

"AUSTRALIAN SHEARER OF THE YEAR"

H.E. J. Alan Beesley, Q.C.

CANBERRA NATIONAL SHOW

February 25, 1978

I am particularly pleased to have been asked to announce the winners of the "Australian Shearer of the Year" competition.

One of the dominant impressions of Australia most newcomers bring with them to this country is one of a land which has depended upon the strength and skill of the shearer for much of its prosperity during the years when the country was opened to settlement. This impression remains a powerful one, evoking an image full of historical significance and holding for Australians much the same associations we in Canada have for the fur traders who first ventured into our own back country. Even today, many of the national folk songs and stories of our two countries reflect the legendary achievements of these men.

As Canada grew, the once dominant role of the fur trade gave way to new endeavours until today it is a relatively minor industry. In contrast, the Australian wool industry has continued to be a major element in the Australian economy. Not only does Australian wool account for one-third of world production, it also accounts for a large proportion of the wool traded internationally. Australian wool shipments were worth well over a billion dollars last year, making it your most important export commodity. Canada imports about A\$30 million worth of wool each year and a large part of these imports come from Australia, although some processing often occurs in a third country between the time the wool leaves Australia and the time it arrives in Canada. In fact, during the National Sheep Dog Trials recently held in Canberra, I presented, as one of the prizes, a set of Canadian Hudson Bay blankets woven from Australian wool.

Watching Australian shearers in action this afternoon I was forcefully reminded that, in spite of the great mechanization which has taken place in most sectors of agriculture, there are still some tasks which remain dependent on human strength, skill and stamina. Too few of us, Canadians and Australians, appreciate fully that the wool industry, for all its impressive production and export performance, is still so completely dependent upon human factor, namely the special expertise and endurance of the shearer.

This is the first time in my life that I have witnessed such an event. I expected to be a fascinating experience, and it was - fascinating and memorable. It is with these thoughts in mind that I take pleasure in announcing the winners of this extremely exciting and spirited contest for "Australian Shearer of the Year" among these eight finalists. I will start with Number 8 and move up to the overall winner: