

## McMEEKAN MEMORIAL AWARD

### Neville B Jopson

Neville Bruce Jopson grew up in Palmerston. After attending East Otago High School he went to Lincoln College in 1984 and graduated with an Honours degree in Agricultural Science in 1987. He subsequently studied for a PhD at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, Australia, under the joint supervision of Drs Peter Fennessy and John Thompson, graduating in 1993. In studying the seasonality in Red and Fallow deer, it comes as no surprise to learn that this work involved a considerable amount of development work with a computerized tomography (CT) scanner sparking his later involvement in the practical adoption of this technology.

Following his PhD, Neville shifted base to Norway as a Berge-Fondet Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Norwegian Agricultural University at Aas, using CT scanning to measure changes in body tissue in dairy goats. Neville returned to Invermay in 1994 on a New Zealand Science and Technology Post-Doctoral Fellowship and in 1996 was formally appointed as a scientist in AgResearch. In this position Neville was closely involved in the implementation of CT scanning in sheep, including examining lines of lean and fat sheep as part of a large quantitative trait loci (QTL) study as well as evaluating selection responses in those two lines. Another aspect of this work was the investigation of the inheritance and effects of the Carwell gene, which was subsequently publicly released as LoinMAX™. Other projects Neville undertook included investigating the implementation of dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scanning for yield measurement in meat plants, as well as developing a case for a sheep progeny testing programme to improve genetic linkages among industry sheep breeders. This programme is now the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Central Progeny Test.

In 2001 Neville took a position as consulting scientist in a newly established research and applied-science company, known then as Abacus Biotech Limited. Neville's role in the company increased with his additional appointment as a director and shareholder of AbacusBio Limited in 2006 with his subsequent promotion to Managing Director in April 2010. This is a key leadership role in a company that developed from a small niche consultancy business, to one that currently employs over 30 consultants and staff with a central focus on using science to create value through practical business solutions. Neville's primary responsibility is to ensure the company has the



resources to provide a quality service to their clients. However, he continues to work with farmers, businesses, industry bodies, and government to add value to agribusiness throughout the value chain. Neville's leadership and influence was recognised by him receiving an invitation to join the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture on a trade delegation to South American countries in 2012.

A second major contribution to New Zealand animal production is the leadership Neville provides in the management of the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Central Progeny Test. Neville's influence in this role is illustrated by the

evidence that the rate of genetic progress in the profitability index in recorded sheep breeding flocks has increased by 50% since the introduction of this industry progeny test structure. Recent developments that warrant mention include the introduction of accuracies for ram breeding values in the annual publications of the Central Progeny Test results, and inclusion of a hill country environment for a more appropriate evaluation of daughters of participating maternal sires.

Over the years, but particularly in the last five years, Neville has displayed an in-depth practical knowledge of animal physiology, growth, meat production and genetics, which he has coupled with a real appreciation of the importance of economic and technological applications for improving livestock production. This complex of interests is blended with a strong sense of commitment to New Zealand livestock breeders and producers. Neville is totally producer-friendly when it comes to talking with farmers, because he rightly believes that it's the scientist's responsibility to understand his audience as equals, and convey the message accordingly.

In short, Neville's leadership, by example and by influence, lies behind many of the developments and technological applications contributing to enhanced livestock performance and productivity, as well as incremental improvements in agricultural product value. He is an admirable example of the AbacusBio mission: "...to bridge the gap between scientific possibilities and practical applications in business". Accordingly, Neville is a most worthy recipient of this Society's McMeekan Memorial Award.

*Geoff Nicoll and Peter Amer*