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Shearers mulesing crackdown



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Shearing Contractors
Association of Australia is
calling on the industry to
ramp up efforts to phase
out mulesing. PHOTO:
Peter Stoop

THE controversial practice of mulesing has been thrust back in to the spotlight by some unlikely advocates who are calling on the industry to spearhead an aggressive anti-mulesing campaign.

Concerned with the lack of progress on phasing out mulesing, Shearing Contractors Association of Australia (SCAA) has reignited the mulesing debate with fears animal activist groups unwavering attack on the shearing industry could hurt demand for Australian wool.

"Mulesing provides great graphic footage for people to see to get them emotional about a perceived problem - it is not easy to get rid of mulesing but it is possible," SCAA secretary Jason Letchford said.

Mulesing refers to the procedure to remove wool-bearing skin from the tail and breech area of sheep, from two to 12 weeks of age, in order to prevent flystrike.

The uproar around mulesing hit headlines in 2004, when People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) launched a campaign to boycott Australian wool products if farmers mulesed their sheep.

Australia Wool Innovation's (AWI) reaction put a 2010 deadline on phasing out mulesing, which is now five years overdue.

"... (AWI) said mulesing would be phased out and gave them (Peta) a date... subsequent to that AWI has said that there is no end to mulesing and they are working towards a non-mulesing solution.

"They have effectively, in the eyes of the PETA reneged on their deal."

He said AWI had "turned their back" on animal activist groups and as a result they had a hostile focus on the industry.

"There is no point for our leading body AWI not to address that in the positive light and get on with fixing things," Mr Letchford said.

"We need to open up the very urgent need to aggressively phase out mulesing."

He warned of catastrophic market impacts if the industry did not take a proactive approach to anti-mulesing.

"People get lost between perception and reality," Mr Letchford said.



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"Our reality is that mulesing is necessary for animal health and production but that is lost on the likes of people in New York, London and Stockholm, they see the Peta video and step away from buying wool products and move towards the cotton or synthetic (products) because they have a perceived idea that wool is not humane -their perception is not our reality.

"While (the mulesing procedure occurs) we will always run dangerously to the rest of the global market who will have images of something that is an unfavourable portrayal of wool growing in Australia."

Wool Producers Australia chief executive Jo Hall said the WPA would support the phase out of surgical mulesing when there was a universally accepted alternative.

"We do not need to refocus the debate as there is a lot of behind the scenes work going on that ensures that key stakeholders are briefed and are aware of the hard work and progress that industry is investing into this issue," Ms Hall said.

"WPA does not support the setting of another mulesing deadline.

"While progress is being made in finding alternatives, these things can't be rushed and by working to a deadline there is every chance that we may set the industry up to fail if it can't be met."

Ms Hall said the Industry was working towards phasing surgical mulesing out and since 2005, had invested \$27million in breech flystrike as the industry's number one research and development priority.

AWI spokesman Marius Cuming said animal welfare and flystrike prevention was AWI's number one research priority.

"Since 2005 considerable progress in the R&D program has been made, with AWI investing \$47 million in health and welfare R&D activities, including \$28 million specifically in breech flystrike prevention," Mr Cuming said.

"AWI remains committed to the fast-tracked research, development and extension (RD&E) program to reduce the reliance on mulesing and improve the lifetime welfare outcome for sheep."



Gwendolyn Adams

Perth, Tasmania – fine wool Merino grower

"Minimal mulesing is not radical mulesing. It is a case of balance. We are not wanting lambs to get flystrike but breeding fine wool sheep mean they are naturally wrinkly so it is the old saying, it is temporarily cruel to be kind. Currently there is not a viable alternative to mulesing lambs at marking so we give them pain relief and they are treated in a sensitive manner. We don't want to cause animal welfare problems."



John Taylor,

Winton Merino Stud, Campbell Town

"We haven't mulesed for ten years. We were selecting rams that had less tail... it has become more of a burden due to crutching more often and most farmers would not get a premium in the market place for doing what we are doing. That is why a lot of producers aren't moving down this path. It's not a quick fix - there needs to be feasible options to phase out mulesing. I don't think a deadline should be put on this sort of thing because it comes back to bite you. You need to just do the best you can to improve the industry.



Sandy Jelbart,

Strathcona Merino Stud, Carngham, Vic

"I'm still mulesing. I need to be profitable and currently there is no viable alternative to mulesing at this stage. We sell wool by the kilogram so sheep need to be productive and at this stage the bare breech sheep don't produce the kilograms. It seems to me most growers are still mulesing and there is an increase use of pain relief which is a good thing. The important thing to remember is a well-cared for sheep is more profitable. There wouldn't be a farmer who enjoys mulesing but it is a necessary part of our care regime for our sheep."

<http://www.stockandland.com.au/news/agriculture/sheep/general-news/shearers-mulesing-crackdown/2735280.aspx?storypage=0>



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