



# Dark and Medullated Fibres Risk Scheme

## Background Summary

The Australian Wool Industry, inclusive of growers, brokers, test houses, buyers & processors, has been concerned for some time about the risks to the reputation of Australia's white merino wool arising from the introduction of exotic breeds of sheep. Recognising this concern, in March 2003 AWTA Ltd introduced a test for dark & medullated fibres in May 2003 using the very expensive testing system then available.

Australian Wool Innovation also funded research aimed at producing a less expensive test. However, any test will only be useful for detecting contamination arising from contact of merinos with exotic sheep.

Due to the sampling difficulties involved it will not be useful for detecting contamination levels of pigmented or medullated fibres present in the remainder of the clip, although it may be useful for obtaining information about back ground levels distributed over the fleece. On 1st July 2004, AWTA Ltd implemented a new and much less expensive test based on an improved sample presentation system developed by CSIRO with funding provided by AWI.

The difficulty of measuring the "natural" contamination has long been recognised. Historically the industry has approached this by adopting husbandry and clip preparation techniques designed to reduce the risk of contaminating fleece wools, while concentrating any risk to lower value lines.

In the 1980's CSIRO developed a methodology for objectively assigning a risk level to classed lines of wool, derived from declared husbandry and clip preparation information. This was never adopted by the industry, despite strong support at the time from the the exporting and processing sector.

AWTA Ltd recognised that a testing regime for contamination from exotic breeds, coupled with a Dark Fibre Risk rating for the remainder of the clip could do much to reassure purchasers of Australian wool. The Company presented this view to the Federation of Australian Wool Organisations (FAWO). FAWO set up a working group, and made a submission to Australian Wool Innovation (AWI I) for funding to implement a Dark Fibre Risk Scheme nationally. AWI provided the necessary funding. Part of the implementation required inclusion of the impact of exotic sheep into the risk scheme.

FAWO's Dark & Medullated Fibre Risk Scheme Working Group has finalised the documentation required for implementation of the scheme on 1st July 2004.