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Look after animal welfare or pay the price, warns wool buyer

ONE of the world's largest wool-buying and processing companies wants Australian farmers to be forced into using pain relief when performing animal husbandry operations on sheep.

Modiano chief executive Laurence Modiano, whose company is one of the top 10 buyers of Australian merino wool, has asked federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce to legislate for mandatory spray anaesthetics and pain killers to be used by all woolgrowers when they tail dock, castrate or mules their lambs and young sheep.

London-based Mr Modiano, who sells fine wool to many of Europe's leading fashion houses, clothes and department stores such as M & S, Hugo Boss, Gap, Next and H & M, told Mr Joyce in a letter yesterday that for some brands, Australian merino wool has become a "no-go" purchase.

He warned a lack of action on key animal welfare issues concerning consumers, including the contentious practice of lamb mulesing and tail removal without pain relief, had seen commercial requests for wool from non-mulesed sheep or grown compliant with such changed community attitudes jump 50 per cent in the past year.

"The wool industry can no longer afford the slightest whiff of association with animal pain," Mr Modiano said.

"A failure to make pain relief mandatory for all on-farm surgery is only going to speed up this trend; (such legislation) would send a clear message to the international consumer that Australia is serious about animal welfare."

Mr Joyce said last night he would respond "in due course".

But he said each state was ultimately responsible for domestic animal welfare, although draft animal welfare guidelines — which Mr Modiano pointed out were contradictory about mulesing and pain relief — were agreed to by all state agriculture ministers.

In 2004, the Australian wool industry agreed to phase out by 2010 the contentious practice of mulesing — when wrinkled skin is sliced from a young sheep's bottom to make it less susceptible to potentially deadly flystrike for the rest of its life.

But in 2009, wool grower body Australian Wool Innovation reneged on its self-imposed deadline, claiming mulesing was essential, that no alternatives were available, and that mandatory pain relief was too costly.

The latest data from the Australian Wool Exchange show that about half the 1.6 million bales of wool sold annually in Australia have a grower statement attached declaring the mulesing status of the flock from which the wool came.

These figures show that at least 29 per cent of the national clip, or 464,000 bales of wool, in 2014-15 came from sheep that had not been mulesed, or were mulesed using pain relief and anaesthetic, a much higher proportion than just a year ago.



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With wool prices at their best levels for four years — and for some types of superfine wool at prices not seen since the wool crash of the 1990s — a small premium is also being paid by global buyers at Australian auctions for wool from non-mulesed flocks.

<http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/agribusiness/look-after-animal-welfare-or-pay-the-price-warns-wool-buyer/story-fnkeqfxg-1227488051717>