

MEDIA RELEASE

WoolProducers welcomes launch of Australia-UK free trade agreement negotiations

22 June, 2020

Peak wool representative body, WoolProducers Australia (WoolProducers), has welcomed the announcement from Trade Minister Simon Birmingham last week that the formal negotiations on the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement (A-UK FTA) have commenced.

With the economic effects of COVID-19 resulting in significant decreases in consumer spending on apparel, securing important trade agreements is a step forward for Australian wool when the global economy begins its recovery.

WoolProducers President Mr Ed Storey said, "Wool was the first export from Australia to the United Kingdom back in 1807, so as an industry we have a longstanding relationship with the United Kingdom and that's something to be proud of".

"But we must be equally as proud of the production systems and standards that Australian woolgrowers work in and uphold to produce this wonderful, natural and sustainable fibre."

"It is imperative in any trade negotiations that our production standards across animal welfare, antimicrobial use, environmental practices, and sustainability cannot be compromised for the sake of concluding a trade agreement. Our standards are underpinned by regulations that are informed by world-class science, and this must be acknowledged." Mr Storey said.

WoolProducers has already been in discussions with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment regarding the A-UK FTA and is continuing to provide information Australian wool to assist these negotiations.

Earlier this year, WoolProducers also welcomed the opportunity to meet with a delegation of British farmers and policy staff when they visited Australia in March.

"We are in a very fortunate position that Australian wool doesn't really compete with British wool. They are very different products, and this was a key takeaway for both the British and Australian delegates when we met. So, while we already enjoy relatively low, if not zero tariffs and adequate quotas for entry to the United Kingdom, we expect this will remain without any non-tariff barriers under the A-UK FTA." Mr Storey said.

The Northern Hemisphere is the key market for Australian wool, and WoolProducers acknowledges the opportunities that the AUK FTA will present to bolster trade between the countries. This is particularly important with increasing consumer awareness of the eco-credentials of wool.

Mr Storey said, "It makes sense for trade agreements to favour natural fibres such as wool as they provide a holistic approach to overcoming some of the environmental issues we need to tackle across the globe."

"Consumers are shifting away from fast fashion as they learn of the negative impacts it has on the environment, like microplastics polluting our oceans. We have a great product that can lessen these impacts, and free trade agreements support this as they expand and strengthen our market access."

WoolProducers will be making a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade consultation on the A-UK FTA, which will detail our policy asks across a range of issues that may be included in the agreement.

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About WoolProducers' Australia

WPA plays a critical role in working closely with companies and entities funded by woolgrower funds including compulsory levies or fees for service.

Its mission is to develop constructive and profitable outcomes for woolgrowers nationally.

The agency is responsible for appointing a director to each of the Australian Wool Exchange and the Australia Wool Testing Authority, promoting good corporate governance and ensuring that the interests of growers are met.

WPA maintains a working relationship with Australian Wool Innovation as the voice of woolgrower shareholders. It aims to contribute to AWI's programs for the benefit of growers, promoting responsible use of levy funds and ensuring good corporate governance.

WPA is the sole wool industry member of Animal Health Australia, and as such, carries a significant responsibility for decision making on behalf of the industry in the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak.

As the only wool grower organisation with membership of the National Farmers' Federation, WoolProducers is responsible for providing key policy advice on behalf of our members, and other wool growers, to Australia's peak farm body.

WoolProducers also works closely with the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on key issues such as animal health and welfare, biosecurity, pest management control, natural resource management, drought preparedness, emergency animal disease outbreak preparedness and industry development, including research and trade.