

June 9, 2010

On behalf of our respective member companies – textile and apparel retailers, brands, manufacturers and importers in the United States – the undersigned trade associations and business groups collectively endorse the attached position paper regarding the continued widespread use of mulesing of sheep in the Australian wool industry.

In the position paper, we call upon all segments of the Australian wool industry – growers, breeders, and brokers – with the support of the Australian federal and state governments, to recommit to the goal of ending mulesing and to dedicate sufficient resources with the objective to achieve this goal by the end of 2013. We also call upon the representative organizations of the Australian wool industry to provide a public report by September 2010 that maps out a strategy with measureable milestones to achieve this goal.

A surgical procedure initially done without the benefit of analgesia, mulesing was first adopted nearly 80 years ago in Australia as a preventative measure against often fatal blow fly strike predominantly affecting Merino sheep. While the procedure was used for many years as an effective means to combat fly strike, the practice is now uniformly opposed by animal welfare groups around the world. In addition, technology and animal husbandry techniques have advanced to a point where viable, more humane, and cost-effective alternatives have been identified and adopted in other wool-producing countries, such as New Zealand, and by a minority of Australian growers and breeders.

In 2005, Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) on behalf of the Australian wool industry issued a declaration of commitments to develop and adopt alternatives to mulesing by the end of 2010. In 2009, AWI announced the industry would unlikely meet its 2010 deadline. During the past five years, there have been some advances by the Australian industry in addressing this issue, including the development and widespread use of analgesics on mulesed lambs. However, since 2009, there has been little evidence of a concerted or committed effort by the industry to adopt mulesing alternatives within the foreseeable future.

We are convinced that the actions outlined in this Position Paper are essential to ensure that Australia can continue to be a key supplier of wool to the international textile and apparel market. As an increasing number of apparel retailers and brands are initiating policies requiring their suppliers to use non-mulesed wool, we are concerned that a lack of resolution on this issue will become a serious impediment to the promotion of the Australian wool brand.

American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)
National Retail Federation (NRF)
Outdoor Industry Association (OIA)
Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)
US Association of Importers of Textiles & Apparel (USA-ITA)
Wool Working Group

POSITION PAPER OF US APPAREL RETAILERS AND BRANDS ON THE PRACTICE OF MULESING IN THE AUSTRALIAN WOOL INDUSTRY

- As the world's largest supplier of wool, and an essential supplier of finer-gauge wool, the Australian wool industry is a valued partner for U.S. wool apparel retailers and brands.
- An important issue affecting this relationship is the continued use by many in the Australian wool industry of surgical mulesing of sheep as a preventative measure against blow fly strike, an animal-husbandry technique that is uniformly opposed by animal-welfare organizations.
- U.S. wool apparel retailers and brands reaffirm their goal that the Australian wool industry expeditiously identify and adopt viable alternatives to surgical mulesing, with the objective to achieve this goal by the end of 2013.
- In addition, we call upon the representative organizations of the Australian wool industry to provide a public report by September 2010 that maps out a strategy with measureable milestones to achieve this goal.
- As part of this effort, we strongly support ongoing research by the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and other organizations and individuals in Australia.
- This research has identified breech wrinkle, breech cover, dung-coated wool ("dags"), and urine stain as four primary risk factors for fly-strike among Merino sheep, with the establishment of a scoring system to assist wool growers in identifying higher-risk animals.
- We agree that the genetics/breeding programs hold promise as the best alternative to surgical mulesing, particularly with respect to the highest risk factor – breech wrinkle.
- We also support the efforts by a growing number of merino stud breeders in Australia to produce plainer-bodied rams, with progeny that will be more resistant to fly-strike, yet have good fleece weight and lower wool micron size that growers need.
- In order to ensure their success, it is vital that the Australian wool industry actively support genetics and breeding research programs, and the Australian federal and state governments through Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) provide adequate funding and other support.
- With respect to breech cover, another high-risk factor for fly-strike, we urge accelerated research and testing on (depilating) intradermals that have shown promising trial results on efficacy, ease of use, and cost-containment, so that they can be made available on the market as expeditiously as possible.
- We also call upon the Australian Wool Exchange (AWEX), with support from the Australian Government, by the end of 2010 to require all growers selling their wool through AWEX to report on the National Wool Declaration (NWD) their mulesing status - *i.e.*, "mulesed," "mulesed with pain relief," "clips," "ceased-mulesed," and "non-mulesed."
- We expect all growers who continue to mules their sheep, while mulesing alternatives are being developed, to employ effective analgesics and report on the NWD their use of pain relief on mulesed animals.
- Broader participation by wool growers in the NWD will provide better and more accurate market information and supply-chain traceability, which will assist retailers and brands in making informed sourcing decisions, and give wool growers the pricing signals they need.
- In addition to groups representing the Australian wool industry, we also seek to collaborate with animal welfare NGOs, including those in Australia, the Australian federal and state governments, and other stakeholders in assisting the Australian wool industry to identify solutions to the mulesing issue.