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Ag party a step closer

EXCLUSIVE: A NEW political party to solely represent farmers is likely to be launched in time for September's federal election.

Outspoken wool grower Chick Olsson wants to form the party to be a new force in Canberra.

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Such a party was needed to radically overhaul agricultural policies and introduce massive tax breaks to help debt-laden farmers return to profitability, he said.

Demand for such a party was "very strong" and its prospects of forming and fielding candidates in time for the September 14 federal election "very realistic", he said.

"The only real chance to stimulate agriculture and get it organized would ... be the formation of a new Australian Agriculture Party, that has no other interest in parliament except do all it can for our farmers," he said.

Mr Olsson, who plans to run for a NSW Senate seat himself at this year's federal election, said the "Rolls Royce version" of getting agriculture high on the national agenda was forming a new party.

"We're serious, the wheels are in motion," he said.

"The second option, which is also in discussion, is getting four prominent pastoralists to run for the senate as independents."

The former Australian Wool Innovation director and Goulburn farmer said agriculture needed stronger voices in government. Existing parties were failing to deliver policies to support farmers' future, he said.

Major parties, including the Nationals, although well-intentioned, were "neglecting agriculture", he said.

Nationals Victorian state director Stuart Copeland said his party had represented regional Victorians, particularly farmers, "for the past 100 years".

"We've provided strong representation for farmers, and are still doing so, successfully," he said.

"It seems another week, another new party, many people start up new parties, most don't survive." One of farming's biggest challenges was a "division of agricultural interests and splinter groups", he said.

Katter's Australian Party state co-ordinator Norm Dunn said there was "a need for a party that understands agriculture as well as city life", and his party could fill that void.

http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2013/02/06/558985_politics-news.html