

LWCC STATEMENT - FEBRUARY 2014

THE MULES OPERATION IN WOOL SHEEP

This procedure was conceived in Australia as a way of lowering the susceptibility of Merino sheep to blowfly (maggots) in the wool around the tail. It involved the removal, without anaesthetic or sutures, of a band of skin around the tail with the purpose of increasing the area of bare skin around the anus and vulva after healing. Apart from the pain this procedure produced, the open wound was susceptible to infection and blowfly attack.

However it has been conclusively shown in South Africa that the major underlying cause of increased susceptibility to blowfly strike around the tail is excessively pleated (wrinkled) skin, and that this could be eliminated by breeding plain-bodied (smooth skinned) sheep without lowering the quantity of wool. This genetic approach has been extremely successful in lowering susceptibility to blowfly attack in wool sheep and has rendered any arguments in favour of retaining the use of the Mules operation untenable.

Because this procedure causes pain and risk, and can be rendered obsolete by breeding sheep with less or no large skin pleats, it is regarded as an unacceptable farm procedure and should not be used.