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## AWGA denies sour grapes claim

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By JAMES NASON

The Australian Wool Growers Association has emphatically rejected claims it is motivated by "sour grapes" in its push to cut grower funding for Australian Wool Innovation by 75 per cent.

AWGA's executive has close links to the wool research company's former board, ousted in a shareholder ballot by former Defence Minister, Ian McLachlan, and four other candidates last October.

Several senior AWGA members served as grower advisers to the former Maree McCaskill-chaired board, while Ms McCaskill herself was appointed as an AWGA director when the group re-formed in February. She later resigned to pursue legal matters with the current AWI board. AWGA has been a vocal critic of current grower funding arrangements of AWI, and wants growers to cut their levies from two per cent of gross wool income to just 0.5pc when they vote in WoolPoll 2003 later this year.

Association chair, Will Crozier, said grain and beef producers paid 0.5pc levies to fund industry research, and a similar reduction in the wool levy would force AWI to sharpen its commercial focus.

A 0.5pc contribution would still leverage Government funding for AWI, and would set the company on a course to eventually generate enough returns through successful commercial research to become totally self-funding.

Critics have suggested AWGA's campaign is a case of sour grapes, designed to undermine the new board, but Mr Crozier has lambasted such claims.

"AWGA is not about sour grapes. Most of AWGA were the architects of not only the Future Directions task force report, but also setting up Australian Wool Services, and The Woolmark Company and AWI as it's two commercial entities," he said.

"Our goal is to be commercial and that is what we're sticking to."

Mr Crozier confirmed AWGA had no tenure as an association to support Ms McCaskill in her personal legal battles but she had the full support of AWGA members as individuals.

"It has been a gutsy move by Maree, she can fight that battle, and we will support her as we can," he said.

"It is probably better that she stands aside from AWGA while this is going on, simply because of the accusations of sour grapes etc that have been levelled."

He said AWGA was grateful to Ms McCaskill for helping formulate AWGA's commercial policy, which would help the association pick-up some of the commercial activities the former AWI board had hoped to pursue before it's election loss.



# AWGA - News Update

But while the organisation was still determined to pursue commercial activities on behalf of members, it was a slow process.

Mr Crozier said the looming Senate Inquiry into AWI was a sad indictment on the political nature of the wool industry, but he hoped the inquiry would be wide-ranging in its investigations, and would finish quickly.

Should allegations of mis-management be proven, he said, the full force of the law should come down on those responsible.

Similarly, if allegations were proven false, action should also be taken against those responsible for creating them.

On current research, Mr Crozier said AWGA believed the new AWI board was focusing too heavily on on-farm research and not doing enough to get new products out into the market to create new demand for wool.

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