

'We want to see abundance and life on our farm' eight Australian growers take part in regenerative pilot programme

20 February 2024 – Australian wool growers are looking below the surface to secure the future of their properties in an Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) pilot through The New Zealand Merino Company's (NZM) regenerative wool-sourcing programme, ZQRX.

Australian Holistic Management Co-operative (AHMC) has conducted EOV monitoring to baseline eight ZQRX farms, spread around Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia. As well as the EOV monitoring, growers were invited to join in holistic management training to help aid their understanding of ways to improve soil health and function, leading to regenerating outcomes and further opportunities for improvement. The first stage of the pilot culminated with an in-depth soil health workshop at Mooralla Merinos in Victoria.

AHMC CEO, Helen Lewis, says that NZM's investment in EOV monitoring is an exciting step for its Australian growers.

"It's a tall order to make improvements without knowing where you are at. EOV allows a farmer to quantify the state of play and gives them the confidence to invest their efforts where they are needed.

"This group is special, the properties cover a diverse range of geographies, each with its own strengths and challenges, but they're all committed to the common goal of regenerating land. NZM has brought them together to engage with our experts, share learnings and support each other to try new things and make changes – with annual monitoring the growers will be able to quantify the improvements from the changes made" says Helen.

The assessment includes both short and long-term monitoring. Short-term sites are revisited annually. Long-term monitoring sites are revisited every five years to capture data on lagging indicators of soil health. EOV reports indicate an Ecological Health Index (EHI). If a grower receives an improving EHI, this indicates that the land is regenerating.

NZM brings together forward-thinking growers and the globally leading brands that value their wool. Its ZQRX programme was designed to acknowledge the work farmers do beyond what is needed for certification. NZM's Future Farming Manager, Monica Schwass, says that robust and globally recognised monitoring, such as EOV, provides the verified data leading brands need in the consumer market.

"Our global brand partners want to see regeneration. They want to know the wool they buy is doing good things for the world – not simply doing less harm. Most importantly, they want to be able to proudly share this with their customers and they're willing to invest in reportable data.

"NZM's EOV journey started with a similar pilot in New Zealand, six farms were baselined in 2020 and all of them have shown positively trending EHI scores. Off the back of that, one of our brand partners has invested in management training and monitoring for 30 more properties," says Monica.

While the potential brand support is crucial to expanding the programme, it is not the only motivation for the growers involved. Repeat EOV monitoring gives them proof that their efforts are working and confidence that their properties will be sustainable, environmentally and financially, for years to come.

Chris and Claire Headlam of Ratharney, Tasmania are motivated by the continual learning that comes from day-to-day farming and say that this pilot has helped them refine their big-picture goal to improve the landscape over time.

"We just spent a couple of days with a great group of like-minded growers in this programme. It was awesome for networking, talking about things that have worked – just to see the things people are doing and what's succeeding," says Chris.



"It's more of a holistic goal, things pop up day-to-day, decisions you have to make, but with a goal in mind, things become a lot simpler. You don't get distracted by the noise. When it comes down to it Chris and I agree that we want to see abundance on our farm, we want to see life," adds Claire.

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About The New Zealand Merino Company

Since its 1996 beginnings as industry-good organisation, Merino New Zealand, The New Zealand Merino Company (NZM) has been a champion of innovation and challenging the status quo.

Now the leading global marketer and seller of ethical wool, it fosters direct connections between growers and the world-leading brands that use their fibre. The NZM model offers stability and security against the volatility of the commodity market for both while striving for a better impact on the world.

NZM operates two wool sourcing programs, ZQ which sees growers meet world-leading fibre quality, animal welfare, environmental, and social responsibility standards, and ZQRX which goes a step beyond with its regenerative index designed to promote and support continuous improvement.

For more information, visit www.nzmerino.co.nz

About The Australian Holistic Management Co-operative

The Co-operative seeks to promote Holistic Management to enable thriving lives and landscapes. Its core activity is EOY (Ecological Outcome Verification) – a robust, scientific measurement of the health of farmland over time.

AHMC members have access to training, monitoring, branding, mentoring and field days. Its members produce meat, wool, wine, eggs, vegetables and fruit, and services such as education, media, art, landscaping and farm stays. AHMC also works with government and businesses on Australian and international ecological projects.

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