

Submission  
No 26

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

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## **Submission to Inquiry into the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019 – Witness Invitation**

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### **Statement on the risks of banning mulesing**

My research colleagues and I have been conducting research on the management of painful husbandry procedures in livestock since 2005, including the issue of mulesing of sheep to prevent breech flystrike (myiasis). This is a complex animal welfare problem that is not well understood outside of the Australian Merino wool industry. I have endeavoured to share our research to the international sheep health management community on the mitigation of pain inflicted on animals during mulesing, arguing from our evidence base, that until there is more widespread adoption of a 'wrinkle-free' phenotype in the Australian Merino population, mulesing of sheep with pain relief, offers a more welfare appropriate solution to flystrike control in Merino sheep with wrinkle, than the banning of mulesing. This argument is summarised in the following abstract from a paper published that I delivered to the First European Conference on Small Ruminant Health Management (with a bold/italic outline of a summary conclusion).

### **Abstract from scientific paper: 'Addressing welfare concerns in control of ovine cutaneous myiasis in sheep in Australia'**

Authors: P.A. Windsor, S. Lomax, The University of Sydney, Sydney School of Vet Science

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Special issue: Lectures of the 1st European Conference on Small Ruminant Health Management

*Lucilia cuprina* is a blowfly, accidentally introduced into Australia about 100 years ago. It has become the most serious of external parasite issues affecting the Australian wool sheep industry, currently comprising about 70 million Merino sheep. Sheep blowfly strike (myiasis) is a cause of significant economic losses through sheep deaths, loss of wool and productivity, plus interference with management, estimated at AUD 260,000,000 annually. Of even more concern in recent years, has been an ongoing threat to the marketing of fine-wool, initiated by animal rights activists objecting to the 'mulesing' operation, which aims, by removing perineal skin, to decrease skin 'wrinkle' and to create a bare area that minimises the risk of blowfly strike. For 80 years, this operation has been used by sheep farmers to manage blowfly strike and recent estimates were that cessation of mulesing would result in 7,000,000 sheep affected by myiasis with over 1,000,000 deaths annually. Pressure by welfare activists on international wool buyers, with threatened boycotts, resulted in a proposal by Australian Wool Innovations to cease mulesing by 2010, if suitable alternatives could be found. This proposal proved unachievable, although significant research progress in managing the issue has been made. An integrated pest management approach to myiasis control involves crutching (shearing of breech wool prior to periods of moisture accumulation, such as lambing), timing of shearing (removal of all wool prior to fly-wave activity), chemical protection (jetting or dipping with acaricides) and genetic selection against the risk factors of breech 'wrinkle' and 'dag'. Where

necessary and for a short to medium term period, until wrinkle and dag can be genetically minimised, the surgical alteration of breech conformation to reduce the propensity for accumulation of moisture in excessive skin of the tail and perineum, is advisable. Mulesing mostly occurs at 'lamb marking', a routine procedure performed to improve health management that usually occurs 6–10 weeks after start of the lambing period. Marking is a complex procedure as it includes multiple vaccinations, ear tagging or knotting, castration and tail-docking and where necessary, mulesing. This complexity means there is a labour cost pressure to cease mulesing or only perform the operation on potential replacement ewes. The whole procedure is laborious and expensive for farmers, almost never involves veterinarians and, until recently, no pain management has been provided. In late 2005, a spray-on local anaesthetic formulation for mulesing, containing lignocaine, bupivacaine, adrenaline) and cetrimide, has become available in Australia under a licence for use under veterinary supervision. Published evidence of the efficacy of topical anaesthesia as a practical and affordable method of pain management at mulesing has resulted in widespread adoption of pain relief for mulesing. Moreover, we have recently obtained evidence that pain relief is provided for at least 24 h following mulesing. In late 2011, the product achieved registration for sale by veterinarians. *To address international animal welfare concerns with mulesing, we propose that, in the period until sheep with the genetics to significantly decrease susceptibility to myiasis have been more widely dispersed, provision of pain relief during mulesing should enable breech modification to continue on properties where the sheep genotype requires it and myiasis incidence warrants it.* Investigations are continuing to determine if pre-surgical treatments with analgesia or other drugs can offer additional pain management and offer improved welfare benefits. It is noteworthy that a national system of vendor declaration on the sale of wool to enable wool buyers to potentially select bales from farms using pain management, has been instituted. Industry reports suggest that routine topical anaesthesia for pain relief may have been used on 70% of lambs being mulesed in 2011. Australian wool sheep farmers appear to have readily adopted pain relief at lamb marking, despite the current lack of a premium price for wool from farms where pain relief is used. Although pain relief at mulesing currently offers no increase in financial returns to their businesses, recent trends suggest that a majority of farmers are willing to embrace innovations that provide welfare improvements in our sheep industry. It is important that international consumers of wool are made aware that the changing social ethic for animal welfare during invasive livestock procedures has led to a significant change in attitudes and practice on a majority of Australian wool sheep farms that remain at considerable risk of cutaneous myiasis.