In 1999 I was invited with two others to become trustees in the establishment of a charitable trust supporting in cash and in kind the work of the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment at Sydney University. Principle asset of the trust is a grazing property near Cooma and the main enterprise a self replacing Merino flock of 4,500 ewes plus several ages of wethers. When seasons permit income is increased by cattle trading.

Having spent my working life as a breeder and seller of Merino rams and Angus bulls I was now a flock ram buyer. The property Coolringdon has been a client of our family's Hazeldean stud for many years where sire and ewe replacements and the grading of sale rams are determined according to ranking by a genetic performance index.

I propose in this short address to discuss some aspects of the impact this program can have for the woolgrower apart from increased fleece weights and improvements to wool quality.

A not so obvious advantage follows from the correlation between increased productivity and efficiency in conversion of pasture to product. From observations over time I also believe sheep become better able to digest a wider range of plant species and dry matter of lower quality as well as becoming less selective in grazing habit.

Today our knowledge and application of genetics has become so much more comprehensive and complex than it was 40 years ago when AAABG was born. In effect we have become the masters of evolution constantly fine tuning the adaptability of our flocks and herds to the management practices and environments we and Mother Nature supply. Furthermore as the cost of DNA fingerprinting has been substantially reduced we are recording accurate pedigrees for thousands of animals enabling progressive improvement in the predictability of index selection.

In a world of growing demand, increasing cost structures and the threats of climate change long term plans for Coolringdon can be summarised in three sections. Firstly to continue to strengthen economic viability, secondly to conserve environmental values and thirdly to promote the regeneration of species facing extinction. Improvement in environmental adaptation our livestock accompanied by the adoption of modern stock handling techniques provides management with greater flexibility in the deployment and stocking rates applied over the yearly cycle and therefore integration of the three objectives. In short our animals can become part of the solution rather than add to the problems.

With my best wishes for AAABG over the next 40 years and thanks to Keith and Stuart for the memories and companionship of 40 years ago.

Sincerely,

James Litchfield