

Submission
No 27

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

Organisation: The Australian Workers' Union

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Inquiry into the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) has represented shearers since it was established in 1886 by Ballarat shearer William Guthrie Spence. Since then, the AWU has a long and proud history advocating for workers' rights in the wool industry.

Since the 1930s mulesing has been practiced on sheep as a means to combat *flystrike*, a condition where parasitic flies infect the organ of the sheep and cause death. The mulesing procedure is surgical in nature and is usually undertaken when the lamb is 6-10 weeks old, however some animals are treated at after 9 months of age.¹

The welfare benefits of reducing breech strike or flystrike incidences is well documented and prosecuted by reputable stakeholders such as the CSIRO and the Australian Wool Innovation.

The AWU recognises there are legitimate concerns raised about whether lambs are treated with analgesics during these procedures, and the pain they endure throughout the recovery process.

Recently the AWU conducted a survey of experienced shearers in the industry, and the overwhelming consensus by the workforce prosecuted that:

- Banning mulesing would have a severe impact on the welfare of sheep, especially without a framework to replace it that ensures sheep will be immune to flystrike.
- Mulesing significantly increases the productivity of shearing and sheep handling.
- Mulesing is the most effective and scientifically viable procedure.
- Lambs and sheep must be administered anaesthetic and pain relief throughout the procedure and recovery.

In a 2017 survey of 1,200 merino breeders across Australia, the results showed that 83% of Merino lambs mulesed received analgesics and/or anaesthesia.²

Some activist groups argue that mulesing should be banned, and that the mandating of anaesthesia is an unacceptable policy solution.

This is evidenced by the introduction of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019*. The bill seeks to prohibit the mules operation being performed on sheep after 1 January 2022, and mandates that a person performing mulesing administer analgesic to the animal before that date.

¹ <https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/sheep/research-publications/welfare/improved-pain-relief/welfare-assessments-of-analgesic-options-in-female-lambs-for-surgical-mulesing-and-its-alternatives.pdf>

² <https://www.wool.com/sheep/welfare/breech-flystrike/welfare-improved-practices/>

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It is difficult to reconcile the pursuit of banning mulesing in the absence of a humane and viable alternative.

One in particular is crutching, which involves frequent shearing of the breech, however unless conducted frequently the process is not unassailable. It also makes it difficult to enforce compliance in the instance of a regulatory regime, and in turn compromises the health of sheep.

The AWU believes the most appropriate pathway forward should be to mandate anaesthesia procedures, and to continue to support mulesing as an effective and humane response to incidences of flystrike.

In addition, the AWU recognises that the mandating of anaesthesia requires consideration to a regulatory framework that ensures against gaming of the law, and one that does not significantly impede on the economic viability of farms.

The AWU recommends a tripartite body be established with government, industry (including veterinarians), and unions to develop a framework that helps deliver humane treatment of 100% of sheep in Australia and does not undermine the viability of farms.

The Australian Workers' Union.