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He knew of at least five SA studs which had already ceased mulesing, while for others it would be a 20-year project.

Mr Rowett said it was not just about breeding bare-breech sheep. Selection pressure was also needed to reduce tail-wrinkle – folds of skin around the tail – to minimise flystrike.

In the interim, he favoured more preventative blowfly chemical control strategies such as jetting or swabbing the breech of unmulesed lambs, and more frequent crutching.

He said the Better Choices animal welfare program was "outstanding" and good short-term option, but even with pain relief he expected People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals to continue its anti-mulesing fight.

The RSPCA had been quite moderate in its stance, even supporting mulesing with pain relief until a viable alternative was found, but the weight of public opposition would continue to grow and pressure the organisation.

"The whole mulesing debate has brought animal welfare to the fore and we have to address our animal handling issues better than in the past – it is not that they weren't being done correctly, but there are some areas of management we can improve," he said.

The wool industry's long-term future must be the num-

"We have seen the influence PETA is having with its terrorist-style campaign – we can't afford to have retailers walk away from wool," he said.

Another concern was the economic impact of unmulesed sheep, with some agents observing discounts for wethers of \$6 to \$8 and ewe lambs.

Ms Jared said that in 2007, between 800 and 900 producers accessed Tri Solfen spray through their local veterinarian, with Bayer selling 9732 litres, equating to about 1.6 million lambs treated at mulesing.

The use of this pain relief in the mulesing process had been found to reduce blood loss, promote wound-healing and reduce of mismothering.

It enabled producers to demonstrate they were putting animal welfare first and for wool processors and retailers to meet their corporate social responsibilities, and address consumer sentiment.

"Consumers are more aware of agricultural production, and accountability has never been at a higher level with so many things need to adhere to when selling your products, such as the National Livestock Identification Scheme and National Vendor Declarations," she said.

"We need to be careful because in 2008 there are people watching over the fence to ensure we are serious about reducing pain and stress in our animals."

Those producers using Tri



Tri-Solfen's relieves wool industry pain

WOOLUMBOOL sheep producers Graham and Leigh Clothier (pictured) are among a growing number in support of pain-relief to silence animal rights activists. This year for the first time, their June to August-drop Merino lambs will receive the Tri-Solfen treatment at mulesing, and while it appears the pain relief is cost-neutral thanks to fewer lower lamb losses, Graham says even if it is not, it is something producers need to wear. "Producers need to be seen to be proactive in doing something and the pain relief does work effectively and quickly," he said. "If we do nothing the whole thing will implode." He says mulesing with pain relief is the current best option, especially with the RSPCA endorsing it. But the Clothiers believe that in the long-term, breeding bare-breech sheep is the answer for their 3000-head self-replacing Merino

InShort

Murray message: The need to fast-track the River Murray rescue plan will be the key message delivered to representatives from the office of Federal Water Minister Penny Wong visiting the Riverland this week. South Australian Murray Irrigators are hosting three of the Minister's key advisers on water reform for two days. SAMI officials, along with representatives of citrus, winegrape, almond and stonefruit industries, and the Central and Renmark irrigation trusts, will present their case for immediate action on water reform in the basin. SAMI chairman Tim Whetstone said while a lot of detail still had to be worked through on how best to achieve significant reform, there were grave concerns that stretching any plan over the next decade would be too little, too late for the river and the hundreds of communities that depended on it. Mr Whetstone said he expected the visiting officials would add detail to the Minister's National Water Plan.

• Details: Tim Whetstone 0428 617 800.

Debt scheme: More than 20 000 Australians file for bankruptcy each year – one every 20 minutes – with regional Australia the hardest hit. But Debt Mediators Australia spokesman Ben Paris said thousands of farming families and people in regional centres unnecessarily went bankrupt or suffered major distress because their debts spiralled out of control. Mr Paris said there were alternatives for people facing bankruptcy or financial hardship – some virtually unknown by Australians. For instance, in 1996 the Federal Government launched a scheme called Part 9 Debt Agreements, under which Australians struggling with debt could apply to make repayments based on what they could afford. These agreements cancelled all the interest on their debts and frequently, the applicant only needed to pay back a reduced amount. "Despite this often ideal last resort for their money woes, many Australians are completely unaware that the scheme even exists as it is something lenders and even financial counselors almost never discuss," Mr Paris said.

• Details: Ashwin Segkar 1300 553 604 or www.debtmediators.com.au.

Research sting: New research has