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Fears for low WoolPoll voter turnout

WITH less than a week to go in WoolPoll 2012 voting, Australian Wool Innovation chairman Wal Merriman says he is “a bit worried” about apathy in the ranks of the nation’s woolgrowers.

Mr Merriman said AWI was proud of the industry’s previous participation rates in the triennial wool levy vote. But because wool prices had been at higher levels in the past two years and there had been fewer issues in the industry, perhaps growers had not yet voted in the six-week poll.

In a letter to shareholders this week, Mr Merriman encouraged woolgrowers to vote and outlined how AWI had delivered on growers’ priorities in the past three years.

Key achievements were in the areas of flystrike prevention, helping farmers increase weaning rates and manage risk, reducing wild dog predation and increasing shearer and shedhand training. Globally, it included educating consumers about wool, marketing it through new campaigns and fostering its use in emerging affluent nations, such as China.

“These activities are driven by woolgrowers, through the ongoing consultation we conduct in seeking your input to set our priorities,” he said.

But consultation has emerged as a key issue during WoolPoll, particularly for growers who wanted a say on two of the board’s recent decisions - the 60:40 split between marketing and research and development and funding for the second phase of the Information Nucleus Flock.

Australian Wool Growers Association director Chick Olsson said there had been virtually no industry-wide consultation in WoolPoll 2012 when compared with the previous vote in 2009.

He said after the 2009 vote, the board – including him as a member – made a huge effort to engage all of the wool industry to develop a three-year plan, of which everyone had ownership.

“Fast forward to this WoolPoll 2012,” he said. “No consultation, no chance to vote on a split, no input into research direction, and a company that isn’t paying attention to such worrying issues such as generic promotion and cancellation of the highly popular INF research.

“AWI still is trying to defend men’s suiting with the Italian suit companies without realising nor understanding that people are no longer wearing suits but are embracing stylish and sophisticated casualisation.

“AWI is still marketing muskets, while the world wants rifles.”

But Mr Merriman said the 60:40 split had been discussed six months ago and was raised with state farming organisations, with AWI’s Industry Consultative Committee, in preparation for the WoolClip series of events, and at the WoolPoll roadshow.

He said the decision had been based on feedback received from these groups that they wanted to see more marketing of Australian wool.

Mr Merriman also defended AWI’s financial management, saying in 2011-12 the company had doubled its project spending but maintained its operating costs. Operating costs in 2011-12 were half of those in 2007-08 and the cost-reduction focus would continue in future.

AWI had also not decreased funding to MerinoSelect – as claimed by some growers – and it would publish WoolPoll results in the same way it did for the 2009 vote. The company also confirmed it would not revisit its INF2 decision but that other genomic project proposals were being developed.



Wal Merriman is concerned about low voter turnout for WoolPol.

<http://theland.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/wool/general/fears-for-low-woolpoll-voter-turnout/2630611.aspx?storypage=0>