

ETHICS

IN ACTION

The saying goes that talk is cheap, but if you keep talking hopefully a solution will arise, in the merino wool sector, one organisation has put the talking into action and created what they claim is the world's first traceable value chain for wool. Zque combines exceptional quality New Zealand Merino with an accreditation programme that ensures environmental, social and economic sustainability, animal welfare and traceability.



Zque is based on encouraging Merino growers to adopt best management practices and to continually refine and improve their performance with respect to fibre quality, animal health and welfare, environmental, economic and social values. The system requires accredited growers to meet the standards outlined in the manual and uses an independent (third party) audit process to ensure that these are complied with. The programme has been developed to satisfy the customer's expectations of the integrity of New Zealand Merino fabric by The New Zealand Merino Company.

The New Zealand Merino Company acts as a facilitator bringing together the farmer and the fashion designer or as it says on its own website 'High Country to High Fashion'.

Zque provides a transparent traceability scheme that allows everyone in the chain to identify and track the Merino fibre from the brand to the farm. The contracts between the various partners provide price stability at a level that is sustainable for both the purchaser of Zque Merino and the farming businesses by removing price volatility.

Specifically, Zque;

- encourages the production of 'fit for purpose' New Zealand Merino fibre through systems with enhanced animal welfare, environmental, social and economic values;
- provides extra confidence for customers as to the quality and integrity of New Zealand Merino fibre accredited under the Zque programme;
- provides a framework for further innovation of the programme and grower recognition in the future.

Quality Merino

The unique high country environment provided by New Zealand and special farming systems produce Merino fibre renowned for its range of attributes, which give New Zealand Merino garments a distinctive lightness and smoothness to



Designer Textiles' MAPP fabrics utilise the Zque system to ensure integrity of the fabric for the customer

touch. Zque fibre is sourced specifically to optimise these attributes according to fibre requirements of brand partners.

The fibre produced has superior whiteness, and strength produced by consistent nutritional quality and intake throughout the year. Stronger fibre increases garment durability, reduces the likelihood of pilling, and significantly improves its processing potential. The low coefficient of variation of fibre diameter in New Zealand Merino bales offers improved spinning performance. Uniformity within each bale is achieved by careful and professional sorting by New Zealand's highly skilled wool classers ensuring that the softness and handle of the final garment are exactly as specified.

Dark and medulated (hollow/partially hollow) fibre can limit the potential use of garments - dark fibre can show up in a light coloured garment, and medulated fibre can cause inconsistent colouring in the finishing of a dyed garment. But New Zealand Merino fibre is well known in the textile industry as having exceptionally low levels of contamination, largely through careful stock breeding and selection, and highly skilled shearing and wool classing professionals.

The New Zealand Merino sheep graze on pasture in 'free range' conditions throughout the year. This free range style of farming suits both the high country environment (alpine and sub-alpine grassland) and the hardy Merino breed. Merino producers have developed the necessary stockmanship, often over many generations, to ensure the health and welfare of their sheep and that the productive capacity of their farms is maintained or enhanced, rather than degraded, over time. In New Zealand, the Animal Welfare Act (1999) defines minimum standards that specify the obligations of people who own or are in charge of animals. It also defines best management practices for the provision of an animal's physical health and behavioural needs. The Zque Merino fibre is selected from farms that have never mulesed, or that have stopped mulesing sheep which supply Zque Merino fibre.

Why not organic?

Although organic Merino is available, many farmers and manufacturers prefer not to choose this route as this would

incur the animals being mulesed. It takes a long time for farms to attain certified organic status and to do this pastures and feed must be organic; the sheep cannot be dipped in toxic chemicals (for parasite control); and the sheep must also be free from antibiotics, growth promotants and vaccines.

Animal welfare is important to many of the brands that choose New Zealand Merino and for many having the animals mulesed is one step too far and they prefer to pay a premium for mulesing-free wool. Preferring farmers to drench the animals once a year to prevent fly strike.

According to the New Zealand Merino Company, protection of the environment and animal health and welfare result in productive and profitable farming. The Merino sheep are farmed in some of the most beautiful alpine and sub alpine grassland areas, to ensure they stay this way for future generations, farmers have developed systems that result in the production of high quality Merino fibre without damage to the environment.

In New Zealand, the Resource Management Act (1991) establishes rules to protect the environment, through;

- Sustainable management of natural and physical resources
- Governing the use and development of the land, air and water resources
- Managing the environmental effects of human activities

The audit system

For the Zque system auditing is undertaken byASUREQuality, an internationally recognised assurance organisation compliant with ISO Guide 65 and ISO 9001 standards, and accredited with the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ).

ASURE is a State Owned Enterprise that has been designing, developing and delivering farm assurance with a high level of integrity and consistency since 1994.

Accredited Zque suppliers are required to make an annual application for renewal. On-farm audits are scheduled on every accredited property at a frequency of once every three to five years. In addition random on-farm audits are completed annually on a sample of growers to ensure the integrity of the programme.

Doing the right thing

Social responsibility requires more than just lip service. Zque's focus is on acting responsibly and respectfully to promote stability and sustainability throughout the value chain. The economic viability and broader sustainability of farming is closely linked with the social and economic welfare of farmers, farm workers and communities. The majority of New Zealand Merino fibre is produced in the South Island's high country grasslands where farmers and their local communities have developed a distinctive culture of robustness and resilience, while continuing careful stewardship of the land.

The Zque programme encourages these attributes and aims to ensure that a responsible attitude and appropriate strategies are maintained for the protection of the health and safety of those living, working and visiting the accredited farms.

The programme also provides an assurance that the New Zealand Merino Company acts responsibly in its own relationship with its supplier base via the stable and sustainable pricing delivered through the forward contract system. This ensures continued supply of Merino fibre and creates an environment in which farming families, and communities, can continue to invest in their Merino business and enhance the opportunity for long-term business validity.