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UK heat off mulesing

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BRITISH retailers are no longer telling Australian wool growers to stop mulesing. But they want to be informed of what practices are being used on farms, in an effort to appease animal activist groups such as PETA.

In what appears to be a softening of the strong stance adopted by retailers six years ago, the British Retail Consortium - which represents most of UK's largest and most influential retailers - wants to put the onus back on to farmers. The BRC was instrumental in negotiating the now defunct 2010 deadline for the end of mulesing.

BRC sustainability policy officer Catherine Pazderka told The Weekly Times the mulesing issue was just one of several animal welfare and environmental battles affecting food, furnishing and apparel retailers.

Ms Pazderka said the list included cotton and child labour; palm oil and orangutangs; fur and harp seals; furniture and rainforests; fishing and deep-sea trawling.

Ms Pazderka said retailers no longer used the terminology "corporate social responsibility" but would rather be seen as retailers caring for the environment, animal welfare and fair trade issues.

She agreed the mulesing issue was currently relatively quiet. "But it is an issue which can flare at any time," she said.

"Images of mulesing can go very 'tabloidy' for a week over here and of course the retailers get very nervous."

Ms Pazderka said retailers wanted to be able to back up claims that their product was made from wool from non-mulesed sheep. "But without transparency through the wool pipeline it is very difficult to justify their claims," she said.

"That is why we are calling for more transparency and use of the National Wool Declaration."

Ms Pazderka said it was hard to estimate how many consumers were really concerned about animal welfare and environment issues.

But there were many consumers who would buy from a particular retailer if they knew that retailer was trying to do the right thing.

She said there were those retailers who see a marketing advantage in promoting their credentials on animal welfare and environmental issues.

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<http://australianwoolgrowers.com.au/>

Source: http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2011/08/10/366691_business-news.html