

Submission
No 6

**INQUIRY INTO PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS
AMENDMENT (RESTRICTIONS ON STOCK ANIMAL
PROCEDURES) BILL 2019**

Name: Ms Hannah Messner

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To the Chair Members of the inquiry into the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019,

My name is Hannah Messner and I am a registered Australian Wool Classer, Agricultural Science student majoring in Livestock Production, sheep farmworker and daughter of a New South Wales woolgrower. I live in _____ of New South Wales, where sheep and wool production is a popular choice of enterprise amongst farmers.

In writing this submission, I would like to present the practical reason why mulesing occurs. I also wish to explain why it is essential for it to continue to occur until a viable alternative has been found.

As a woman who lives and works on a sheep farm, I have seen first-hand the mulesing process. While to the outsider it appears horrific and bloody it is absolutely necessary to avoid future welfare neglect in sheep. After the initial operation, most farmers apply a product for pain relief, which numbs the wound area. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly lambs recover from the operation. Within a few days to a week, they are running around happily again and after three weeks, the wound is nearly fully healed.

As a wool classer, I have also experienced the effects of not mulesing. The stench of the rotting flesh of a fly-blown sheep is something that I will never forget. If you fail to mulse, the risk of breech fly-strike occurring is incredibly high – and it is something that no sensible person would wish to inflict on a sheep. Flystrike occurs when flies lay their eggs into wet or smelly wool (usually around an un-mulesed sheep's breech, where urine and faeces come into contact with wool around the breech). When the fly larvae hatch, they feed on the flesh of the sheep which is carrying them. This results in a cruel and horrifically painful process of slow mutilation as the sheep is gradually eaten alive by flies. Even when treated using registered treatments, severe nerve damage may occur. The suffering sheep is left weak and often lame. Regularly, recovery is impossible and the sheep will die.

By mulesing (removing the skin around the breech), you stop wool from growing where urine and faeces create a 'fly-trap'. This significantly reduces the risk of flystrike among sheep. In my opinion, it is not cruel to mules, rather, it is cruel not to mules.

No one that I know enjoys mulesing. However, it seems logical and ethical that a little short-term pain (which may be treated with pain relief) is far better than allowing a sheep to go through a horrendous experience of flystrike, which may occur multiple times through the life of a sheep.

If mulesing is banned, millions of sheep will be affected by flystrike, resulting in far more pain and cruelty than mulesing ever will. The industry will suffer both economically and ethically.

The argument has been made that through preventative measures we can avoid the occurrence of flystrike without using mulesing as a management practice. However, examination into the current preventative options show that effectiveness is questionable.

While there are chemicals available commercially for this purpose, it must be noted that there is an alarming amount of resistance to these chemicals. Recently, a chemical resistance survey was conducted by the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, resulting in one hundred

per cent of the samples sent in from NSW being resistant to the 2 most commonly used chemicals in prevention of flystrike.

Another proposed method of prevention is vaccination. Vaccination for flystrike is still being researched and there is no evidence yet as to its effectiveness or a timeframe for this treatment to be developed.

Genome targeting has some merit, however the process of evolving the entire sheep flock of NSW into a 'flystrike resistant' type of animal will take a considerable amount of time and money. It would be completely unreasonable to suggest that such a transition could take place within two years. Another issue with genome targeting to breed sheep with less body wrinkle and barer breeches is that the ability of the sheep to produce large amounts of wool is significantly reduced, which poses a serious economic problem.

The application of liquid nitrogen is still in the research and development stage and has not yet had sufficient testing to prove its efficiency as a method of flystrike prevention.

Although initially exciting, Skin Traction technology has never become commercially viable, even though it was introduced over eight years ago.

Some would even say that we do not need an effective preventative practice, but can instead just treat flystrike when it does occur. This is completely impractical and unethical. For example, if you had a paddock with a thousand sheep in it, and three sheep were fly-struck, you would have to disturb all the sheep in order to treat the fly-blown sheep. Often, it is hard to detect fly-strike before significant damage occurs. Additionally, the time spent treating flystrike is very ineffective because when a large number of sheep are owned, there may be many cases of fly-strike, all in different stages of infection. Furthermore, the concept of treating fly-strike is completely ineffective on large sheep enterprises, where sheep are only mustered at shearing and lamb marking times. The expanses of land are too large for mustering to be completed in a single day and it is too time consuming for continual monitoring of fly-strike. Because of this, prevention is key. If you cannot effectively prevent fly-strike from occurring, then you have well and truly lost the battle against flies.

The wool industry is a significant agricultural sector. A single decision to ban mulesing has the potential to have a detrimental effect on its ability to produce both the quality and quantity of wool that it is known for. The banning of mulesing will have a dramatically negative effect on the wool industry economically.

If you feel that change is needed, I would like to suggest that further funding is made available in order to research alternatives to mulesing that are both practical and economically viable.

In closing, I strongly suggest that rather than supporting the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019, it is instead opposed. I would ask that all those who have the power to would choose to oppose a Bill that has no sensible application, but rather will harm and destroy both the integrity of the welfare of sheep within the New South Wales wool industry and the industry's economic status.

Regards,

Hannah Messner