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Wool on show during Royal visit

AUSTRALIAN wool took centre stage alongside Campaign for Wool patron HRH Prince Charles during his visit to Tasmania yesterday.

The Prince of Wales visited the Thornbury family's Leenavale Merino stud near Sorell, in the state's south east, while the Duchess of Cornwall lunched with women in agriculture.

Sporting a grey wool suit with a white pinstripe, the Prince quizzed the Thornburys – Kevin, Brenton and Jason – about their enterprise.

The Thornburys' own Leenavale, a 2000-hectare property carrying 6500 superfine Merinos, producing 16.8-micron wool and stud Merino rams. It also has a 120-sow Wessex Saddleback outdoor piggery.

The family also leases Fulham, a 1600ha farm running 4500 larger-framed Merinos producing 18M wool.

The Prince was given a tour through the sheeyards, where 200 of the Thornburys' wethers were being shorn.

He saw Tasmanian shearers Josh Hazelwood, Bruce Rowland and Darren Byers in action with the handpiece and received a lesson in wool handling, classing and pressing from rouseabouts Lucy Byers and Matt Tattersall, wool classer Gerry Balding and wool presser Brendon Spaulding.

He then met about 60 guests at an Australian Wool Innovation function at the property, including wool industry leaders and Tasmanian woolgrowers.

Today he will attend a second event showcasing Australian wool in design and fashion with industry representatives in Sydney. It is hoped he will make a statement about the future of the Campaign for Wool.

Stud founder Kevin met the Prince when he arrived and introduced him to his sons who now manage the property.

He said the Prince asked about the stud's direction and the Kelpie sheepdogs that were working in the yards.

"He threw a fleece but he must have thrown one before because it did come out very well," he said. "I'm not sure whether he was goaded into picking it up or he volunteered."

AWI chief executive Stuart McCullough said it was hard to put a price on the publicity being generated for Australian wool as a result of the visit.

He said the images that were being beamed back to the Northern Hemisphere all helped to promote Australian wool in overseas markets, particularly the UK.

"I don't think it can be assessed in dollar terms. He's not only put his name to the Campaign for Wool but his energy is with it too because he is giving us two wool events in Australia," he said.

"Certainly if we don't do this (kind of promotion) then wool prices will be affected. It's all about wool prices and upping the profile of wool and bringing it to the attention of consumers so they buy more.

"We think this is a very modest investment and the peak thing is we have the world's media here photographing the Prince of Wales in a shearing shed on-farm in Australia."

