



24 September 2007

Letter to the Editor

TIME FOR MULESING COMMONSENSE

Dear Sir/Madam

Australian woolgrowers need commonsense solutions to the current Mulesing issue. Animal welfare should be the prime consideration in the development of any mulesing alternatives, followed then by practicality, effectiveness & cost.

Congratulations to the positive leadership shown by the Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders, which has endorsed mulesing with pain relief, up to & beyond 2010, as a humane alternative to conventional mulesing. (Will Roberts, The Land letters 20/9/07)

This position is backed by the CSIRO study reported in the Australian Veterinary Journal in March 2007, which determined that analgesia can alleviate the pain response of lambs to mulesing.

The compact signed with US retailers in 2005, included the following points;

Point 1 The Australian Wool & Sheep Industry (Task Force) aspires to produce wool in a way which alleviates animal discomfort to the greatest extent practicable,

Point 5 The Task Force has resolved that mulesing will be phased out by the end of 2010 or sooner if viable alternatives become available prior to that date.

Point 6 In the meantime, The Task Force will adopt the use of painkilling products when such products are proven to be efficacious, practical to administer & commercially available.

Feedback from woolgrowers who have used the prototype mulesing clip show that there are problems with this technology. Unfortunately the clips cause the sheep significant discomfort. They are slow to administer successfully (around 300 lambs per day), & require skilled operators & special cradles. To retrieve the clips, lambs need to be re-handled again within 2 weeks of application.

Without pain relief, the prototype clip will fail Point 1 of the agreement with US retailers, as it does not alleviate animal discomfort. The clip may also fail Point 5 as it is unlikely to be commercially viable because of cost & problems associated with application & retrieval.

However, the Australian wool industry does have the opportunity to fulfil the promised Point 6 of the agreement with retailers to use currently available painkilling products, until other viable alternatives are developed. This will include selection for merinos that do not need mulesing (C.Massy "Wrinkle free solution" The Land letters 20/9/07), remembering that major genetic changes usually take at least 5-10 years.

Any viable alternative to conventional mulesing must reduce animal discomfort, be effective, practical & low cost. Commonsense must prevail & solutions such as pain relief with mulesing should be encouraged, so that woolgrowers can have confidence to start re-building the Australian merino flock.

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