

Chick not hatching plans

BY COLIN BETTLES



Chick Olsson won't be forming a new political ag party - but may run for the NSW Senate.

CHICK Olsson has ruled out establishing a new federal political party focused 100 per cent on agriculture.

But the high profile wool grower says he wants to see greater pressure applied on Canberra during the federal election campaign, to produce a better deal for the nation's farmers.

He is however considering running for a NSW Senate position, to apply added pressure on current Coalition members on rural issues.

Speaking to Fairfax Agricultural Media, Mr Olsson rejected reports that surfaced last week suggesting he was in the process of building a new political party to address issues confronting Australian agriculture and had several candidates ready and waiting.

The former Australian Wool Innovation board member said reporting of the issue "got a bit carried away", but stressed the essence of his reported ideas were accurate.

He has an intense desire to see a bold vision illustrated and articulated for the nation's farmers, by the nation's political elite, in the lead up to the September 14 poll.



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He wants to see a clear vision on how the Coalition or ALP government plans to address rising debt levels in rural Australia and counteract the escalating Australian dollar which is having a massive impact on farmers' ongoing viability and "increasing frustrations".

Mr Olsson said he was concerned about the over-riding attitude of government which seemed to resolve every problem by imposing more financial levies on farmers, which was effectively cost shifting.

He said that was particularly the case for R&Ds like AWI and Meat and Livestock Australia but praised the work those organisations were doing on behalf of growers.

"I'm not setting up a new political party but I'm very serious about tackling all of these issues and finding solutions," he said.

"I'd like to see more accountability in our political system, with a specific focus on agriculture.

"If we're going to continue producing cheap food for consumers we need to look after our farmers."

Mr Olsson criticised the government's plans to make Australia the food bowl of Asia calling the idea "absurd".

He said the current costs of local food production and logistics far outweighed what consumers were capable of paying further down the supply chain in Asia.

"The costs are insane," he said.

In calling for more concerted action and greater political accountability for agriculture, Mr Olsson was also cautious not to criticise the National Farmers Federation, which is the obvious lobby group to take on such a role.

He said the peak farming body was doing a good job and praised NFF President Jock Laurie, describing him as a major asset for the industry.

But he said there was insufficient grower unity, and backing of the NFF and other related organisations, to apply sufficient pressure on government to achieve necessary action.

"How many bodies are there out there pretending to represent graziers?" he said.

"It all comes back to the issue of how fragmented our entire industry is.

"There are too many bodies running around trying to do the same job and taking a slice of the cake."

Mr Olsson said the Coalition's election policy directions document - released late last month - had failed to mention agriculture sufficiently but was a good document.

He said if the Opposition was serious about its vision for Australian agriculture, they'd have a package of ideas ready to go now, and would release more policy detail, rather



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than wait until later in the campaign.

He said rural communities and farmers needed more time to digest any policy plans and consider any offered vision and solutions, once it appeared in black and white print.

He believes tax breaks and other similar incentives are integral to any agricultural plan, to find ways of boosting productivity and profitability.

Mr Olsson described the Coalition's policy development committee Chairman and former NFF executive director and economist Andrew Robb as “a genius” and was looking forward to assessing the results of his policy development work, since the 2010 election.

He urged the Nationals to stop being the “poor cousins” of the Liberals in Coalition and to stand up and demand greater action on rural issues.

“It’s not just the Nationals, the entire Coalition have to stop taking us farmers for granted and just expect we’ll simply give them all of our votes,” he said.

On the Greens potential offering for farmers and rural Australia at this year’s election, he said “God help us”.

“The Greens can’t be a serious political party for farmers, given what they’ve done to us,” he said.

Mr Olsson said he was a member of both the Liberal and National Party but not the Greens or Labor.

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