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AWI director battle



Walcha woolgrower Martin Oppenheimer is among six nominations to contest three positions on the Australian Wool Innovation board.

WOOLGROWERS will soon have a chance to have their say on the direction of their industry with three positions on the board of Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) up for election.

Eight candidates vie for the positions, which will be made available at the 2013 AWI annual general meeting on November 22.

There are six new nominees, who will battle against incumbent AWI directors Meredith Sheil and George Falkiner.

Dr Sheil and Mr Falkiner will retire and renominate at the 2013 AGM, while director Roger Fletcher will not stand after serving on the board since 2007.

The new nominees come from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia.

They are Riverina Wool Testers managing director Paul Cocking from Wagga Wagga and Petali Merino stud principal Martin Oppenheimer from Walcha, NSW; WA's John Hassell; Victorian Merino producer Jock MacRae; commercial wool producer James Morgan from SA, and Will Roberts, Victoria Downs, Queensland.

Mr Oppenheimer said the election was of utmost importance for wool growers.

"We can change the direction (of the wool industry) back to what it should be," Mr Oppenheimer said.

He thought the current board of directors had moved too far towards a wool-only focus, that was at odds with the way many wool growers operated now.



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Mr Oppenheimer used his own experience as an example.

While wool from his Merino stud was his main source of revenue, Mr Oppenheimer also runs cattle and prime lambs to diversify the property's income, and said this was indicative of many in the industry.

With this in mind, he said the narrow focus of the current board needed to be shifted.

"The wool industry is part of the sheep industry," he said, adding that an AWI decision to move away from a partnership with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) in order to create a new "wool only" workshops was one reason he decided to stand for election.

Funding cuts to genetic research and external programs were also factors.

"There is so much change going on at the moment, so we need the best tools to remain profitable," he said.

"It is important for woolgrowers to pay attention to their vote, as it will set the direction of the industry."

According to AWI financial statements, in the past two financial years the organisation's total revenue has increased \$72,698,000 to \$73,970,000.

The investment ratio for this time has been set at 40 per cent for research and development and 60pc for marketing.

On-farm research and development makes up the majority of that 40pc, with off-farm research amounting to 15pc of AWI's investment.

AWI chairman Wal Merriman paid tribute to Mr Fletcher's achievements as director.

"(Mr Fletcher) brought significant experience, insight, business acumen and practical commonsense to the AWI board," Mr Merriman said.

"This assisted with the board's focus on commercial research and efficiencies in operations which have been of great benefit to woolgrowers in Australia."

The AWI constitution stipulates at least a third of the board, currently made up of seven members, must retire their position every two years.

The AWI Board Nomination Committee will assess the skills of the candidates as required under the Statutory Funding Agreement with the federal government.

The Nomination Committee will deliver its report to the AWI board and the report will be appended to the notice of annual general meeting as part of the AWI shareholder voting pack.

<http://www.theland.com.au/news/agriculture/livestock/sheep-wool/awi-director-battle/2673010.aspx?storypage=0>