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Len Stephens will resign

AUSTRALIAN Wool Innovation (AWI) chief executive officer Len Stephens will resign from his position to make way for a replacement with greater marketing experience.

The move, flagged by Farm Weekly almost two months ago, comes as the board of the organisation switches away from its traditional focus of research and development, and amid criticism of its lack of marketing skills by processors such as Laurence Modiano at the recent World Merino Conference.

The fate of the research director was sealed after a Memorandum of Understanding to merge was signed between AWI and Australian Wool Services earlier this year.

The AWI board and Dr Stephens came to an agreement about the timing of his departure with the directors indicating they would appoint a new CEO to lead the company after the integration of the two companies.

Growers are expected to be offered the chance to vote on such a merger sometime this year. AWI chairman Ian McLachlan confirmed to Farm Weekly Dr Stephens' departure was due to the need for a CEO with more marketing experience.

"He asked me if he would be getting the job after integration and I had to say I did not think the board would go with that," Mr McLachlan said.

"For the reasons that we will be in a slightly different game, more to do with marketing and trying to make sure this Woolmark symbol problem gets solved.

"We are determined to be integrated and also solve the very vexed problem of the pension fund debt.

"To do that we need somebody who has the history of being focused internationally on the whole marketing scene." Mr McLachlan said Dr Stephens was not under a contract that was terminated early, nor did he receive a payout for his resignation.

He also said nobody had been approached so far for the position of CEO.

"We have an executive search company looking," Mr McLachlan said.

In a prepared statement released this week, Dr Stephens said: "I will remain as CEO for the next few months, which will be a busy time for the operational side of the company as we build up our product marketing activities around the world and drive important projects such as shearing and mulesing replacements to market.

"At the same time, we will also conduct WoolPoll, carry out planning for the AWI/AWS integration, and hold the Annual General Meeting.



AWGA - News Update

“Since arriving at the organisation three years ago, AWI has changed its focus and is now seeking more marketing skills at its head.

“When I started, the plan was for AWI to be a research and development company principally operating from Sydney. But over the past three years, the scope of AWI’s activities has expanded enormously to include apparel product development and marketing, with operations in five countries in addition to Australia.”

Dr Stephens is the second person to leave AWI since July, when animal health project manager Scott Williams resigned.

AWI’s change towards marketing recently drew the attention of its own auditor. In the ACIL Tasman performance review of the company earlier this month, marketing activities were highlighted as possibly being in breach of AWI’s statutory marketing arrangements with the Federal Government

Source Farm Weekly

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