INDUSTRY FACT SHEET

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SHEEP WOOL

The international sheep wool industry is worth approximately USD 3 billion[1] and involves the production of over almost 2,000 million kilograms of wool each year produced by around 1.2 billion sheep[2]. While the wool industry presents multiple animal welfare concerns, a key focus for many animal protection groups is the intensely painful and outdated animal mutilation called live lamb cutting (also known as mulesing*), a practice only carried out in Australia, the biggest wool producing country for the global fashion market where approximately 70% of their Merino wool producing sheep were live lamb cut (mulesed).[3]

The high level of public support for the **anti-live lamb cutting campaign of FOUR PAWS**, the extent of media coverage of the issue, and the number of brands communicating their concern are all testimony to the level of public concern about the issue.

INDUSTRY ACTION

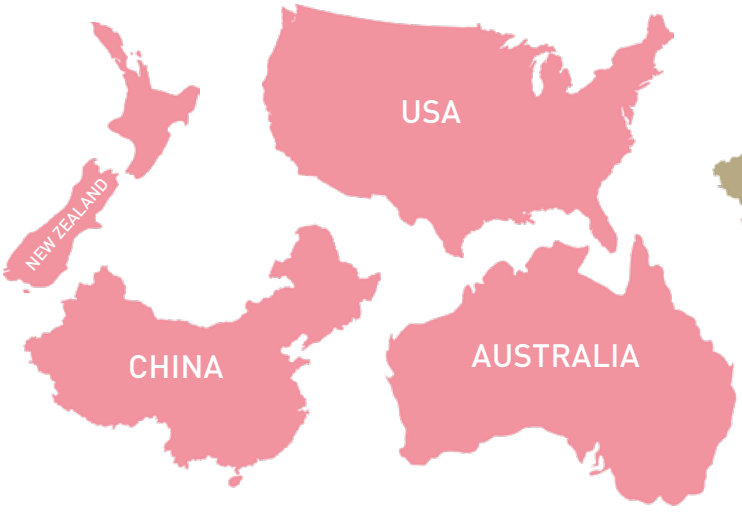
Over 400 brands have banned live lamb cut wool (mulesed wool), including:

ADIDAS	MARA HOFFMANN
BURBERRY	MYER
CALVIN KLEIN	PUMA
COUNTRY ROAD GROUP	RALPH LAUREN
GUCCI	REFORMATION
H&M	TIMBERLAND
HUGO BOSS	TOMMY HILFIGER
KATHMANDU	ZALANDO
LEVIS	ZARA

"Puma is not using wool from mulesed sheep; we are working at sourcing only from Responsible Wool Standard certified wool suppliers by 2025."

Puma animal welfare policy

LARGEST PRODUCERS[4]



LARGEST IMPORTERS[5]

*Mulesing, named after its creator John Mules, is an outdated term for a practice that no longer aligns with modern standards. The terminology fails to describe the practice and, as a result, hides the cruelty involved. Hence animal protection organisations, including FOUR PAWS, are referring to the practice of mulesing as 'live lamb cutting' not including other practices such as tail docking or castration. We encourage the industry to adopt this change for better clarity. It is essential to use terminology that accurately reflects the situation.

WHAT BRANDS CAN DO

Refine
Utilise the best available animal welfare certification initiatives[6] as outlined in the **FOUR PAWS Animal Welfare Policy Guidelines in Textiles**, to exclude live lamb cut wool and improve the welfare of sheep used in the wool industry. For brands who continue to use sheep wool, we actively encourage you to participate in multi-stakeholder initiatives to improve the level of overall animal welfare ensured within the certifications currently available.

Reduce
FOUR PAWS calls on all brands to set goals to reduce their use of animal derived materials. Whilst certification can help to ensure better animal welfare, any use of animals for commercial means brings inherent risks to their welfare.

Replace
The best way to protect animals from suffering in the fashion industry is to move to animal-free alternatives. Replace wool with alternatives such as certified organic cotton, recycled polyester, lyocell, hemp and modal blends[7, 8].

Be transparent
Brands must provide accurate information about their commitment to sheep welfare and communicate both their position on live lamb cutting and how they intend to uphold their commitment. By communicating this information alongside what certification initiatives are used to help ensure animal welfare overall, brands can equip consumers to make an informed choice.

This information should form part of a robust and comprehensive overarching animal welfare policy, which is clearly communicated to suppliers.

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An international YouGov poll commissioned by FOUR PAWS in 2024 shows that four in five (80%) adults globally agree that companies sourcing wool should phase out their use of live lamb cut sheep wool.

Animal welfare issues

To obtain more wool from each sheep, many have been selectively bred to have excess skin. This makes them susceptible to a serious condition called flystrike. There are numerous pain-free ways to prevent flystrike, but some farmers continue to undertake the barbaric process of live lamb cutting which involves lambs of 2-12 weeks of age being restrained while shears are used to remove large pieces of skin from their buttocks. This extremely traumatising mutilation is usually undertaken without adequate pain relief and anaesthesia (and no post-surgical treatment) and is currently performed on most Merino wool-producing lambs. On the FOUR PAWS website, we answer seven crucial questions about live lamb cutting and pain relief. **Here** you can learn more about why pain relief is essential during a phase-out period but not a long-term strategy for live lamb cutting. Moreover, FOUR PAWS, alongside other animal welfare organisations, released a report revealing the industry's failure to eliminate the outdated practice of live lamb cutting (mulesing). In 2004, Australian wool industry leaders promised to phase-out the cruel practice of live lamb cutting by 2010, only to abandon this commitment one year before the deadline. As a result, the practice continues with million lambs enduring excrutiating pain. Read more about the wool industry's Broken Promise **here**.

— Painful surgical procedures, such as castration and tail docking, are undertaken without adequate, or sometimes any, pain-relief[9].

— Each year over one million Australian sheep[10] are exported to the Middle East for slaughter. These animals experience a torturous journey, crammed together in soaring temperatures and in weeks of accumulated excrement on ships that are inherently high risk, simply to be brutally slaughtered without prior stunning once they arrive at their destination.

— Despite being the world's leading supplier of superfine merino wool, contributing 80% of the product used by the global fashion industry, Australia's lamb mortality rates exceed the global average by over 10%. It is estimated that over 10 million lambs die annually in Australia alone mostly due to poor breeding, birthing complications and inadequate supervision and shelter. Learn more about causes and strategies to reduce the high number of lamb deaths in Australia in the FOUR PAWS briefing paper '**Shining a light on lamb mortality**'.[11, 12, 13]

— Sheep also regularly experience the stressful process of shearing. For a prey animal, such as sheep, being forcefully restrained in a recumbent position is a traumatic experience. Workers move quickly to shear as many sheep as possible in the shortest period, and injuries, which receive no treatment, are common.

— Overall, many of the sheep's basic needs, including access to adequate food, water, veterinary care, the freedom to express natural behaviour and experience positive mental states can be neglected.

Environmental concerns

Environmental sustainability is increasingly important to consumers[14], but wool, despite being a natural and renewable fibre, causes significant negative environmental impacts that include land deterioration, water contamination or overuse[15], and the use of fossil fuel energy sources throughout its production. It is also a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emitssions through methane production[16]. The environmental impacts of wool are calculated via the Sustainable Apparel Coalition's Higg Materials Sustainability Index, which shows that, overall, wool performs poorly[17, 18].

FOUR PAWS calls on fashion companies to only source certified wool free from live lamb cutting; to reduce the amount of animal-derived materials used overall in favour of sustainable animal-free alternatives; and to ensure that the animals which continue to be used within domesticated animal supply chains enjoy an excellent state of welfare.

For more information, review the FOUR PAWS policy development guidelines.

"Together we can drive an animal-friendly fashion future, and create a world where people treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding."

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