AuctionsPlus Market Insights – West Australian Sheep Flock

By Teeah Bungey

The year 2020 has so far provided many significant moments for the Australian agricultural industry; including widespread rainfall over the East of the country which has proven to be the catalyst for record breaking stock movements across Australia. Between 1st January through to 30th April, 696,200 Western Australian sheep have travelled through the Ceduna checkpoint in South Australia. Demand for WA livestock has also resulted in a spike in online listings as buyers look to take advantage of the availability of larger lines and freight efficiencies. The AuctionsPlus Market Insights team has investigated historical data for sheep purchased and listed in Western Australia to assess the impact the eastern market demand has on the use of the online platform for WA producers.

Between January & April of this year, the number of sheep offered from WA totaled 119,347, more than double the online offering of the 2019 calendar year. Figure 1 displays the gradual increase in WA's offering since 2015, with spikes and dips largely following seasonal trends. The year 2016 saw an 80% increase in numbers, which can be attributed to, an increase in demand from the eastern markets for WA sheep and a push from Dean Hubbard, Elders WA Zone Livestock & Wool manager encouraging fellow agents to look beyond traditional selling methods and towards AuctionsPlus. Fast forward four years and the spike in numbers is significantly greater due to the drier start in WA and the contrast welcome rainfall in the East, seeing WA producers look online, many for the first time, to take advantage of the demand and strong prices. *"Up-take for AuctionsPlus in WA is growing, whilst currently the system is being used to market stock to eastern buyers, local agents and producers have been purchasing in sales such as the annual Elders WA Forward Lamb Sale"*, says Dean Hubbard, Elders WA Zone Livestock & Wool Manager.

Figure 1: Total purchases and listings on AuctionsPlus for Western Australia 2015 - 2020

As shown in figure 2, New South Wales has dominated the purchases of Western Australian sheep on AuctionsPlus since 2015. Richard Thomas, Nutrien Livestock Nyngan is one of the many NSW agents purchasing WA stock online in 2020. "*The majority of WA sheep purchased have gone into the local Nyngan and Brewarrina districts, with welcomed rainfall seeing producers looking to re-stock, approximately 50-60% of the area has restocked so far*" Richard said. Whilst for some looking for stock so far from home may be daunting for some, for Richard's clients "*sheep on offer from WA have been reasonably sized quality lines, which are currently hard to come by locally*".

Online results have seen WA sheep travelling up to 3,700kms to eastern states buyers. Richard describes the transporting process as a "*Two leg journey; the first leg sees stock transported from WA properties to a spelling facility at Nundaroo, located 300km from the WA border in South Australia. The sheep are unloaded at Nundaroo and spelled on hay and water with added electrolytes for a minimum of 24hrs. The second and final leg of the trip sees sheep loaded onto eastern states trucks to continue their journey to their new homes.*" With the trip taking around five days and costing between $30-$40/head it's a big factor for potential buyers to consider.
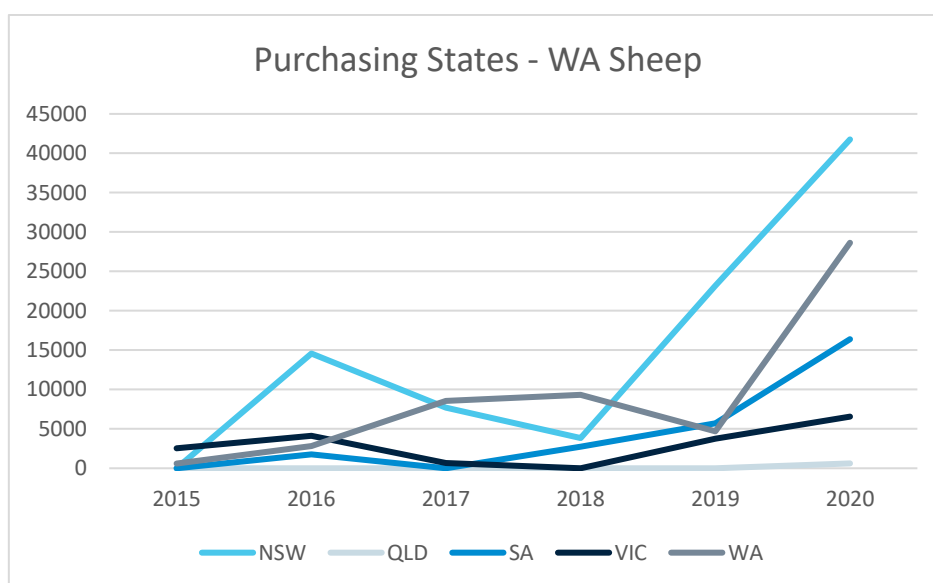

Figure 2: Top purchasing states for Western Australian sheep on AuctionsPlus 2015 - 2020

2020 has also seen many Western Australian sheep producers look to the online platform for the first time a result of the strong record-breaking prices being achieved online. Figure 3 shows the rise in prices being achieved for breeding ewes online.
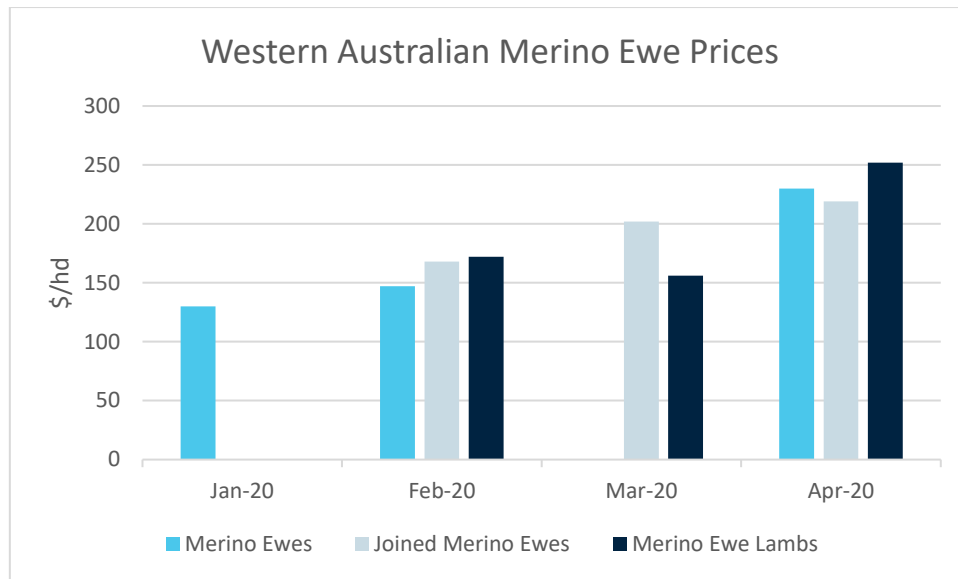
Figure 3: 2020 Merino ewe and ewe lamb prices on AuctionsPlus achieved for West Australian Sheep.

Keep an eye out for a continued increased Western Australian livestock presence online over the coming months as both agents and producers adjust to utilizing an alternative marketing and selling platform.