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Bales head to Hollywood

GIVEN what mulesing has done for the Australian wool industry in recent years, the decision to place wool products in a Hollywood movie called How To Lose Friends And Alienate People sounds ominous.

Decades of declining demand for Australian wool thanks to competition from cotton and synthetics, poor marketing and, more recently, mulesing has left the wool industry desperate to lift itself out of the doldrums.

Although Australia dominates the global wool trade, co-ordinated wool promotion has almost disappeared since growers first voted to pay a levy of sixpence on each bale in 1936 to promote the product internationally.

Yesterday the industry said it would spend \$120 million over the next three years to reacquaint consumers with the stuff modern Australia is said to be built on the back of - which is still produced by 55,000 Australian farmers.

The Woolmark logo that has appeared on 2 billion garments since 1964 will be rejuvenated with the aim of establishing fine Australian merino as the world's luxury fibre of choice. "We have got to get higher prices to make our farms sustainable," said Don Hamblin, the head of the grower's organisation WoolProducers.

A new logo has been created for "Australian Merino", which will designate a fibre comprised 100 per cent of what its name suggests and targeted exclusively at "high end" fashion. It will be "offered only to the world's most discerning designers". How To Lose Friends And Alienate People, a movie starring Gillian Anderson and Kirsten Dunst about the kind of high-end crowd the wool industry would love to see constantly draped in expensive Australian Merino threads, is due out in October.

Wool growers believe that in a world worried about climate change and the environment there has never been a better time to promote a fibre that is natural, sustainable and biodegradable.

Growers are looking forward to a marketing campaign after years of legal battles against the United States animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which uses images of bloodied backsides of sheep to encourage retailers and consumers to boycott mulesed Australian wool.

Chick Olsson, a Goulburn grower and board member of the research body Australian Wool Innovation, said millions of dollars that could have been spent on marketing had been wasted on fighting animal rights groups over mulesing campaigns.

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