WOOL — A PROUD HERITAGE

Key:
- 1788 — sheep were brought to Australia with the First Fleet
- 1797 — first wool-producing sheep were shipped to Australia from South Africa (Spanish Merino)

Source: Adapted from The Story of Wool, Kondinin Group

HOW SHEEP WERE INTRODUCED INTO AUSTRALIA
Wool — a proud heritage

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 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.

Did you know?

- In recognition of his contribution to Australian agriculture, wool pioneer Captain John Macarthur was honoured by a postage stamp issued on the centenary of his death in 1934 (depicting a Merino ram).

- Eliza Forlonge of Scotland was a pioneer of Australia’s superfine wool industry. There is a memorial in the shape of a wool bale near Eliza’s grave at Euroa in Victoria and a statue of Eliza and a ram at Campbell Town in Tasmania.

- 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.

More information

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

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.

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