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Italian wool textile sector seeks urgent action on mulesing and animal welfare



ITALY'S wool textile industry has had discussion on a call for urgent action from the International Wool Textile Organisation on sheep welfare standards and mulesing deferred

until November.

A delegation from the leading textile federation Sistema Moda Italia – representing the entire Italian supply chain from topmakers to spinners, weavers and retailers – has asked IWTO to release a worldwide standard for animal welfare and not mere guidelines.

The SMI motion put to the IWTO Heads of Delegation council meeting at the 85th IWTO Congress in Sydney last Sunday also strongly suggested inclusion of the use of anaesthetic pain relief before and after sheep are mulesed.

“In other words, what we are recommending is to treat our animals in exactly the same way as a human being who should undergo any kind of surgery.

“If we do just that, what could we be blamed for then?” the delegation motion said.

Delegation spokesman Claudio Lacchio said he had seen sheep dying of flystrike and recognised that mulesing in certain areas was “a must”. But if it was demonstrated that sheep could be treated exactly same as a human being – with pre-operation and post-op pain relief – “anybody can say whatever they like,” he said.

“Mulesing is a must in certain areas, but we must give a credible answer to the consumer, not to animal rights organisations, that we do things correctly.”

The Italian delegation sought approval and implementation of a sheep welfare standard by all the wool-producing IWTO country members and relevant certification bodies, possibly before the next IWTO Biella Round Table in November.

“This is our request, which also has the added advantage of avoiding undue interferences by other “private” bodies, companies and organizations which are currently creating significant confusion on the market.”

The indirect reference to the position of private organisations trying to impose animal welfare standards on the industry was followed by the delegation’s contention that the IWTO is the only entity which could and actually should release a worldwide animal welfare standard for the industry.



AWGA - News Update

Fears that other bodies will take lead on sheep animal welfare

IWTO should not let anybody else take the lead on the issue of animal welfare standards, Mr Lacchio said.

"We are asking IWTO and AWI indirectly to recognise there is a problem on the table and a big one.

"Not to say, 'No, we are wonderful, everything is fine, you won't be touched'."

Mr Lacchio said the problem of animal welfare and mulesing in Australia is still far from solved after several years. After the delegation tabled their motion, Mr Lacchio said a prominent Australian industry person asked him why he was attacking the Australian industry.

"He said 'Why are you raising a problem which is not there? – I said 'first of all the problem is there' and he said to me if you insist on that, there is an option for the growers, to go on cattle," he said.

"So what if they want to go on cattle, they go on cattle – but you don't tell me that if I talk about mulesing people will go on cattle – you solve the problem."

Mr Lacchio said the delegation was very disappointed that it was seen as "raising troubles for the sake of raising troubles" in Australia.

"We want the people here (in Australia) to tell the truth – that there is a problem and we are going to solve the problem by doing this, not that the problem is not there."

Mr Lacchio said SMI members were getting messages, enquiries and requests every day that the clients – retailers and big brands – are worried and don't want to use wool of a particular origin or wool generally, if it is not guaranteed to be mulesing-free.

"We think this issue is not acknowledged, especially in Australia," he said.

"There is a little bit of confusion, you've got to understand that at retailer level they don't really care about if there is pain relief or not – they refer to mulesing in general terms.

"Pain relief does mean something, but they accept wool that is non-mulesed."



AWGA - News Update

Company requested that wool not be sourced from Australia

To support their motion, the Italians presented a redacted yarn order from a northern European client specifying that the required yarn must not be from Australian wool. The delegation wanted Australian growers to know there are wool customers who now did not want to buy Australian wool. Clients were increasingly asking for non-mulesed certificates as a prerequisite, Mr Lacchio said.

“Our feeling is that in Australia in particular the big organisations who should take care of this, they think the problem is solved and we think the problem is not solved at all.”

Mr Lacchio said IWTO should take the lead and set standards for animal welfare including mulesing in particular, but has only released guidelines. SMI understood that it could not impose standards in countries or on growers.

“But we fear the lead on this could be taken by other organisations.”

The Italian delegation’s motion to the IWTO said Italian and European processors are disappointed by a never-ending list of undelivered promises, unmet deadlines, mistaken assumptions and inadequate conclusions on the issue of mulesing.

“We don’t feel backed and protected in our efforts to try and promote wool, and European brands are considered to be quite influential in deciding which kind of raw material is used in the (fashion) collections,” the motion said.

The delegation said it seemed the whole approach and implementation of Australia’s action plan on mulesing needed to be reconsidered and that the money invested could probably have been spent more wisely.

“(There is) no real sense in continuing to talk about mulesing or not mulesing, we all know it is necessary in some areas not to let the animals die, we are of course aware of this fact...and no sense in continuing to discuss with people who would criticize and ban wool regardless.”

“Today the issue is mulesing, tomorrow it will easily be something else, today Australia is under the spotlight, while tomorrow it will easily be another country,” the motion said.

“Let’s change the approach, let’s be proactive, let’s sell the story that wool has got nothing to hide regarding animal welfare.”



IWTO sheep welfare guideline launch in September

The proposed launch of IWTO's sheep welfare guidelines in September at Dumfries House, Scotland, was not too long, "as long as they address the problem sooner rather than later", Mr Lacchio said.

"We don't want to create any political hiccup at the moment, we've guaranteed the discussion will take place at Biella in November.

"But at the same time we think that the process has been very slow, a lot of money has been spent and could have been spent more wisely."

Chinese IWTO delegation member Madame Yang Xiaoxiong told the IWTO Congress in Sydney this week that Chinese consumers understood mulesing was a necessary practice in wool growing, but Mr Lacchio said mulesing is an issue after 14 years.

The Italian delegation is also seeking support for their motion from other countries within the IWTO.

"We do hope all the players and the countries involved will support this initiative, urging IWTO to take a strong stance, so as to go beyond an old, defensive and unsatisfactory approach and to embrace instead a positive, constructive and effective attitude towards animal welfare."

Sheep Central will next publish IWTO president Peter Ackroyd's position on many of the issues detailed in this article.