

14-04-2015

Jona Weinhofen should stick to guitar: his anti-shearing ad is a work of fiction



California-based musician Jona Weinhofen is the face of a confronting anti-shearing campaign by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (Peta). Photograph: Peta/Peta

Adelaide-born musician, vegan and Peta activist, Jona Weinhofen should stick to his day job, guitarist in metalcore band I Killed the Prom Queen.

His starring performance in a video [produced by Peta](#) is ill-informed, incendiary and inflammatory. But I suspect facts were not the important thing here. Incendiary gets shares on social media. Inflammatory gets us talking, which is the way to shape the agenda by fair means or foul.

In case you missed it, the Peta campaign shows the rockstar holding what is now acknowledged to be a plastic lamb, which looks as though it has been skinned alive. This is meant to be a representation of the shearing process.

It looks like no other lamb I have ever seen in the 20-something years I have lived on a sheep farm.

It is something more like the woolly cast of the schlock-horror New Zealand movie [Black Sheep](#), where a mob of genetically engineered sheep turn into blood-thirsty baaad bastards with a taste for human flesh.



AWGA - News Update

Perhaps Peta should spend more time around animals if they are going to represent them in plastic.

Leaving that aside, it does not take much to spot the mistakes in Peta's plastic panto.

Lambs that size are not shorn on any farm I have seen. Apart from the odd poddy (hand-fed lamb), they are mostly still being raised by their mothers at that stage. And they do not have much wool on them. It's really like a short woolly stubble and would be bloody hard to shear. No sheep farmer worth his or her salt would pull a lamb that size off its mother to shear.

When they get older, sheep are shorn to remove the wool, usually in one whole fleece. The wool has a price. Wool with scraps of skin attached does not have a price. Even if we were only making an economic argument, Peta's depiction would make no sense.

But the prime argument for Peta – and the one that demands an answer – is the humane treatment of animals. Logic will tell you that looking after animals humanely simply makes economic and moral sense.

From the moment that little white gangly bundle hits the ground, farmers work to ensure they survive. They spend most days shepherding sheep and their lambs, pulling them out of bogs, fences and other paddock hazards. A healthy happy animal produces more wool. An animal which lost as much skin as Jona's tiny jumbuck would take a month to nurse back to health. If it survived at all.

It is true that shearers are paid on volume of sheep. But bear in mind a scared, hurt animal fights harder and takes longer to shear so it is not in the interests of the shearer to abuse a sheep. A gun shearer is a sight to behold – they know the curves of the animal better than anyone. Shearers generally have their own pen of animals to shear, so if they do treat animals cruelly, the evidence cannot be denied. A cruel shearer is sent packing.

Of course, in a large industry, which produces Australia's third largest export income, there are always going [cases of animal cruelty](#). Some humans are capable of inflicting cruelty on animals, just as they are on other humans. There is no accounting for dickheads.

But that is not the average sheep farmer.

There was some debate within the industry as to whether the Peta campaign should be answered. In strategy terms, wool bodies were reluctant to "give it oxygen" but agriculture minister [Barnaby Joyce](#) characteristically came out swinging.

In my view, there are plenty of reasons to have conversations between livestock producers and animal rights organisations on animal welfare. However both sides have a duty to stick to the facts.

That is what makes it necessary to correct Peta's record, more for the consumers of wool than Peta, which does not agree with any use of animals. Theirs is a vegan agenda and I respect their choice. I would just ask them to respect the choices of others.

http://www.theguardian.com/world/bush-mail/2015/apr/14/jona-weinhofen-should-stick-to-guitar-his-anti-shearing-ad-is-a-work-of-fiction?CMP=share_btn_tw