How sheep were introduced into Australia

Source: Adapted from The Story of Wool, Kandinn Group
During 1797, the first **Merinos** (Spanish Merinos) arrived from Cape Town, South Africa. The sheep were shared between early settlers, including Captain John Macarthur and Reverend Samuel Marsden.

As the size of the national flock grew, so did the quality of the wool, with Australian wool producers using **selective breeding** to develop a type of **Merino** suited to Australian conditions, which produced lots of white wool that felt soft to the touch.

By the 1830s, Australia was challenging Spain and Germany as the main supplier of wool to England. By 1838, wool was Australia’s main **export**.

The early wool industry was different from today’s modern industry. Shepherds watched over sheep because there were no fences to contain them. **Shearers** used hand blades (called blade shears) to harvest the wool. Horses, bullocks and camels pulled carts to transport the wool to the ships, which took it to England where it was sold and made into clothes and furnishings.

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**Blade shears**: Shearers in the past used hand blades to shear sheep.

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### Glossary

- **Export** — the sale of goods (like wool) or services to another country.
- **Merino** — a breed of sheep that produces high-quality wool.
- **Selective breeding** — wool producers choose rams and ewes to breed with that will produce lambs with better quality wool.
- **Shearers** — people who are specially trained to harvest wool from sheep.

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### Fun facts about history

- Hundreds of years ago Spain had the finest wool in the world. They did not allow any of their Spanish **Merinos** to leave Spain until the late 1700s.
- Reverend Samuel Marsden travelled to England during 1807 with wool packed in a barrel. The fibre was woven into a black suit that Marsden wore to meet King George III.
- The first **Merinos** in Australia produced about 1.5 kg of wool per fleece, but today’s superior **Merinos** can grow a fleece of more than 8kg.

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### More information

To find out more about the history of wool in Australia, take a look at:

- [learnaboutwool.com](http://learnaboutwool.com)