Australian White Sheep
Breed Standards
as adopted by
The National Australian White Sheep Society Ltd
May 2015

General Comments
The Australian White is a moderately large, upstanding meat sheep breed that stands over a lot of ground. It is white in colour and displays good shedding ability with a short hair covering. It is a heavy breed without sacrifice to good mobility. It is characterised by having straight legs and sound hooves, which support a long, deep and broad body.

When assessing the breed, primary attention must be focused on the functional aspects of the sheep. Sheep displaying these characteristics combined with strong breed type should be given preference.

In general form, the breed is somewhat shorter in stature to the Australian Poll Dorset, but is taller than the Dorper breed, with more leg underneath it. The outward appearance should be a sheep of substance and vigour, with free movement and good walkability.

Head
In side profile, the head has a somewhat triangular shape with a blunt nose, and high poll. The jaws are strong, the teeth are well-fitted and cut in the correct anatomical position. The cheeks are large, flat and strongly muscled. The chin is deep and broad. The head is moderately broad but not stuffy. The nose bone is broad and may be slightly arched. The forehead must not be dished. Both male and female sheep are polled (small vegetative scurs in rams are permissible, while horns are not). The ears are of moderate size and semi-lopped. The eyes are large and well positioned on the head with a forward-looking countenance. Eyes are darkly coloured, with black pigmented eye-lid rims, and are protected by a strong ridge of bone over the top of the eye.

In rams, the head should display vigour, masculinity and strength. In ewes, the head displays femininity and is less broad and more refined.

In animals under 12 months of age undershot or overshot jaws are a cull fault. (In animals above this age, a marked degree of fault in this regard is considered a cull fault). Well fitted jaws & properly aligned teeth are the ideal.

Neck
In rams, the neck is strongly built, broad at the base and somewhat less broad and thick as it joins the head. In ewes, the neck is strong and broad at the base, but significantly more refined than that of rams. As the neck reaches the head, it is noticeably less thick in proportion.

In both sexes, the neck comes out of the chest just above the point of the sternum, is of medium length and blends smoothly into the shoulders.

Shoulders
Shoulder blades are moderately sloping, which provides the sheep reach in stride. The withers are moderately high and discernible and should be well padded with muscle, without being loaded. The correct positioning of the withers combined with a well laid-back shoulder gives the breed an upstanding appearance. Width between the shoulders, at the withers, is thus moderate.

In side appearance, the scapulars are broad, flat and well-muscled.

In movement, indications of loose shoulders are undesirable and should be assessed by the degree of deviation from the ideal; a marked display of looseness on the move is a cull fault.

Chest
The chest is broad and deep, reaching at least to the point of the elbows. Forward of the front legs there is some indication of a visible brisket, which is well fleshed, but not too broad. An overly prominent and narrow brisket should be considered a fault, equal to the appearance of no brisket at all. From side view, at the floor of the brisket and the chest, the appearance should be one of an imaginary straight line where it blends into the barrel of the animal. A narrowing of the chest behind the front legs, and an appreciable rise upwards of the chest to meet a high and shallow sternum is a fault (devils grip).

Front legs
The front legs hang down straight from the shoulders and are placed well back under the point of the shoulder, in line with the withers above. To provide good mobility in the breed, the front legs should not be placed too far forward, thus obscuring the brisket. (Note: a faulty construction of this kind gives the sheep an appearance of having a flat front to the chest, causing a rolling awkward gait. Combined with loaded shoulders and an overly broad chest, this faulted conformation is associated with poor lambing ability in ewes).

The upper bone of the front legs, above the knee, are well-fleshed and long, while the cannon bones are short. Leg joints are large and dry and the knee is broad.

Behind or over at the knee is a conformational fault. Likewise, front legs which cave inward at the knee or which bow outwards are cull faults.

Back legs
The back legs should be spaced widely apart, without there being any tendency to exaggeration. The legs hang down straight from the pelvis, while the bones show no discernible tendency to inward or outward bowing. Cow hocks, turned in hocks and sickle hocks, are all faults by degree.

The upper part of the back leg (shank), above the hock, is long and the outside surface well fleshed with muscle, with a tendency to bulge outwards. Leg joints are large and dry and the hocks strong with sufficient turn. Straight hocks [post-legged] are a conformation fault. Cannon bones are short. Quality of bone is measured in the short cannon bones, determined by their density and by the flatness [dryness] and width of these bones, when viewed from the side.

Height in this breed is determined by both the length of the upper arm and length from hock to hip, as well as total body depth. Height at the withers should never be consequent from breeding for a longer cannon bone, which would indicate a corresponding weakness.

All four legs should move in a straight line without a tendency to paddle or to throw the legs outwards from the knee.

Pasterns
Pasterns are short, strong and fairly upright.

Feet
All four hooves should be fairly large and somewhat upright so that the animal gives the appearance of standing over and above its feet. The claws should be closely fitted and not splayed, particularly in front. All four hooves should point forward, and should not tilt in or outwards. Turned-in front feet [pigeon toed] are a cull fault.

Depending on strain type, hoof horn colour may be fully black or dark grey or bone coloured (amber); or be striped in a combination of these pigment shades. Dark hooves are preferred in show animals, but are not essential. An otherwise admirable animal should not be unduly penalised for having hooves of a lighter colour, over poorer quality animals showing darker colour – (Darker hooves are presumed
to be somewhat more desirable in heavier, wetter country). Hooves with a tendency to excessive horn growth are undesirable, and are to be discriminated against.

Complete [whole] leg construction of the above type provides strength and the ability in the animal to carry weight over distance.

Barrel
The barrel is broad and deep, showing good capacity. Ribs are well sprung and widely spaced. A slab sided and/or shallow barrel is a severe culled fault, as is a barrel that is narrow gutted and tubular in side view.

Back and Backline
The back is broad and long but without tendency to weakness. Thus, the spine is broad and supported by strong [eye or fillet] muscle on both sides. The loin muscle is strong, and in exceptional animals it may appear slightly arched.

A visible or protruding spine in a well-conditioned animal is an indication of severe weakness and is a culled fault.

From a side view, the appearance is of a level back from its start at the withers to where it joins the loins and hip junction. In heavily pregnant ewes or in older animals there may be an appearance of a slight sag in the top line, but this should not be severe.

The croup (the area on top of the rump, from the hip bones to the base of the tail) may show a slight slope towards the tail. However, this slope must not be so marked as to give the animal the appearance of being “goose rumped”.

Rump and Hindquarters
The rump is broad and the hindquarters deep. From the point of the hip bones to the base of the tail, the rump should be as long as possible and be well fleshed and broad across its width. In rear view, the general appearance is a backward full of meat.

The hindquarters are broad and well-rounded across, and when viewed from behind are deep; from beneath the tail to the scrotum in rams or udder junction in ewes. There is plenty of space [width] between the back legs, while the inner thighs are well fleshed. The entire construction giving a square and full appearance to the back view of the rump and hindquarters.

Across the hips and pin bones, through the thurls and over its length, the entire pelvis construction should indicate size and capacity, which is especially important in ewes.

Fat Cover
The Australian White has been developed to be a breed that can withstand the demands of the harsh Australian environment. Sheep of a type that are too dry [little fat cover] are to be discriminated against, as the ability of their lambs to finish on Australian pastures will be severely compromised, whilst ewes will struggle to maintain their reproductive performance.

Oppositely, sheep that tend to significantly localize fat deposition are contrary to breed type.

Colour and Coat
The Australian White is a white sheep and may only exhibit a few small coloured spots on the ears and face, or lower legs.

Light lemon/fawn coloured [hair] patches on the body are permissible but undesirable and when taken together, may not exceed 10cms in total circumference. Colour patches different to the above are not permitted.

The Australian White is a breed of the shedding sheep type [mostly hair and some or little wool] and consequently, good shedding ability is of high importance.

Sheep, which in summer have a coat entirely made up of hair or which carry only a little wool along the back, are considered the ideal.

At minimum, sheep of this breed must have a clean head, front of neck, belly and legs, and a clean breech area [no wool but only short hair]. Selection efforts must endeavour to breed the hair line pattern as high up the sheep’s body as possible.

However, good carcass traits and functional attributes of the breed must never be sacrificed to shedding ability alone.

At all times, the functional purpose of the breed must not be sacrificed to the selection of one trait in isolation.

Reproductive Organs
For the purposes of this document, descriptions here are restricted to the external reproductive sex organs [able to be visibly assessed]:

Rams
Rams must have two fully descended testicles, encased in one undivided scrotal sac. The scrotum should be large without being too pendulous. The testicles should be firm and smooth without indications of lumps or other abnormalities. The scrotum should be broadly attached to the wall of the abdomen [wide: not having a long narrow neck]. The penis should exit the sheath in the normal anatomical position on the body and the sheath must not be too long or too pendulous.

Ewes
Ewes should have a well-formed udder, squarely and widely attached to the body. Pendulous, narrow necked udders and teats that are too large or long [dairy type] are all undesirable faults. Teats must be functional and the udder free from lumps or other abnormalities.

The vulva area of the ewes should be of normal size and anatomical form.

For show purposes, ewes at 14 months of age must be visibly pregnant or have lambed before [evidenced in dry ewes by mature teats and palpable residual udder tissue].

Lambs
For show purposes, lambs must exhibit good growth and weight for age.

Temperament
Because this is a relatively large and heavy sheep breed, issues of temperament must be considered. Overly nervous, timid or flighty animals ‘showing a wild eye’ [countenance] are regarded as untypical. A balanced temperament is characteristic of the breed, and should be purposefully bred for.

General Discriminations
The Australian White is an early maturing, growth-oriented breed with sufficient inbuilt hardness to survive most Australian pastoral conditions. However, it is not designed for the most arid of our regions, to which smaller breeds or fat tailed breeds are better adapted.

The breed’s ability to produce the earliest and heaviest lambs across trade specifications and before other haired breeds are able to do so, are traits essential to this breed’s purpose.

Only sheep recorded or registered with a recognised Australian White Sheep Society or Association are regarded as pure AW sheep.