

ANIMAL WELFARE, MULESING AND WOOL

WHAT IS MULESING?

Mulesing is a one-off surgical procedure to protect the lifetime welfare and health of sheep from breech flystrike. It quickly removes the excess skin from the breech – the area around the tail – of the sheep. The majority of procedures in Australia are performed with anaesthesia and analgesia.



WHY IS MULESING USED AS A LIFETIME SHEEP WELFARE TOOL?

Mulesing greatly minimises the risk of the devastating sheep welfare issue of flystrike by reducing the opportunity for blowflies to lay eggs in the wet wool area of the breech.

WHAT IS FLYSTRIKE?

Flystrike in sheep is when parasitic blowflies lay eggs on wet wool, commonly occurring in the breech area. After hatching, the blowfly maggots bury themselves in and under the sheep's wool and skin, feeding off their flesh and causing blood poisoning. This is excruciatingly painful for the sheep and can be fatal if left untreated.

WHY IS MULESING DONE IN AUSTRALIA?

The blowfly was accidentally introduced into Australia and is a parasitic pest. Advances in breeding and other management practices have enabled the need for mulesing to be eliminated from a proportion of the Australian flock – in fact, Australia exports more non-Mulesed Merino wool (<24.5 micron) than any other country. However, mulesing is still used as a lifetime welfare tool for the remaining sheep in the flock because it is still needed to protect them from the annual risk of flystrike.

WHAT IS AUSTRALIAN WOOLGROWERS' POSITION ON MULESING?

Australian woolgrowers know that happy, healthy sheep produce the world's best wool. The lifetime welfare of Australian sheep is the number one priority for all Australian woolgrowers.

Whilst mulesing remains an important welfare procedure, Australian woolgrowers continue to innovate and strive for a long-term solution. The Australian wool industry ensures woolgrowers have access to the latest best practice welfare-improved flystrike prevention practices, informed by robust and scientific research and development.

WHY ISN'T MULESING BANNED IN AUSTRALIA?

The priority in Australian animal welfare law is to protect sheep from health and welfare risks, which includes flystrike. Australian animal welfare law recognises that mulesing, where no alternatives are available, is necessary to protect sheep.

WHAT IS THE WOOLMARK COMPANY DOING TO HELP WOOLGROWERS TO REDUCE THEIR RELIANCE ON MULESING?

To date, The Woolmark Company's parent company has invested AU\$41.6 million to combat flystrike and find alternatives to mulesing, working closely with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty To Animals (RSPCA) and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) as well as leading research institutes.

Key areas of investment include scientific research in breeding flystrike-resistant sheep, analgesia and anaesthesia, vaccination, best practice procedures and management practices as well as rigorous education and extension programs.



ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO MULESING?

As Australian woolgrowers work towards the ultimate goal of reducing the reliance on mulesing, the immediate goal is to provide welfare-improved practices.

- Analgesia and anaesthesia for mulesing has been widely adopted by Australian woolgrowers from 0% in 2006 to more than 86% of woolgrowers in 2020.
- The most recent research project undertaken by The Woolmark Company's parent company aims to develop a world-first flystrike prevention vaccine. Phase one of the multi-phase research and development program commenced in January 2019.
- Breeding flystrike-resistant sheep is an important long-term solution to reduce the reliance on mulesing. Australian woolgrowers have initiated the largest sheep breeding and selection scientific trial in the world. The 10-year project began in 2015 and is capturing lifetime data across diverse environments and Merino types to provide robust scientific data to increase the lifetime welfare of sheep.



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