Breeding commercially relevant cattle is the aim of the game for Glen Fosslyn Droughtmasters and BREEDPLAN plays a major role in helping them to accomplish this. As founding members of Droughtmaster GROUP BREEDPLAN, the Salter’s have demonstrated a long-term commitment to performance recording.

Alongside sons Cameron and Shaun and their respective families, David and Betty Salter operate Glen Fosslyn Droughtmaster Stud, founded in 1988. Stretched over five properties in the Glenmorgan/Surat area of southern Queensland and Glen Innes/Guyra district of northern New South Wales, the Salters run up to 3000 Droughtmaster cattle, including about 1000 Droughtmaster females. Of these, about 250 are regarded as stud females and run in six single-sire mated mobs. The remainder comprises the commercial breeding herd which is run in mobs of 150 cows, multiple-sire mated with four or five bulls.

The Salter’s describe the value of BREEDPLAN in their enterprise in dollar terms, primarily through increased production in their females and higher growth rates in their bulls and commercial bullocks. They identified the potential value in improved growth rate in their cattle some 15-18 years ago during AMH feed trials, leading them to focus on increasing productivity in their commercial herd.

Their use of EBVs as a tool to genetically improve growth rate in their herd has resulted in Glen Fosslyn’s average whole of herd EBVs for 200, 400 and 600 day weight lying within the top 15% of the breed for 200 day weight and top 10% of the breed for 400 and 600 day weight.

Figure 1. depicts how Glen Fosslyn’s average EBVs for 200, 400 and 600 day weight compare to the 2006 Droughtmaster breed average.
A Practical Approach to BREEDPLAN

At Glen Fosslyn, the Salter’s combine the use of EBVs with good cattle sense in their selection decisions. To quote David Salter, “BREEDPLAN is just another spanner in the toolbox, not the big shifter.” They advocate that cattle must have the correct physical traits for structure and fertility before the consideration of BREEDPLAN figures.

Replacement stud females are selected from within the core stud herd, although a small number of desirable females may be selected from the commercial herd. The EBVs of potential replacement females need to fall within the range that Glen Fosslyn find acceptable, which, for the weight traits, is ideally above breed average. In their quest for above average growth, the Salter’s have become mindful of an associated increase in cow mature size in their herd. As a result, one of their current breeding objectives is to try and “cap” it by selecting for good growth to 600 days but setting an upper limit on Mature Cow Weight EBVs.

Heifers are joined for the first time at 12-13 months of age and culled if they do not produce a calf from this first mating. The Salter’s attribute their 88-92% weaning rate to this pressure they put on females at a young age, thereby selecting for fertility and early puberty. The Salter’s follow the adage of “selecting on milk figures to suit your environment,” and believe that -2 to +2 is the optimum Milk EBV range for females in the majority of the country where their females are running.

The Salter’s admit that the relatively small number of stud breeders participating in Droughtmaster GROUP BREEDPLAN means there are limitations within the breed when it comes to sourcing new genetics.
with EBVs. Therefore, they have tended to retain a small percentage of their own bulls for within-herd use. Bulls selected as potential stud sires, including bulls introduced from other herds, are used for one season in the stud herd and then used in the commercial herd until the Salter’s make an evaluation of how his calves are performing before he is used further in the stud operation.

Glen Fosslyn has stringent requirements for scrotal size and semen quality. In their selection of sires, they place great emphasis on Scrotal Size EBVs when the information is available to them. In their breeding operation, they are striving to genetically improve scrotal size through the use of objective measurement and EBVs. All Glen Fosslyn sale bulls are semen tested and those with scrotal measures less than 32cm are not offered for sale. Bulls with measures less than 33cm or greater than 44cm are semen morphology tested.

**Collecting Performance Records**

Glen Fosslyn annually record 200, 400 and 600 day weights on all of their calves as well as mature cow weights on their cows. Although they would like to measure birth weight, the extensive nature of their operation and rough terrain in their breeding country makes it too difficult to do so. All bulls are measured for scrotal size and ultrasound scanned prior to sale. Joining records are also maintained for future submission to BREEDPLAN for the calculation of Days to Calving EBVs.

The Salter’s have strict selection for temperament and without EBVs for this trait, rely on visual attributes and experience to detect and cull out poor temperament animals from the herd.

![Bulls](image)

**Making the Information Available to Clients**

Glen Fosslyn staged their first Inaugural Annual Droughtmaster Bull Sale at Roma in September 2006. Despite ongoing drought conditions and the stud’s first time selling as a single vendor, the sale was a strong success, with a clearance of 88 bulls from 93 offered, for an average of $4,670, topping twice at $13,000.
Most of Glen Fosslyn’s bulls are sold to commercial clients in west/north-west Queensland and the south-west corner, whose main production focus is finishing bullocks for the grassfed market. The bulls are sold on average at 22 months of age after preparation on grass and oats to a target weight range 740kg – 810kg.

Glen Fosslyn utilise a number of avenues to best inform and educate their clients about the cattle they are offering for sale and the EBV information presented. Queensland’s inaugural Beef Week in 2006 provided an opportunity for Glen Fosslyn to showcase their stock and better understand the requirements of their buyers, with some success.

Their clear, concise and aesthetically pleasing web site http://www.glenfosslyn.com.au is full of information about Glen Fosslyn’s operation and includes a simple explanation of BREEDPLAN EBVs and their philosophy on its application in their herd. At bull sale time, the Salter’s add a “Pre-Sale Sire Selector” which enables interested parties to view and search for particular animals with the sale draft which meet their breeding requirements.

Finally, Glen Fosslyn display the EBVs of their bulls in their sale catalogue, as exemplified below in Figure 2. In addition to the traditional table of EBVs, they have opted to display their EBVs in a graphical format which plots an animal’s EBV for each trait relative to the breed average and the Droughtmaster percentile bands. This user-friendly approach assists buyers to quickly assess the genetic merit of each bull in relation to the rest of the breed.

![Figure 2. Example Extract of Two Bull Lots from Glen Fosslyn’s 2006 Sale Catalogue.](image-url)
The Future

The Salter family of Glen Fosslyn Droughtmasters are strong supporters of BREEDPLAN technology and are an excellent example of a producer using EBVs to their full potential as a within-herd selection tool in addition to a marketing tool. Their investment in performance recording has paid dividends in their operation and they believe that their commercial clients are beginning to pay more attention to EBVs. This may serve to give them a competitive advantage over studs selling bulls without EBVs in the future. In the 2007 selling year they will offer 100 performance recorded bulls. The Salter’s hope other Droughtmaster breeders recognise the benefits of BREEDPLAN and become involved in performance recording, for the genetic advancement of the breed.