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Wool Industry Leaves Dalang with Renewed Confidence as 95th IWTO Congress Concludes



The International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO) closed its 95th annual Congress on 26 June, concluding three days of dialogue that brought 238 delegates from across the global wool supply chain to Dalang, China's knitwear capital. From opening remarks to closing sessions, the Congress told the story of an industry navigating real structural change, but doing so from a position of strengthening prices, sharpening science, and expanding partnerships.

“Wool is our work and wool is our passion,” said IWTO President Klaus Steger, opening the Congress. “It is impressive to be here in Dalang, a living demonstration of what this industry can achieve. The discussions and partnerships we build this week will strengthen wool's position in the textile landscape for years to come.”

Setting the scene: wool in a changing global landscape

China's textile and apparel sector alone processes over 60 million tonnes of fibre annually, accounting for more than half of global garment output. In his keynote address, China National Textile and Apparel Council (CNTAC) Chairman Sun Ruizhe set the Congress in the context of a textile industry undergoing rapid transformation. Mr Sun called on the wool sector to engage actively with the changes most profoundly reshaping the industry: AI, digitalisation, and evolving consumer expectations.

A warm welcome, and a first for the FAO

Dalang's hospitality set the tone from the outset, with delegates welcomed into the city's exhibition centre and market, home to a cluster producing one in every five sweaters made globally. Dalang Town Party Committee Representative Dong Tie reflected on four decades of partnership: “From initially introducing wool from Australia and New Zealand, to today exporting knitwear to more than 100 countries, Dalang has become an indispensable link in the global wool textile supply chain.” Delegates learned of Dalang's plans for a

comprehensive service platform for the wool textile industry, a strategic project supporting the development of a wool textile hub worth over RMB 100 billion (approximately USD 14.8 billion).

The Congress also marked a milestone for international cooperation with the participation, for the first time, of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). Assistant Director-General and Chief Veterinarian Thanawat Tiensin delivered a video message emphasising the human side to the wool industry.

“Most people see the final product, but few see the story behind it,” Mr Tiensin said.

“Behind every fibre is a human story. That story deserves to be heard.”

That same spirit of storytelling and stewardship shaped the launch of the IWTO Green Book, presented by Francesco Botto on behalf of the Wool Sector of Confindustria Moda, alongside Green Book lead author Dr Paul Swan. The publication sets out a shared framework for wool's environmental impact and traceability.

“We want this Green Book to be the start of a change in how livestock and products like wool are perceived in the world,” said Dr Swan.

A market finding its footing

Congress delegates heard consistent evidence that wool's price recovery reflects structural change rather than a passing cycle. Andrew Hogley, CEO of British Wool, reported that UK and New Zealand strong wool prices surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the past few months. Isak Staats, General Manager Wool and Mohair at BKB, shared statistics charting 19-micron wool's rise of 39% and 28-micron crossbred wool's rise of 75% through 2025 compared to 2024. Early 2026 merino prices sit 25% above the five-year average.

Scott Carmody and Stephen Hill of Australian Wool Innovation/The Woolmark Company reported that the AWI Purchasing Managers' Index has moved back above 50, signalling a return to positive manufacturer sentiment, alongside a rebound in the Eastern Market Indicator.

However, context is crucial. Even as prices have risen, wool production has fallen. Mr Staats was clear that the rise in wool prices marks a genuine market inflection point driven by sustained restraint in wool production rather than a surge in demand. Other speakers echoed this analysis.

Certification was further noted as a growing driver of value. Responsible Wool Standard premiums for Australian crossbred wool have recovered from around 20 cents to over 100

cents per kilogram clean since mid-2024, Mr Staats noted. Even so, a continued run of stronger prices will be needed to rebuild grower confidence.

Reading China's market signals

Several presentations turned to where the next phase of wool demand may come from. Monica Ebert, Chair of IWTO's Product Wellness Working Group, highlighted the rapid growth of the global wellness economy, which is growing faster than the broader global economy, and is forecast to reach nearly 9.8 trillion dollars by 2029.

“The market is shifting from aspiration to evidence,” Ms Ebert noted, calling for wool's fibre science to be translated into specific, well-substantiated health and comfort claims.

Functional, evidence-based wellness products resonate particularly well in China's domestic market. Liu Gangzhong of Nanshan Zhishang described strong demand for the company's proprietary outdoor wool fabric and a broader turn in Chinese consumer preference toward functional, technical wool applications. Stephen Hill's data showed wool competing directly in the fast-growing global sportswear category, forecast to outgrow luxury apparel in the years ahead.

What comes next

“The global wool textile industry is at a key crossroads from market volatilities to new intelligence technologies,” said Yang Zhaohua, Vice President of the China National Textile and Apparel Council (CNTAC), in his address to delegates. “Wool textile industries worldwide need to strengthen consensus on sustainable development, firmly uphold open cooperation, and elevate global industrial synergy and innovation vitality.”

The 95th IWTO Congress leaves that ambition well underway.

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[*Discover wool's story in the Green Book*](#)