

17 January 2025

The New Zealand Merino Company (NZMC) Condemns Animal Mistreatment and Reaffirms Commitment to Animal Welfare

MPI has confirmed that a large volume of footage alleging animal welfare mishandling has been processed. MPI will not and cannot disclose the identity of any entities that are involved in the investigation.

NZMC is also running an independent investigation for breaches of its ZQ Standard. Through the publicly available footage NZMC has been able to identify two ZQ farms, along with a number of non-ZQ growers. NZMC cannot provide the names of these properties, nor any third parties (e.g. shearing sub-contractors) involved due to the Privacy Act 2020 and so as not to prejudice the outcome of the ongoing MPI investigation.

NZMC immediately suspended these farms from the ZQ programme and will move to determine if any breach of the ZQ Standard has occurred. If further information or footage is released we are committed to expanding our investigation.

NZMC and its growers are appalled by the footage and unequivocally condemn the mistreatment of animals.

The behaviour captured in PETA's footage does not reflect the values or practices of the 600-strong ZQ grower base. These farms, many of which are multi-generational family properties, are committed to being part of a standard that advocates for the highest levels of animal welfare.

The ZQ programme was founded on a commitment to work constructively with growers to continuously improve animal welfare on farm, banning mulesing a decade before it was outlawed in New Zealand in 2018 – the first country in the world to do so.

We categorically reject the claim that animal abuse is in any way a typical occurrence within the ZQ programme. We have zero tolerance for breaches of our standards.

We have taken the following immediate action:

- The farms we have been able to identify have been suspended from the ZQ programme pending completion of our investigation
- Unprocessed wool from the two identified farms has been quarantined in the supply chain
- Reengaged PETA and MPI directly requesting the names, locations and dates of the farms
- Initiated a rapid response assessment of all ZQ farms to determine that current animal welfare protocols are being upheld and identify potential gaps in our monitoring process
- Requested an additional 50 animal welfare-focused spot inspections, to be completed by Control Union our third-party auditor, by the end of February
- NZMC's in-shed observation visits during shearing will now be accompanied by a third-party auditor
- Commissioning an independent industry working group to develop recommendations for enhanced welfare and monitoring
- In addition to the third-party spot inspections on farm, there will also be independent monitoring of the programme certification and assurance processes



We are also exploring the continual advancement of our monitoring and control protocols during shearing and for animal handling practices. The following actions are being considered to support the improvement of the ZQ Standard:

- The use of video surveillance during shearing for independent review by auditors
- Unannounced inspections by third parties during heightened risk times of the season (e.g. shearing)
- The appointment of trained, designated animal welfare officers in shearing sheds during shearing for each ZQ property

Our commitment to delivering ethically farmed wool remains unwavering. We will continue to hold ourselves accountable, raise the bar for animal welfare, and provide consumers with confidence in the integrity of the products they purchase through the ZQ programme.

Kate Mitchell
Chair
The New Zealand Merino Company

Ends

About the ZQ programme

Wool certified to the ZQ Standard meets strict standards of animal welfare, environmental sustainability, fibre quality, traceability and social responsibility. Established in 2007, the ZQ Standard was the world's first ethical wool production standard. ZQ represents the wool of choice for world-class brands that want to assure consumers of the ethical and sustainable nature of their materials.

The ZQ programme has been a global force for positive change in the wool industry, including leading the charge by banning the controversial practice of mulesing in New Zealand, a decade before it was outlawed in 2018.

The wool of our growers is recognised globally not only for the quality of the fleece but also for the high standards that are independently audited by Control Union to the rigorous requirements of the ZQ Standard and the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS) owned by Textile Exchange.

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