



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Wool Industry: Mulesing

QUESTION

Tuesday, 11 October 2005

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner Adams, Sen Judith
Speaker

Source Senate
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Responder Macdonald, Sen Ian
Question No.

Wool Industry: Mulesing

Senator ADAMS (Western Australia) (2.59 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Senator Ian Macdonald, representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Is the minister aware of a campaign being waged against a practice used by merino wool producers known as mulesing to prevent flystrike? Will the minister advise the Senate of actions the government is taking to counter the claims of radical activist organisations and reassure consumers and manufacturers that Australian wool remains a humane and quality product?

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland—Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation)—I thank Senator Adams for that question on wool and the wool industry. Senator Adams is a wool grower from Kojonup in Western Australia and she well understands the importance of the wool industry to Australia. Wool is an attractive and versatile material. It makes easy-care, easy-wear fabric. Wool is quintessentially Australian. It is part of our culture and it is a \$7 billion industry for this country. It supports hundreds of thousands of Australians in employment and thousands of country towns. That is why I, like Senator Adams, am disgusted at the dishonest, deceptive and—if it were in Australia—illegal campaign of a group called PETA, an extreme environmental group with a suspicious agenda. The web site of PETA denigrates the fabric and the industry with lies and misinformation.

This suit that I am wearing is a 100 per cent woollen suit. It is about six or seven years old. It spends most of its time in the bottom of a suitcase, thrown in not very well folded. You take it out and hang it on a rack and within a few hours it falls out into this suit that looks as good as the day it was born. I see that most of my colleagues here are wearing woollen suits—and the females as well are wearing woollen garments. They understand how important wool is. In fact I see Senator Brown over there looking quite stunning. That looks like a woollen suit, Senator Brown.

Senator Bob Brown—Mr President, I rise on a point of order. I have a clarification. It is 100 per cent wool and made in Australia.

The PRESIDENT—That was not a point of order and you know it was not.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—As well as these woollen garments that we are wearing I have a beautiful woollen shirt. I do not have it in Canberra; I leave it up in North Queensland, in the tropics, because it is cool and easy to care for. My wife loves it. It is easy to wash and easy to iron. Wool is a fabulous product.

Senator Adams asked me what the Australian government is doing. Our diplomatic posts right around the world have been involved in setting up a series of meetings with retailers and industry to keep the United States, particularly, and the United Kingdom and, indeed, European customers well informed. As well, the Australian government supports research and development into a chemical treatment to the breech area. That is being researched at the moment and it may be an alternative to mulesing in the years ahead. The research and development people and the industry are working towards that. We are also looking at integrated management practices and there have been positive trials for an analgesic spray for pain relief during mulesing.

The important thing here is that mulesing is a little painful to the sheep at times but the alternative is an excruciating, painful death from flystrike. That death is to be avoided at all costs and that is why the Australian Veterinary Association, the RSPCA and the government's Chief Veterinary Officer all support mulesing as a process that is beneficial to the sheep and prevents that excruciating and painful death from flystrike.

Senator Hill—Mr President, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.