

A brief history of the evolution of Australian shearing

Source: ABC

1788

Twenty-nine sheep survive the voyage from Cape Town and arrive in Sydney on the First Fleet. The yield is less than 500 grams of wool each.

1807

Rev Samuel Marsden takes a keg of wool to England and wears a suit made from it to visit King George III. 1811 2000kg of wool is exported.

1835

First authenticated daily record tally by Tom Merely who shears 30 sheep with blades in Western Australia.

1840

Sheep numbers in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) exceed 1 000 000. Wool prices plunge during a deep economic depression, sheep are slaughtered and rendered into tallow.

1866

T Millier Edgerley of Willaura in Victoria invents the shearing table.

1868

James Higham, a compositor from Melbourne patents a shearing machine on 2 March.

1877

Wolseley and Savage are granted a patent for a shearing machine and a rope drive machine developed at Euroka station near Walgett, New South Wales.

1882

Jack Gray is the first person to completely machine shear a sheep at Euroka station.

1886-87

Wolseley machine shearing is demonstrated around the country to the delight of woolgrowers and the horror of blade shearers.

1888

Dunlop station, at Louth in New South Wales, is the first large 'machine shed' with 40 Wolseley stands, Toganmain at Hay has fifteen machine stands amongst the blade shearers. 1891 A six-month strike by shearers centred around Barcaldine in Queensland cripples that state, New South Wales and Victoria.

1892

Record tally of 321 blade shorn at Alice Downs by Jack Howe.

1899

Christian Koerstz begins selling his Homestead and Squatter wool presses.

1900

Jimmy Power machine shears 315 at Barenya Station, but runs out of sheep before the end of the day.

1939

The British government guarantees to buy the entire Australian wool stockpile and annual clip for the duration of WWII at 13.5d per pound (22 cents per kg). To protect production shearers may not volunteer for war service.

1963

The Tally-hi shearing system is developed by the Australian Wool Corporation and promoted using synchronised shearing demonstrations.

1965

Kevin Sarre machine shears 346 at Penshurst, Victoria.

1969

At 923 287 000 kg, the biggest wool clip on record is harvested. Australia's sheep population exceeds a record 180 million.

1979

David Ryan shears 501 merino lambs at Penshurst, Victoria. The ORACLE developed by James Trevelyan at the University of Western Australia makes the first shearing blow by a robot on a live sheep.

1983

A ten-week strike over the use of wide combs on handpieces does not have the popular support of shearers. The union loses many members and wide combs eventually prevail.

1990

Merino Wool Harvesting of South Australia develops a sophisticated robot to partially shear sheep as part of an automated process. Economic recession in 1993 puts the company out of business.

1997

'Defleecing' experiments begun by the CSIRO in 1975 are finally commercialised as Bioclip, a viable alternative to machine shearing. 2002 Shear Outback and the Australian Shearers' Hall of Fame open in Hay, New South Wales, to honour and celebrate the contribution of shearers to Australian life.