.0	February 2026	*Chair*
WALRC Livestock Matters Forum	Sheep Producers Australia	Perth (in person)	To share Sheep Producers Australia strategic plan with	March 2026	*X 2 SPA Staff*

WALRC Producer Identified Priorities

PROGRAM	RANK	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Wellbeing	1	Improved sheep management in confinement systems, including strategies to prevent disease, optimise individual welfare, and maintain productivity.
Wellbeing	2	Validation of virtual fencing as a safe and effective tool for managing cattle in rangeland systems, ensuring animal welfare is maintained while supporting productivity and land management.
Feedbase	1	Development of feedbase systems that optimise the use of vetch and/or alternative species to reduce re- sowing frequency while maintaining productivity and flexibility in WA systems.
Feedbase	2	Optimised use of standing crops and conserved forages and grains for grazing, feedlotting, and finishing systems for WA sheep and cattle. Where feasible, work with crop and forage breeders to include measurement of key livestock traits when phenotyping near-commercial material to optimise dual-purpose outcomes.
Environmental Sustainability	1	Assessment and integration of desalination methodologies as a sustainable water source for red meat production systems, supporting reliable drinking water supply under changing climatic conditions.
Environmental Sustainability	2	Development and adoption of more salt-tolerant pasture and forage plants in WA sheep and cattle systems to maintain productivity on saline soils and expand usable grazing areas.
Sheep Productivity	1	Clear understanding of the potential to increase red meat production and gain economic benefits from virtual fencing in sheep, including increased sheep numbers, labour savings, infrastructure costs (investment and reduced fencing)and potential improvements in pasture utilisation and management of sensitive areas. Adoption and implementation of virtual fencing in WA sheep systems, supported by research into technology, management practices, and economic feasibility, to improve productivity, pasture utilisation, and operational efficiency. Development of technology for sheep industry with inclusion of welfare studies to underpin registration.
Sheep Productivity	2	Use of sheep genetics to improve and consistently deliver high eating quality (tenderness, marbling, flavour) under WA production conditions. Development and implementation of genetic strategies tailored to WA sheep production systems, providing producers with effective tools to improve productivity, resilience, and market outcomes.
Grassfed Beef Productivity	1	Improved adoption and management of virtual fencing in WA cattle systems, including identification of lead cows, optimal developmental training, and integration into existing management practices to enhance feed utilisation, grazing efficiency, welfare and environmental outcomes. Use of animal-based measures/ animal assessment tech, such as Optiweigh, to predict liveweight change and therefore estimate diet quality, increase capacity for feed management, reduce labour costs in WA cattle systems, enable better tracking and production of feedbase and animal performance to drive grazing/feeding decisions that drive productivity/efficiency
Grassfed Beef Productivity	2	Improved understanding of the feedbase in WA pastoral systems, including traits associated with resilience intake, nutritional value, relative palatability, and relationships with ecological indicators of systems health. Novel information to enable integrated management strategies that support cattle performance, adaptation, and decisions regarding seasonal movement from northern to southern regions.

Other Identified Priorities

PROGRAM	RANK	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Wellbeing	3	Improved survival of triplet-born lambs through early and accurate pregnancy diagnosis, enabling targeted management and interventions to support welfare and productivity.
Wellbeing	4	Improved understanding and management of respiratory disease in sheep and cattle to minimise productivity losses and welfare impacts.
Wellbeing	5	Effective pain relief strategies for routine husbandry procedures (dehorning, castration, spaying, and marking) to improve animal welfare and support sustainable production.
Feedbase	3	Improved annual pasture legume genetics suited to medium rainfall zones in WA, delivering greater persistence, productivity, and contribution to livestock performance.
Feedbase	4	Development and extension of simplified feed test values to help producers assess and meet livestock feed demands throughout the season, improving feed planning, efficiency, and animal performance. Making sure we have a tool that is accurate, easy and assessable.
Environmental Sustainability	3	Evidence-based confirmation that confinement feeding systems can support sustainable production, maintaining productivity while minimising environmental impacts.
Environmental Sustainability	4	Strategies to manage effluent runoff and salinity, turning potential environmental challenges into productive outcomes for livestock systems in WA.
Sheep Productivity	3	Development and adoption of advanced scanning technologies, for accurate pregnancies diagnostics including alternative diagnostic methods, such as AI, to provide faster, more accurate, and earlier measurements of sheep performance, reducing reliance on operator skill and supporting better flock management decisions. Development of tech for cost effective muscle fat plus pregnancy diagnosis that supports measurement at scale without current labour/skill limits: Muscle, Fat, Foetus, IMF
Sheep Productivity	4	Worm vaccine and drenches
Sheep Productivity	5	Enhanced understanding and application of reproductive genetics in sheep to improve fertility, lamb survival, and flock productivity across WA production systems. Improved precision reproduction in sheep, enabling tighter joining periods supported by robust data, practical demonstration, and confidence-building initiatives to encourage adoption of best-practice strategies.
Sheep Productivity	6	Identification and adoption of optimal multi-species pasture mixes for different WA rainfall zones, particularly low rainfall areas, to improve feed availability, resilience, and livestock performance.

Other Identified Priorities

PROGRAM	RANK	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Grassfed Beef Productivity	3	Enhanced use of Buffel grass to increase pasture resilience, improve feed availability, and support sustainable cattle production in WA systems.
Grassfed Beef Productivity	4	Understanding and management of cattle welfare, reproductive outcomes, and weight shrinkage during transport, supporting productivity and market value.
Grassfed Beef Productivity	5	Remote monitoring and characterisation of bull performance, including remote tracking, to support breeding decisions, herd productivity, and efficient management.
Grassfed Beef Productivity	6	Better understanding of the trade-offs between production traits, longevity, and structural integrity in cattle, enabling breeding and management strategies that optimise both performance and herd sustainability.

Research Award

The WALRC Research Award recognises individuals and teams who have made an outstanding contribution to Western Australia's red meat and livestock industry through excellence in research, development, extension, communication and innovation.Established in 2026, the annual award celebrates those whose work has delivered meaningful improvements in on-farm productivity, profitability and sustainability. By recognising excellence across the research and innovation pipeline, WALRC aims to acknowledge the people whose commitment and leadership continue to strengthen the Western Australian livestock industry



2026 Inaugural Recipient

Professor Andrew Thompson

The inaugural WALRC Research Award was presented to Andrew Thompson in recognition of his exceptional contribution to sheep research and his lasting impact on the Australian sheep industry. Over more than three decades, Andrew has dedicated his career to improving the productivity, resilience and welfare of sheep enterprises through practical, industry-focused research.

His work has consistently bridged the gap between scientific discovery and on-farm adoption, ensuring research translates into meaningful outcomes for producers. As the leader of the Lifetime Ewe Management program, Andrew has helped deliver practical management knowledge to more than 5,000 sheep producers, representing around 40 per cent of the Australian sheep flock. His research has transformed industry thinking, improved producer decision-making and generated significant economic benefits for sheep enterprises across Australia.

LIVESTOCK MATTERS
Forums

The purpose of Livestock Matters is to directly and indirectly answer the question ‘what are the barriers to increasing productivity on your farm?’ and to take the answers received through conversations held during the forums and given within the post event feedback surveys, to help form the next round of MLA funded research priorities.

FORUM	FOCUS	ATTENDEES	NUMBER OF FEEDBACK FORMS SUBMITTED
JULY 2025	SHEEP	100 +	52
JULY 2025	CATTLE	100 +	43
MARCH 2026	SHEEP	130 +	73

WALRC forums delivered meaningful value to the red meat industry, strengthening knowledge, awareness and connections across the sector. An outstanding 96.5% of participants reported gaining new knowledge, demonstrating the forums’ effectiveness in supporting knowledge transfer and meaningful industry engagement.

Beyond knowledge sharing, participant feedback provided valuable insights into the issues and opportunities that matter most to producers and advisors. These insights helped shape the future research, development and extension priorities submitted to MLA in August 2026.

“Today was an excellent mix of growers/ industry/ research.

The jam packed schedule of relevant takeaways for producers felt very positive. Gave practical insights into the ewe lamb mating management and confinement feeding. Great to see the set up in person and hear two different set ups from Clayton and Hamish. Great forum. Very well done.

On point topics for current climate. Producer led innovation backed by research”

LIVESTOCK MATTERS Forums



‘Reasons to believe’ message at annual event

By BROOKE LITTLEWOOD

ALMOST 200 livestock producers, research scientists and industry representatives gathered across two days last week, when the WA Livestock Research Council hosted its annual Livestock Matters forums.

The first forum was held at Walebing, and was Humphry family, and was centred around “the reasons to believe – improving sheep enterprise resilience through science and attitude”.

Hosts Michael and Blair Humphry were the first to speak on the day, offering insight as to how their farm operates and what is ahead.

The packed line-up of speakers left those attending to think about the possibility for succession and adaptation, as well as a renewed belief in the future of livestock.

Day two was held at Gingin and hosted by Chalta station pastoralists Debbie and Ash Dowding, Southern Rangelands.

The Dowdens also oversee a property at Gingin, where they focused day shared real stories, expert presentations and hands-on demonstration.



Walebing farmer Michael Humphry is interviewed by WALRC executive officer Amy Coombe.

WA Livestock Research Council chair Bronwyn Clarke.

The Humphry family's Merino flock will transition from a fleece weight genetic base to a focus on increased lamb production.

Forum renews faith in flock

BOB GARNANT

WA sheep producers gained a renewed belief in the future of livestock at a forum designed to improve sheep enterprise resilience through science and attitude.

The WA Livestock Research Council's forum — Why Livestock Matters: The Reasons to Believe — was held at the Humphry family's mixed sheep and cropping farm in Walebing on July 24.

WALRC chair Bronwyn Clarke welcomed 80 visitors to hear about what could strengthen their businesses from a diverse range of speakers on topics relevant to industry challenges.

"We want to know the gaps of your system so we can pass on this information to Meat and Livestock Australia," she said.

Forum host Michael Humphry, who was interviewed by WALRC executive officer Amy Coombe, said his family's sheep enterprise had "evolved through science".

"We run a heavy stocking rate, with late lambing beginning July 1, which leads us to autumn shearing," he said.

"This allows us to sell our wethers early and get grass established for next year's lambs. It worked brilliantly until two years ago."

That was when the Federal Government announced the live sheep export ban by sea was to begin on May 1, 2028.

WA's traditional dependency on the live sheep export trade to sell excess wethers was scrutinised in 2021 by the Labor Government.

The Government's ban policy defied Saudi Arabia's demand of about 4 million head after it decided to accept Australia's rigorous Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System standards.

Federal Agriculture Minister Julie Collins visited WA in July to announce the breakdown of the $139.7 million transition assistance package aimed to help farmers and the wider industry to transition away from live sheep exports.

Mr Humphry said the finance package was "too little and too late".

"The reduced numbers of sheep are gone at our farm — we have increased cropping and decreased pastures," he said.

"Live



Hosting the WA Livestock Research Council Livestock Matters forum were Blair and Jess Humphry, with their daughters Ada, 3, and Sybil, 1, with Tracy and Michael Humphry, who all farm together at their Walebing property. Pictures: Bob Garnant



Anthony Thomas and Lynley Anderson.



Koojan farmers Ruth and Peter McDonald.

were able to get rid of them and grow grass for next season's lambs.

"Our sheep enterprise worked on supplying wethers for live export for as long as the trade has existed.

"I wasn't expecting this live export phase-out."

Mr Humphry said his thought was the Government would ban the live trade only in the Eastern States and let it carry on in WA.

"That didn't happen and I was caught out," he said.

interest from extra borrowings as a consequence of the ban decision will be $2½ for every sheep we can dream of producing in perpetuity."

At the forum, Mr Humphry said it was fabulous to hear of sheep now being sold for $200/head because of low supply.

"I don't know if we will get a lot of that — the first 10 per cent of that will be compliments of [illegible] and his thinkin[illegible]

to the livestock program. "He knows how to make money from sheep," he said.

Blair, who studied agricultural science at the University of WA and worked as a research agronomist for three years, said he was committed to keeping the family's sheep enterprise profitable.

"I have always [illegible] shee[illegible]

summer stocking rate to below 5 DSE and pushing winter stocking up to 10-12 from 8-9.

"We need to increase our lambing percentage, pushing it up to 100 per cent."

Blair aims to fill a hole in the market from [illegible]'s June to early [illegible] well old-season

[illegible]mands, we may [illegible]s," he said.

[illegible]time making [illegible] in sheep, but [illegible]line to remain [illegible]meant keep-[illegible]wool execs at [illegible]vernment feed-[illegible] to gain extra

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Feed facility lifts production

CALLY DUPE

Western Australia's biggest cattle feeding facility is hitting its stride, with Koojan Downs near Moora nearing full capacity just four years after opening.

Operated by Harvest Road — the agriculture and food division of Tattarang — the grain-fed facility has become a key part of the group's broader strategy to improve cattle supply consistency, product quality and market access for WA producers.

Koojan Downs and its supplying cattle producers have become a cornerstone of the group's strategy to transform WA's cattle and beef supply chain, holding more than 20,000 head of cattle and with a licence to double that.

Tattarang chief executive John Hartman opened up about the facility's success to hundreds of agricultural stakeholders at the recent Bringing Drawrin Downtown 2026 luncheon in Perth. The facility opened in 2021 and sources cattle from across WA to finish for premium export markets.

Mr Hartman said Koojan was complementary to existing feeding operations servicing domestic supermarkets and gave farmers — who had been integral to the facility's success — "another market opportunity" to sell their cattle.

"Despite its abundance of grain production, WA has historically lacked large scale cattle feeding facilities," he said.

"This, along with summer back grounding capacity in the south-[illegible]ern region, is a key enabler to address the seasonality, quality and consistency challenges.

"And it was the genesis of our development of the Koojan Downs feedlot facility." Harvest Road's investment in Koojan was part of a long-term plan kicked off in 2014 when parent company Tattarang acquired Harvey Beef.

Since then, more than $300 million has been invested to upgrade WA's beef supply chain — from breeding and backgrounding to processing and export.

About 1400 cattle producers work with and supply cattle to Harvest Road.

And now, the investment is paying dividends — for Harvest Road and its cattle suppliers alike.

Since then, Koojan has helped Harvey Beef — WA's only accredited export beef processor — increase throughput by more than 40 per cent — from 130,000 head to more than 200,000 in the past financial year.

It's also contributed to a significant rise in average carcass weights, from 385kg to nearly 400kg, and a step-change in product quality. The operation has also become a significant buyer of local grain, purchasing nearly 60,000t of barley from WA farmers.

Mr Hartman said the company's goal was to build a sustainable, high-quality beef industry in WA that could compete globally and provide strong returns to producers across WA.

"These results represent a broad cross-section of cattle producers working on their own operations to improve genetics and adjust turn-off timing," he said.

"These results are a fantastic achievement as a collective industry, and I'd like to congratulate cattle producers for the progress we've made together so far."

Heading into the "next phase" of the Harvest Road journey, Mr Hartman said the company would focus on three key things — growing market shares, continuing to invest in the WA supply chain, and continuing to increase collaboration opportunities.

But he said the business and industry could not grow without collaboration, which was "key to unlocking future growth potential" of the State's cattle and beef industry.

LOOKING AFTER BUSINESS & THE LAND

GEORGIA CAMPION

Prioritising business and environmental sustainability has paid dividends for well-known Chalia Station operators Ashley and Debbie Dowden, who expanded their cattle operations south five years ago.

Chalia Station has been in Mr Dowden's family since 1888 and over time has transformed from a Merino sheep station to a 200,000ha Santa Gertrudis cattle enterprise that also runs a human-induced regeneration carbon project.

A human-induced regeneration carbon project is a land and livestock management practice that encourages the natural regrowth of native forest.

Mr Dowden said the Gingin property, purchased five years ago, was a "finishing block" for their Chalia Station production.

"It's been a fairly rapid expansion for our business over the last 10 years," he said.

"Five-odd years ago, we decided it was in our best interest to purchase this place down here — and we know absolutely nothing about running cattle in Gingin.

"We've been fairly conservative with our stocking rates here coming out of pastoral country, not knowing how many we can actually run here without impacting on the land."

The station's main product is the sale of bulls for live export, with 200kg to 350kg bulls the "priority".

Mrs Dowden said the key to a business like Chalia Station, where rain was unpredictable, was sustainability — farming long term strategies and plans.

"When you live in the Southern Rangelands, it's a hell of a hard place to live," she said.

"It's incredibly dry — you get very erratic and unpredictable rainfall.

"We get about 220mm of rain every year, but you just don't know when it's going to fall, so you can never plan.

"This station has been in the family since 1888 and having had the property for such a long time, you take a very long-term view of the station and how to run your business."

Sustainability also extends to the wellbeing of the land for Chalia Station, with Mrs Dowden saying the pair manage their country "very carefully".



Chalia Station operators Ashley Dowden and Debbie Dowden expanded their operations south in Gingin. Picture: Georgia Campion

Livestock centre claims honour as an advocate for the industry

GEORGIA CAMPION

Muchea Livestock Centre has been recognised as the country's leading industry advocate for its quiet advocacy for the saleyard sector and leadership.

The centre was awarded the 2026 Industry Advocate Award at the 2026 National Saleyard Conference for its leadership and impact across animal welfare, support for people and industry, economic contribution and community value.

The centre is WA's biggest dual-species saleyard and handles more than 500,000 sheep and 70,000 cattle annually.

WA Meat Industry Authority chief executive Dr Lyn Loo said the award belonged to every member of the team whose work inspired others, strengthens the community and lifts the entire sector.

"We are proud to receive the Industry Advocate Award 2026 and humbled to be recognised for our work in quietly advocating the importance of saleyards in the livestock supply chain," she said.

"We're passionate about sharing our knowledge and capability with our colleagues and wider community in WA and across Australia — particularly in providing a facility to inspire and practically equip the next generation of agribusiness leaders.

"This award belongs to every member of our team. Their quiet, consistent actions have made a lasting impact — not just at Muchea, but across the industry."

WAMLA operates and manages the centre, and has led the way in implementing constant animal welfare coverage, on-site veterinary oversight, and low-stress handling training.

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Analyst is upbeat on red meat industry

GEORGIA CAMPION

Market analyst and Episode 5 co-founder Andrew Whitelaw is optimistic about the Australian beef industry's "very" future amid an increase in popularity of locally-sourced beef.

Speaking at the Western Australian Research Council Ian Llewellyn Memorial Dinner in Gingin, Mr Whitelaw said for us Australia was still a major consumer of red meat.

"We're reproducing meat ... the domestic market gets satisfied first," he said.

"The picture for red meat looks very, very ... I am more optimistic about the grains market than the red meat market.

"Over time Australia is still a huge consumer of meat — one of the biggest in the world per capita — but that domestic consumption of beef and that domestic consumption of pork has dropped significantly.

"Since 2010, lamb and beef has gone down, but chicken and pork has gotten more and more popular.

"Mr Whitelaw said that over time, domestic consumption was a function of population demographic change of population demographic in, who consumed more pork than red meat.

"Luckily we're seeing things like chicken hasn't really changed in price for a long time — pork has gone up, but it's still cheap," he said.

"When we look at pork, one of the factors that's crossed that increased consumption is the demographic change in Australia. We have got more Philippines, more South Asians, more Chinese, who eat pork a lot more as a staple than white populations do."

Contributing to the bright outlook of the Australian beef industry was the decline of meat analogue, also known as fake meat, which surged during COVID but has since declined in demand.

"Nobody wants fake meat," Mr Whitelaw said.

"I think that those products, the reason why they're not successful is because we've seen they've been very successful to start, and they've got very good interactive proposition for investment.

"But the reality is that consumers went out and bought a burger ... but they only tried it once, and they didn't try it again.

"The reason behind that is because they're not very good, because beef is pretty consistent, and Australian beef is probably the most consistent in the world."

Mr Whitelaw said beef was fully sourced, grass-fed as the "very strong signature" of beef around the world, with exemptions of hormone growth promotants.

"We are the second largest exporter of beef around the world — we have become ... we have the ability to export to almost anywhere because we have those country protocols," he said.

Despite the 10 per cent tariff imposed on exports from Australia to the United States, Mr Whitelaw was optimistic that WA would be the "final exporter".

"The US have been a big talking point in recent times," he said.

"The reality is we've got a 10 per cent tariff — it's our biggest market but it's not really a huge issue at the moment."



Officers spray disinfectant at an Indonesian cattle farm infected with FMD in 2022. Picture: Ulet Ifansasti

World-first foot-and-mouth jab looms as game changer for global biosecurity

CALLY DUPE

A world-first biodegradable vaccine to protect livestock from foot-and-mouth disease has been developed through a $30 million, five-year research partnership between Meat & Livestock Australia, Tiba Biotech and the NSW Government.

While Australia remains FMD-free, modelling from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences has estimated an incursion of the disease could cost the country's economy up to $80 billion.

It would have a catastrophic impact on trade, animal welfare and farm productivity.

MLA managing director Michael Crowley said while it was hoped an FMD vaccine would never be needed, the research represented a proactive approach to managing biosecurity risk. "FMD is present in countries near to Australia and is the No. 1 priority in terms of potential biosecurity risks," he said.

"Vaccination may not necessarily be required in the event of a disease incursion, but this research demonstrates that the evaluation process with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority before approval for use on livestock.

Australian-based Tiba Biotech company was founded on work by Dr Peter McGrath and the founder Peter McGrath said the company was focused on using "Australia's world-class dairy industry as a network vaccine development, bringing with it the potential to develop manufacturing capacity, jobs, and exports."

Mr McGrath said, "Livestock mRNA vaccines offer a safer, efficient and effective approach to protecting animal health, benefiting both the agricultural industry and consumers.

"Unlike current mRNA technologies, our vaccines can be stored long-term at standard refrigeration temperatures for at least one month. This is a critical advantage in livestock applications.

The research included an extensive evaluation of the safety of Tiba's vaccines.

"Tiba's vaccines were safe at very high doses, much larger than would ever be administered.

Michael Crowley Picture: MLA

Australian industry is proactive and prepared."

Researchers found the new vaccine demonstrated strong, effective immune response and safety in preliminary trials in Germany.

Vaccinated cattle did not contract FMD when exposed to the virus, importantly, they did not shed the virus.

The new biodegradable vaccine uses mRNA to induce an immune response, rather than an actual virus. MRNA vaccines have been proven safe for animals and for consumers.

After these trials, the vaccine must now undergo a rigorous

Ban on live sheep export represents an opportunity

WA's Merino producers can opt to take on the challenges in the aftermath of the Albanese Government's ban on live sheep exports by sea from May 1, 2028.

The State's sheep and wool producers and the broader industry will face unprecedented uncertainty complicated by the swings in global economies and the pressures on world governments to combat climate change.

The ban has greatly reduced producers' confidence, and the flock has been in decline, causing unwanted market swings, particularly in sheepmeat.

Lower wool production in WA will be expected, and values will respond to the supply and demand equation.

WA's traditional dependency on the live sheep export trade to sell off excess wethers was scrutinised in 2023 by the Labor Government.

Federal Agriculture Minister Julie Collins visited WA in July to announce the breakdown of the $139.7 million transition assistance package aimed to help farmers and the wider industry to transition away from live sheep exports.

This package represents an opportunity according to former Australian Meat Industry Council chief executive officer Pat Hutchinson.

"WA is the only State where this money will be invested," he said.

"My pitch to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is to make the industry a bright light with a high level of technology."

On the ground, producers will be seeking advice on their breeding objectives in the new era.

WA Livestock Research Council chair Bronwyn Clarke said producers would be best served by using genetics to measure their flock's performance to align with transitional changes in the sheep markets.

"Genetics works — invest in rams with Australian Sheep Breeding Values and indexes — tools to get genetic gain," she said. "We want to move that average of the whole flock. This requires genetic evaluation.

"Growth is 40 per cent inheritable, the balance is from farm management.

Dr Clarke said by using Merinoselect indexes when purchasing rams, genetic gain would increase wool cut and quality and selecting for individual ASBVs would increase reproduction, meat yield, and eating quality.

"Most of producers' returns are coming from lamb production — find the index that suits," she said. "The top rams in Australia from the 2024-drop Merinoselect data have indexes of about 150.

"This gives producers a benchmark, and if they want to know where their flock sits nationally in genetics, they can easily take a flock profile test."

Dr Clarke said considering reproduction traits in ram selections, would result in increased lambing percentage. More lambs weaned aligns with this year's Science of Merino feature — emphasising more profit/hectare while reducing costs.



WA Livestock Research Council chair Bronwyn Clarke. Picture: Bob Garnant

FROM PRIORITY To Project

Research priorities identified by WALRC through our priority setting process, have helped shape MLA-funded research, ensuring investment is directed towards addressing practical challenges and opportunities for our industry. For example, the following WALRC priorities were turned into MLA funded research project throughout 2024 - 2026.

TOR TITLE: WA Wean-a-lamb: Improving weaning rates and system resilience in Western Australian Merino sheep enterprises

Sheep Productivity	Curtin University	Estimated Project Value: $670K

Priority Summary: We seek to understand why we still have only 70 to 75% lamb survival and 85 to 95% weaning rate in WA Merinos? We want to know what control points, management and production factors will provide the greatest return for effort for individual farmers?

Executive Summary: This project adopts a tiered, integrated mixed-methods design between two sister projects that combines qualitative behavioural inquiry with quantitative benchmarking and bio-economic analysis as a part of the sister project. The design progresses sequentially from benchmarking current practice (undertaken by the sister project), to diagnosing adoption drivers and barriers, to identifying high-leverage control points and economically justified interventions (undertaken by the sister project) and finally translating findings into producer-centred value propositions, business cases, and Toolbox-ready recommendations.

TOR TITLE: Biosecurity Gap Analysis

Animal Wellbeing	CSIRO	Estimated Project Value: $371K

Priority Summary: Industry access to disease data including changes in disease distribution to identify emerging animal health issues and better inform setting of research priorities in the animal wellbeing space

Executive Summary: CSIRO Futures has developed this analysis in consultation with the MLA, and CSIRO research experts in biosecurity, environmental science, agriculture and food, and animal health. CSIRO Futures has also leveraged experience developed through previous analyses relevant to livestock biosecurity and agricultural RD&A. This analysis has also been informed by insights collected through existing CSIRO stakeholder relationships with domestic and international experts in biosecurity, animal health and animal epidemiology. The risks and challenges to Australian biosecurity are growing and changing, which threaten the resilience, productivity and viability of the red meat industry. Factors driving these changes include climate change, new and emerging threats, the changing epidemiology and ecology of endemic threats, population growth and urbanisation, technology advancements, changing global trade including red meat demand in the US, Japan and Korea, changing consumer expectations, business consolidation and a drive for nature positive outcomes. Understanding the evolving biosecurity risks and challenges the red meat industry faces, and the gaps and needs that must be addressed, is critical to informing strategic RD&A investment opportunities. Although the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has identified a need to promote biosecurity innovations in its National Biosecurity Strategy, there has not been an assessment of which biosecurity RD&A opportunities can yield the timeliest impact for the red meat industry.

TOR TITLE: Novel Tools for Improved Monitoring of Pasture Biomass

Feedbase Productivity	CSIRO	Estimated Project Value: $667K

Priority Summary: Priority #1, R&D Gap #3: Tools to predict biomass (and biomass quality) that are accurate in the Southern Rangelands. More ground truthing of CIBO Labs to improve the predictions. Can the tools be used to measure ground cover, carbon and other metrics that are associated with nature positive systems. What is best for WA?

Executive Summary: Current tools for estimating or measuring biomass (and hence 'feed on offer') are either very labour intensive and limited in scope (e.g. plate readers), broad in scope, but limited in accuracy and reliant on clear skies (multi-spectral satellite imaging), or require significant inputs to allow accurate model parameterisation (e.g. quadrat cut measurements for biomass extrapolation). This project aims to test the accuracy of a new method for measuring pasture biomas that uses advanced LiDAR sensors with the CSIRO-developed RayCloudTools analytical packages.

TOR TITLE: Grazing Crops - Key Principles and New Frontiers

Feedbase Productivity	Murdoch University	Estimated Project Value: $3.7Million

Priority Summary: Feedbase and mixed farming systems: New plants, tools and practices to optimise nutrient supply for sheep and whole-farm profitability in mediterranean climate areas.

Executive Summary: The aim of this project is to develop awareness, demonstrate and extend the key principles of grazing crops for sheep and cattle, unpack barriers to adoption and understand the value proposition of grazing modern and emerging crop cultivars relevant to WA.

TOR TITLE: N/A

Animal Wellbeing	CSIRO	Estimated Project Value: $1.29Million

Priority Summary: Strategies for sustainable, effective disease control and regional biosecurity.

Executive Summary: To further develop and deploy a flystrike vaccine. Key flystrike antigens have been identified and produced, along with developed bioassays for vaccine performance assessment. The scope of this project is focused on improving the vaccine by optimising the antigens and exploring novel adjuvants and delivery methods to optimise this vaccine to boost the sheep immunological response.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

For the year ended 30th June 2026

WALRC's annual accounts have been audited and endorsed by Lincoln's Accountants, Albany. The signed set of financial statements are available from the Committee of Management on request.

WA LIVESTOCK RESEARCH COUNCIL
ABN: 29 580 047 699
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	2026 $	2025 $
Revenue	38,000	42,000
Other income	220,512	150,600
Administration expenses	(19,365)	(11,379)
Governance expenses	(38,609)	(30,755)
Project expenses	(188,625)	(148,514)
Net current year surplus	11,913	1,952
Net current year surplus attributable to members of the association	11,913	1,952
Other comprehensive income		
Total comprehensive income for the year	11,913	1,952
Net current year surplus attributable to members of the association	11,913	1,952
Total comprehensive income attributable to members of the association	11,913	1,952

WA LIVESTOCK RESEARCH COUNCIL
ABN: 29 580 047 699
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2026

	2026 $	2025 $
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	205,865	125,519
Accounts receivable and other debtors	20,075	17,584
Financial assets	-	47,528
Other current assets	2,400	2,188
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	228,340	192,819
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	-	-
TOTAL ASSETS	228,340	192,819
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable and other payables	37,570	13,962
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	37,570	13,962
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	-	-
TOTAL LIABILITIES	37,570	13,962
NET ASSETS	190,770	178,857
EQUITY		
Retained surplus	190,770	178,857
TOTAL EQUITY	190,770	178,857

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WALRC is an initiative of MLA with support from AWI, CSIRO, DPIRD, Murdoch & UWA.
Many of the images supplied in this annual report are courtesy of Brooke Littlewood, Farm Weekly.