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Mulesing most effective

http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2013/01/23/557377_wool.html



Clipped: A new study backs traditional mulesing methods.

MULESING clips are eight times less effective at stopping breech flystrike in adult sheep as traditional mulesing. And younger sheep with clips applied were up to 30 times more likely to be flystruck than mulesed sheep.

These are some of the results of a \$400,000 Australian Wool Innovation-funded 3 1/2-year study comparing the effectiveness and cost of three treatments - mulesing, polypropylene breech clips and the long-acting insecticide Clik on unmulesed sheep.

The study on three properties at Nareen, Ballarat and in East Gippsland compared the affects of the treatments on 6000 sheep at different ages.

University of Melbourne MacKinnon Project director and the study's chief investigator, Dr John Larsen, said clips were "probably not as effective and cost-effective as hoped".

Sheep that were unmulesed but treated with Clik in September showed to have a "similar or lower prevalence of flystrike to mulesed sheep" in the peak breech-strike time before Christmas, Dr Larsen said. Clipped sheep, however, had very little protection from breech strike.

The study found unmulesed sheep took the longest to crutch, adding about 10 per cent more to the activity's costs.

They also suffered more accidental cuts during crutching, due to having more wrinkles, which Dr Larsen said should be considered from an animal welfare point of view in comparison to a one-off mulesing wound. Insecticide costs were 20 cents a sheep.

Overall, clips were the most costly approach, followed by unmulesed sheep using Clik and the most cost-effective approach was mulesing.

The study did not rank animal welfare outcomes.

Dr Larsen said the most cost-effective long-term solution remained breeding for bare breeches. He said CSIRO work had proven that there was no negative impact on wool cut for selecting barer breech sheep.

Meanwhile, Dr Larsen said a lack of a price-incentive for unmulesed wool meant there was anecdotal evidence some producers were going back to mulesing because it was "just so damn effective".