British White Cattle Society of Australia Ltd

Newsletter - September Quarter 2026

Karingal British White herd. Photo by Janet Brooks

Society News Round-up

BRITISH WHITE CATTLE IN THE NEWS

Katie Jagger of Lallylee British White Stud, Foxground, has been breeding British White cattle since 2021. Picture by Jessica Owers.

On 7 September 2026 The Land featured an article "Commercial advantage: the old cattle breed making a quiet comeback" about the British White Cattle breed in Australia. Members with a digital subscription to any of the ACM Agri mastheads (The Land, QCL, Stock and Land etc) can access the article on line. The article by Jessica Owers is gratefully reproduced here for the benefit of members and our newsletter subscribers.

"In the rainfall-rich district of Foxground, on the state's south coast, Katie Jagger's herd of British White cattle has grown fourfold in five years.

From just nine individuals, bought from the Mid North Coast during COVID, to nearly 35 today, the herd is a small but necessary contribution to

Australia's British White population, 784 at last count.

"I recently had someone buy three from me as a starter herd in the Southern Highlands," Ms Jagger said.

"I'm hoping that might happen more because they are beautiful cattle."

The British White, one of the oldest native breeds to the United Kingdom, was first introduced to Australia in 1958, and today the herd numbers 688 females and 96 bulls.

A 'heritage breed', albeit also classed a 'rare breed' with Rare Breeds Trust of Australia, they are robust cattle and, according to Ms Jagger, surprisingly suited to Australian conditions.

"Their colouring is really beneficial because they don't get too hot, but they also have the dark skin underneath, which I've found makes them resistant to sunburn and skin cancers," she said.

"For me, that's something to be noted because I know of several cows in this valley recently lost to skin cancers."

British Whites are known for their white coat and distinctive black points on the muzzle, nose, ears, eye areas and legs, with a black tongue preferred. They have good docility, bred for temperament and a low birth weight, with strong maternal characteristics.

In Australia, their numbers have suffered from commercial apathy, something the British White Cattle Society of Australia, and its president John Miller, are trying to counter.

"There are people who have them because they love them, and people who have them because they're a rare breed, but we need to grow the breed commercially," Mr Miller said.

"We need to get more people interested in them as a commercial option, as opposed to your hobby-type cattle, and we know they will never sell as well as Angus, but nothing sells as well as Angus these days."

Current Angus data in Australia presents a compelling picture for Angus, and the opposite for breeds trying to cut into its market.

Angus genetics influence up to 53 per cent of the total Australian beef herd, while pure Angus accounts for about 38pc of the national purebred share.

Of the total Australian bull population, 71pc is pure or predominantly Angus.

Mr Miller, who farms 45 British White females west of Grafton, said while he didn't expect the breed to ever compete with Angus, he also didn't see why it shouldn't.

"British Whites are very good doing cattle, very well-tempered and fertile, and have all the attributes to be commercial," he said.

"We appreciate they're a heritage breed with a very old genetic line, but we want people to have them because they will give you commercial performance."

In her 2025 book, Saving Heritage Breeds: A Love Story, author and University of Western Australia adjunct research fellow Catie Gressier observed the consequences of a livestock industry honed in on high-yield breeds.

She found the extinction rate alarming, stating unique breeds had vanished at the rate of one a month for more than three decades. At least 184 breeds, or close to 10pc of livestock breeds globally, were now extinct, and in Australia, 12 cattle breeds had disappeared.

Judy Barnet, managing director of Rare Breeds Trust of Australia, said maintaining genetic diversity by keeping rare breeds created future options for Australian agriculture.

She said British White cattle were a perfect example of why rare breeds mattered, and why their traits - natural polling, docility, easy calving and hardiness - were more important than just history.

"The difficulty is that a British White breeder doesn't have the same enormous established market that an Angus breeder has," Ms Barnet said.

"If you are making a purely commercial decision today, it can be very difficult to justify maintaining a small rare breed when a mainstream breed may offer an easier and more immediate financial return.

"But if everyone makes that same decision, eventually the British White disappears, and with it we lose those genetics forever, and we can't wait until agriculture needs a particular trait and then decide we should have conserved the breed that carried it."

For Mr Miller, the challenge was keeping the British White relevant, with the ultimate target the saleyards, which could only happen with commercial numbers.

He said abattoirs weren't interested in small orders, which left the breed in the 'paddock-to-plate' or service kill category, with only a few mobile butchers servicing breeders.

"We've seen it in Victoria where the cattle are

having to go longer and longer distances for butchering," Mr Miller said.

"There is some real work getting done in Victoria to get farm accreditation for butchering, and NSW is falling behind, but it's a legislative minefield.

"The sort of testing you have to do works on high volumes, not on small volumes, which makes it very difficult to butcher those small groups of animals, and when it comes to the meat works, they don't want you bringing in two or three animals; they want you bringing in a B-double."

At Foxground, Ms Jagger isn't breeding for the meat works. She said she was potentially interested in using her British White herd for hybrid vigour.

"They actually perform really well in that space," she said.

"When you cross an Angus with a British White, or a British White with a dairy breed, together they can perform almost better than the individual, and I've had a little trial of that and already my calves are almost bigger than some of their mums."

This was an avenue Mr Miller said was quite popular with breeders.

"We've had some success with this, encouraging people to use their British White bulls with dairy herds to get some better attributes into a fairly slim genetic line in the dairy herd," he said.

"If you're prepared to step back a bit from conventional cattle and get animals that do well, are well-tempered and easy to work with, the British Whites are a magnificent animal for that."

HERD DISPERSAL

Steph Schultz of Bonnie Park British White Stud. Photo Supplied

BWCSA member Stephanie Schultz of Bonnie Park British White Cattle stud has commenced an ordered dispersal of the majority of her herd.

While remaining devoted to the breed, and justifiably proud of the 40 odd head herd she built since establishing her stud in 2021, health issues and work commitments have driven this difficult decision.

Steph's herd will be one of the studs visited as part of our 2026 Annual General Meeting Sunday program presenting an ideal opportunity to view the cattle on offer.

In the News

Here's a snap shot of industry headlines making news relevant to members and producers generally.

RARE BREEDS TRUST – CURRENT LIVESTOCK OPPORTUNITIES

The Rare Breeds Trust of Australia has developed a new livestock availability function on its Livestock Breeder Directories page. Open to financial members of the Trust it provides an important additional outlet for breeders to sell their livestock.

Financial members of the Rare Breeds Trust of Australia with specific rare breed livestock for sale, can email rbtabreederdirectories@gmail.com to have the animal details listed. Advertisers can also include links to on-line auction sites if the animal is also listed there. Listings are also promoted on the Trust's social media platforms.

TECHNOLOGY AND CLIMATE FRIENDLY MEAT?

A recent article on ABC featured this rather startling image of new "wearable head gear" for cattle. However, there is a serious rationale behind the apparel. With the Australian cattle industry comprising part of agriculture and livestock farming asserted by the Australian Climate Council to produce nearly 65 per cent of Australian methane emissions, there are hopes devices such as these can paint a clearer idea

Methane Detection Rubber sock developed by Zelp.

of the cattle industry's contested contribution to emissions.

The neoprene waterproof sock developed by ZELP Sense fits over the animal's head and measures methane emissions in real time.

It is hoped the device can; assist in providing a clearer indication of what the beef cattle industry's emissions actually are, demonstrate steps taken by the industry towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and help producers validate mitigation techniques such as genetic selection for low methane emission and the efficacy of feed supplements such as asparagopsis.

Feature Article

Robertsonian Translocation (Rob 1;29) – Lessons from Spain

British White Cows. Photo by Janet Brooks

BACKGROUND

Robertsonian Translocation (Rob 1;29) (RT) is a chromosomal abnormality first described in Swedish Red and White cattle (a dairy breed) in 1964. RT was subsequently detected in multiple cattle breeds with one of the highest incidences being detected in the UK British White herd in 1975.

Robertsonian translocation Rob(1;29) describes the fusion of the 1st and 29th chromosomes. The most commonly accepted origin hypothesis, supported by subsequent detailed genotypic studies, is the abnormality arose some thousands of years ago in a common ancestor prior to the establishment of the various cattle breeds known today. Cattle with the abnormality appear normal in every respect and RT is only detected by specific analysis of the complete set of an individual's chromosomes (karyotype).

RT is of concern because it is associated with a reduction in fertility. This effect is due the potential formation of unbalanced zygotes (single cell formed from an egg and sperm cell) when the sire and/or dam are carriers of the

abnormality. The resulting embryos are unviable, aborted and the cow continues to cycle until a viable zygote is formed and implanted.

Despite knowing about the high incidence of RT in British Whites since 1975, no action had been taken by either the UK, American or Australian breed societies prior to 2008. In that year, Dr Ian Holmes, made a presentation at a General Meeting. With the assistance of Dr Graham Webb, a geneticist from Adelaide School of Veterinary Science, karyotyping of some Australian herds subsequently confirmed an alarmingly high incidence of RT (over 80% in one herd). In response, the BWCSA formulated a plan that aimed to gradually reduce the incidence of this chromosomal abnormality within the Australian herd. The key components of this plan were:

1. Only bulls verified free of RT were to be registered
2. The society subsidised RT testing of bulls for a period of two years
3. Previously registered bulls of unknown status or carrying RT remained in the herdbook
4. Registration of A grade bulls free of RT was reintroduced for a period of two years
5. Genotypic parent verification for animals known to be RT free was introduced to allow registration of offspring with determined RT-free status without need for expensive karyotyping.

This plan has now been in place for more than 15 years resulting in a significant reduction in the incidence of RT within the Australian. It is useful to reflect on the approach adopted by the BWCSA in the light of recent published experience describing a similar approach adopted by the breed societies of three indigenous Spanish breeds over the past 20-30 years (1, 2).

SPANISH EXPERIENCE

These two recently published studies from Spain address two frequently raised concerns amongst Australian breeders in regard to the Society's approach to RT. In particular, whether the gains in reproductive efficiency are worthwhile and secondly whether the approach is having a negative impact on the genetic diversity of the Australian herd.

Jiménez et al. analyse 30 years of data from the Retinta Breed Society and attempt to:

- Describe the evolution in the incidence of RT over 30 years in a population selected against carrier individuals.
- Determine the effect of RT on fertility in beef cattle raised under extensive field conditions.

González-Cano et al. evaluate the effects on genetic diversity of selecting against RT in the Berrenda Negra and Berrenda Roja breeds.

The Retinta breed is an indigenous breed from

Retinta cow and calf

the south and south-east of Spain known for its longevity and survival in marginal pasture lands in a dry, hot climate. In 1991 as part of an official breeding program aimed at enhancing these desirable traits, the Retinta Breeders Association decided that only bulls tested free of RT would be used and this practice has continued ever since. Jiménez et al. analysed karyotypes (5,721 animals with test results and a further 137,025 determined by breeding), reproductive data and pedigrees, and found a reduction in the incidence of RT from over 15% to around 1% over the 30 years. A slow but steady increase in reproductive efficiency in the breed as a whole was also observed over this period. The RT carrier cows had a small but significant reduction in reproductive efficiency compared with RT-free and RT homozygous cows. The reduction was around 5% and comparable to the effect of advanced maternal age and inbreeding. The authors concluded that exclusion of heterozygous ("59") and homozygous ("58") bulls from breeding programs without culling RT-effected cows was able to reduce the incidence of the condition 15-fold and contribute to increased fertility of the breed without notorious reduction in the census or genetic variability of the breed.

The Berrenda en Colorado (BC) and Berrenda en Negro (BN) are respectively red and black varieties of a unique indigenous breed from the south of Spain each with its own breed society. Both breeds are regarded as endangered native Spanish Breeds. They are regarded as a valuable genetic resource with significant cultural, social and environmental value and in particular are valued as the ideal choice for meat production

in extensive livestock farming sites of high environmental value.

Berrenda en Negro bull

Currently, there are 3061 registered BC females in 73 herds and 5,390 registered BN females in 140 herds. The breed associations developed breeding programs aimed at improving the low reproductive performance of the two breeds, regarded as a significant impediment to conserving the breed. This program included testing for RT to eliminate carrier sires with the result that the RT incidence declined from 18 to 8% for BC and 47% to 11% for BN between 2009 and 2019.

Concerns were raised about the impact of such an intense selective strategy on the genetic diversity and level of inbreeding of these relatively small breeds. González-Cano et al. analysed SNP genetic markers to evaluate for genetic diversity in carrier and non-carrier populations. They found slightly higher genetic variability in the RT carriers of the BC breed but not the BN breed. Overall, the authors thought it wise for Berrenda breeders to apply gentler selection pressure against RT than had been done with the Retinta breed because of the much smaller herd size. They recommended elimination of homozygous male carriers only, mating of heterozygous carriers with RT-free animals only and the development of easier-to-implement methods for the diagnosis of RT (a SNP-based genotypic method is currently being studied as an alternative to expensive karyotyping).

A reduction in the incidence of RT was thought to contribute positively to the conservation of these two threatened cattle breeds not only by improving their reproductive performance but also by increasing their effective population size in the medium and long term

IMPLICATIONS FOR BWCSA

The findings reported in these two papers makes fascinating reading for our breed society in reviewing the impact of the initiatives taken to address RT in the Australian BW herd. The information gleaned from these studies involves much larger numbers of animals and much more comprehensive data collection in relation to reproductive efficiency and genetic diversity than is available to our Society. It is thus useful when reviewing our past approach and future directions in managing RT in the Australian British White herd. Importantly, the cattle studied are being raised under extensive grazing conditions and under environmental conditions comparable to large parts of Australia. In addition, at least in the case of the Berrenda breeds, the herd size is relatively small.

Exclusion of bulls carrying RT from breeding led to a dramatic reduction in the incidence of RT over a period of 30 years in the Retinta breed and a significant reduction in the incidence over 10 years in the BC and BN breeds. This confirms that the policies adopted by the BWCSA were an appropriate initiative to gradually reduce the incidence of RT over a period of decades. Furthermore, the studies support the premise that, even under extensive grazing conditions, reduction of incidence of RT contributes in a small but significant way to improving fertility. It is important to remind ourselves that fertility is however multifactorial and highly dependent on other genetic factors, maternal age and especially nutrition and environmental conditions.

Berrenda en Colorado cow and calf

These articles also raise concerns about the unintended loss of genetic variability within threatened herds by over-aggressive responses to reducing the incidence of RT. Retaining females carrying RT within breeding programs is one way to reduce this risk. Unfortunately, this requires expenditure of time and money in arranging karyotyping of the offspring of these animals. For this reason, many Australian breeders made a decision to aggressively cull RT-carrier females despite this not being mandated or

encouraged by The Society. These actions may have had the unintended consequence of reducing genetic diversity within our herd. The development of cheaper, easy genotyping methods of detecting RT, as currently being investigated by researchers led by Dr Alessandra Iannuzzi at the Institute for the Animal Production Systems in the Mediterranean Environment (ISPAAM) in Italy, may make this option of retaining RT-carrier females more attractive in the future. To assist in these efforts, the BWCSA has recently started discussing options to collaborate and share RT data with ISPAAM.

Efforts by BW breeders in Australia to enhance genetic diversity within our herds whilst reducing the incidence of RT are also challenged by the lack of action in regard to RT by sister societies in the UK and America. Although, a number of breeders in those societies are concerned about RT and its possible contribution to observed fertility issues, the expense and limited access to karyotyping, together with reputational concerns about publicising a potential genetic abnormality that impacts fertility, have meant that no action has been taken at a breed society level overseas. The BWCSA, taking these issues into account, recently modified its regulations creating an appendix register to facilitate use of overseas sperm and embyros from untested or known RT-carriers but with the proviso that offspring would only be eligible for registration in the Australian herdbook if confirmed RT free.

Overall, the BWCSA can be proud of its achievements over the past 15 years in addressing the reputation risk for the breed posed by RT. It needs to continue to evaluate progress via annual censuses and ensure that reduction in the incidence of RT does not come at the price of reduced genetic diversity within the Australian herd. Technical progress in evaluating animals in RT may greatly assist these efforts in the future.

REFERENCES AND LINKS

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In the Herd

Welcome to "In the Herd" our spotlight on individual members and their British White Cattle journeys.

Father and Daughter team believe British White's grass finished meat quality is key

Craig Cross was a self-confessed "townie", with no experience of cattle breeding when he moved from Alice Springs to northeast Victoria in 2011 and bought 150 acres of farmland in Indigo Valley. But unbeknownst, even to him, he had a superpower up his sleeve.

That great business asset came in the form of his daughter, Tabatha, aged eight at the time, who took to the cattle game like a duck to water. Today "Tabby" plays a key role in not only the family's Nanthes Park stud, but in the industry across the region. Tabby started showing cattle when she was 13, is now a judge and also the administrative supervisor at the huge Northern Victorian Livestock Exchange at Barnawartha.

She has been instrumental in one of Nanthes Park's guiding priorities – to keep a keen eye on the stud's cattle in order to continually improve the quality of the stud's breeding stock, by culling any calves or weaners that are not up to the highest standard, and constantly focussing on refining the genetic pool.

Starting predominantly with Ravenswood and Darnum Park Genetics, Craig says "we have invested heavily into a semen and embryo collection from our cattle to not only preserve the breed's genetics but make them available to more producers". His goal is to get the word out

Craig Cross from Nanthes Park British White. Supplied

about the quality of British Whites, and encourage more people to take them on.

Still, British Whites remain a niche market, he says. "The small national herd size doesn't allow for the breed to be commercially comparable to other larger breeds, so it's important to focus on their key traits such as fertility, temperament, eating quality and doing ability. They are what makes the breed stand out in the industry."

The first cattle they purchased were three British White cows from Darnum Park. Since then, they have grown the herd to what it is today, 50 beasts altogether, 20 of them breeders and calves.

Nanthes Park has been so successful that a few years ago they were unable to meet the demand for their heifers, and buyers had to go on a wait list.

While Craig appreciates British Whites' cute looks and manageable temperament, his commercial priority from the get-go centred around the breed's edibility. "British Whites have a great place in the paddock-to-plate, direct to consumer market," he says, and the original intention to run a paddock to plate operation was a prime consideration in choosing them. "We were looking for a moderate framed breed that was easy to manage and produced quality grass-fed beef," Craig says.

Performance in the beef market remains a number one principle: "Our objectives are to breed quality cattle that produce a top-quality grass-fed meat product. Over the years we have been selective in structure, fertility and carcass attributes in our cattle. Looking to the future we want to continue to breed British White cattle that can perform in the current beef industry, while continuing to advance our genetics.

Consumers of Nanthes Park produce comment favourably on the flavour of the meat, Craig says, and an important part of the British White story is that they do really well on grass: "If you've got good grass, you've got great beef.

"British Whites are a later maturing breed and hence we like to grow our steers out to 18 months on grass. Our steers for our direct meat sales are two years old and 500kg live weight."

He sends his animals to a nearby abattoir, and the meat goes to the local butcher, who sell half sides to buyers on agreement at a flat rate per kilo, regardless of the cut.

Craig and Tabby are grateful to be a part of the British White Cattle Society for a number of reasons.

"The work that Society members have done with their paddock-to-plate businesses to promote the breed and the quality meat has been great to see

evolve over the years," he says.

And the connection with other Society members has even been vital to the survival of their business. In 2015, with bushfires burning across the farm, Ian and Debbie Holmes of Ravenswood stud took Nanthes' breeders off their hands and cared for them until they could be safely returned. And last year, with the drought intensifying, Denis and Janet Brooks of Karingal British White stud were similarly open-armed, looking after a number of cows and saving Nanthes from having to sell them.

"The Society has always been welcoming and supportive of new breeders, and we have made some great friends along the way," Craig says.

"It's been a great journey so far," adds Tabby, before heading off to get on with her day job.

Events

MARK YOUR CALENDAR – 2026 BWCSA AGM AT DARNUM, VIC

Mark your calendar for the next BWCSA Annual General Meeting and an action-packed day of shared learning on the Sunday.

Rod Cameron of Darnum Park British White stud will host the 2026 Annual General Meeting on Saturday 17 October 2025 at Darnum, Victoria.

Don't rush off after the meeting because there's an exciting array of activities planned for Sunday 18th October. Inspect the magnificent herd Rod Cameron has spent over two decades perfecting as well as that of Steph Schultz of Bonnie Park stud. Rod, who owned and ran Cameron Genetics will perform an artificial insemination demonstration and we will run a bull assessment workshop using the Society's recently developed Bull Assessment Guideline

Looking forward to seeing you there!

BEEF 2027 – STUD CATTLE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Nominations for the Beef 2027 Stud Cattle Competition open shortly. More than 1,500 entries from over 28 breeds are expected. Further details can be found here.

CATTLE CONNECT 2026

Cattle Australia is hosting this national event at Charles Sturt University on October 22-23, 2026. The theme is "Shaping Tomorrow: Innovation. Leadership. Action. It includes field days and exhibitions

BEEF 2027 – NATIONAL BEEF CARCASE COMPETITION

Considered nominating for the AMPC National Beef Carcase Competition at Beef 2027? There are classes for both pasture fed and grain fed steers or heifers in three weight ranges. The competition provides valuable feedback on compliance with market specifications. Entrants can deliver their entries over a 12 month period from 1 Jan 2026 to 31 January 2027 to participating processors. Further details can be found here.

Share the news!

We'd love to hear what you think should be shared in our monthly newsletter!

Send ideas and links to stories to us at news@britishwhitecattleaustralia.com.au