

How Much Do You Really Know?

There are a lot of “facts” being bandied about at the moment about the Australian wool industry, its use of the mulesing procedure and the campaign launched by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to bring mulesing (and live exports) to an end. To set the record straight on just a few, here’s what PETA has to say on the six big mulesing myths:

1 THE “3 MILLION SHEEP” MYTH

MYTH: “Mulesing is necessary to prevent flystrike – if Australian farmers didn’t mules, up to 3 million sheep would die from flystrike each year.”

FACT: This claim whittles the choices down to “mutilation or death”. Published estimates show that at least 20 per cent of Australian farmers use flystrike prevention and control techniques that don’t involve cutting into their sheep, including increased monitoring during blowfly season, more frequent crutching, blowfly traps and breeding to create plain-bodied and bare-breeched sheep. Mulesing isn’t foolproof, doesn’t prevent body strike and isn’t necessary to prevent 3 million sheep from getting struck – it is simply the cheapest and easiest option and is therefore being presented as the best by farmers with a vested interest in minimising the effort that they expend to properly tend to their sheep. There are an increasing number of voices in the farming industry that acknowledge this. For example, Chick Olsson, the former chair and a current director of the Australian Wool Growers Association, says, “The lack of progress to date in changing industry practice reflects not a lack of economic alternatives to mulesing but a lack of will to unsettle entrenched orthodoxy”.

2 THE RSPCA MYTH

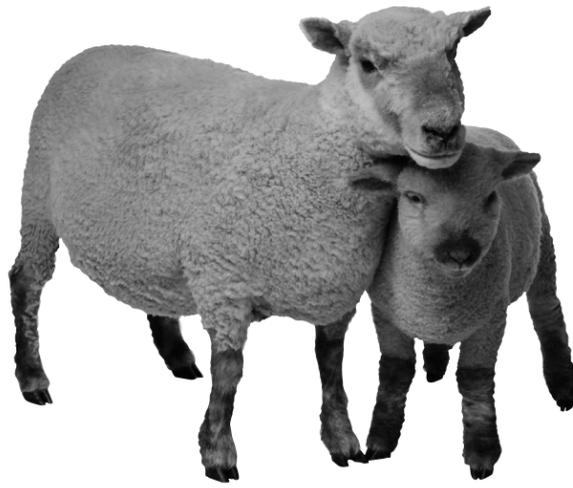
MYTH: “The RSPCA endorses mulesing as a necessary preventive procedure.”

FACT: The RSPCA’s official position is that it does not endorse or accept mulesing as an essential sheep husbandry procedure.

3 THE WELFARE MYTH

MYTH: “Australia has world-standard animal-management practices and has demonstrated that animal welfare is a top priority.”

The Six Myths of Mulesing



FACT: By refusing to adopt more humane management practices for sheep, the Australian wool industry is sending a message to the world that Australian sheep farmers will try to get by on the minimum standards that the government will tolerate. As the public becomes more familiar with the realities of mulesing, they will continue to demand that humane alternatives be employed now.

4 THE “KNUCKLE-SKINNING” MYTH

MYTH: “Mulesing isn’t that bad – it’s just a little skin off the rump. The lambs are just a little sore for a while.”

FACT: Mulesed lambs experience high levels of pain and distress not only during the mulesing procedure, but for long periods afterwards. Lambs do not show this pain in the same way humans do – they are prey animals and will therefore keep quiet when in pain to minimise the risk of attracting predators, but their suffering is demonstrated through a variety of behavioural and physiological indicators. For instance, lambs’ plasma cortisol concentrations and beta-endorphin levels, both effective gauges of stress, skyrocket when they are mulesed and stay high for days. Mulesed lambs can exhibit abnormal, stress-related behaviours for up to 113 days following the procedure.

Many Australian sheep farmers are open about the suffering that mulesing causes. For instance, Lance Jones of Yolla, Tasmania, an award-winning farmer with 40 years’ sheep farming experience, wrote in the *Tasmanian Country* recently: “The

thing that our sheep farmers have got to get used to is that treatments such as mulesing are cruel and so we need to get away from them. One way to do that is to develop farming practices that are more intelligent and responsible”.

5 THE ANNIHILATION MYTH

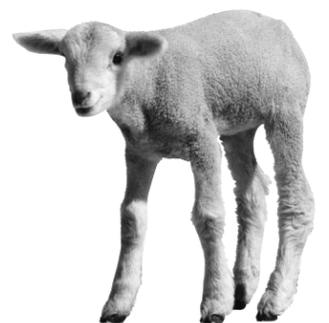
MYTH: “PETA’s ultimate goal in its anti-mulesing campaign is to shut down the Australian farming industry.”

FACT: PETA’s campaign to end mulesing in Australia is aimed at reducing the suffering of sheep in the wool industry – that is all. While PETA indeed believes that few people need to wear animal skins and wool these days and that animals are not ours to wear, once the Australian wool industry agrees to stop mulesing and live exports, two major forms of cruelty, PETA will drop its international boycott against Australian wool. It has carried out the same sort of reform campaigns successfully with regard to other welfare practices in the fast-food industry, including ensuring that Burger King and McDonald’s improve welfare standards, and in other industries.

6 THE INNUENDO MYTH

MYTH: “PETA has been engaging in illegal and threatening tactics to get retailers on board.”

FACT: PETA’s first step in this campaign was to approach the Australian government and try to work cooperatively to bring mulesing to an end. It then negotiated with individual retailers discreetly, without any public campaigning, to ask them to make compassionate choices. Only when these efforts were exhausted did PETA inform retailers of its intentions to go public and inform consumers about mulesing and live exports. PETA’s campaign involves publishing and distributing information that the wool industry would prefer to hide.



To find out more, please visit SaveTheSheep.com.

PETA