

9 August 2013

Wool Packs: The next generation

Following nearly two years of extensive trials, the AWEX Board has approved changes to the Australian Wool Pack Standard. The changes to the standard will improve road transport compliance with road regulations; a key objective of this review.

“Complying with road regulations is a matter of safety, a priority of the wool industry and in the interests of all.” said Mark Grave, AWEX CEO. “Whilst over length bales appears to be a relatively simple matter to resolve, we were conscious that the solution needed to be pragmatic and recognise the investment woolgrowers have in infrastructure and minimise any implications for the cost of wool logistics through the pipeline.”

The Road Rules state that a legal load is one that does not exceed 2.5 metres in width. The main cause of over-width loads of wool on trucks is when wool bales that are >1.25 m are placed end-to-end on a truck, therefore exceeding the 2.5 m maximum.

The NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), early in 2011, met with representatives of the transport industry, wool industry and NSW Police to discuss this issue and consider ways to resolve it. AWEX, as the organisation responsible for the development and maintenance of the Australian Wool Pack Standard was in the best position to respond to this issue and immediately commenced a review of the wool pack standard to work towards a solution.

The key changes to the wool pack standard are the introduction of a four-seamed base and a bale fastening guide (BFG) on each flap. “The four seamed base will provide greater structure to the wool bale, a square base and reduced the ‘bulge’. The BFG will provide wool pressers with a mark to pull the bale fastener too when closing a bale. This is a best practice mark.” said Mark Grave.

The review of the wool pack standard created a constructive working partnership between the NSW Government, NSW Roads and Maritime Services, AWEX, wool growers and wool industry stakeholders. “All parties were committed to working together to find a solution” said Mark Grave “The partnership of government and industry has proven to be the new benchmark in resolving these types of issues”.

AWEX trialled 1,800 wool packs on properties throughout NSW and Victoria to ensure that all factors were considered including environment, sheep breed and wool press type.

“The trial was extensive and we are grateful for the support and cooperation which we received from the NSW Government, NSW Roads and Maritime Services, AWEX Members, wool growers and wool industry stakeholders. The participation of the many wool growers, wool brokers and private treaty merchants in the trials has been essential to successfully completing the review.”

“Extensive trials take time and diligence to complete and we believe that the recommendations approved by the AWEX Board will vastly improve the performance of wool bales.” said Mr Grave “The issue of over-width loads of wool bales is not new to the industry, having been raised as a problem in 1995 when wool packs were made of HDPE or Jute.”

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The NSW Government and RMS have been fully supportive of the review and in consultation with industry introduced a Class 3 Baled Agricultural Commodities Load Exemption Notice 2012 which will expire on 30 April 2017.

An industry working group convened by the NSW RMS included representatives from AWEX, NSW Farmers, NCWSBA, ACWEP, PTWMA, NATROAD & transport operators. “This is the best example of Government, Regulators and industry working together. It is now up to industry to work together to successfully implement these changes.” said Mr Grave

It is expected that woolgrowers will start to see the new designed wool packs by the end of 2013.

A copy of the published trial paper and analysis is available on the AWEX web-site. www.awex.com.au

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