

02-10-2013

AWI 'too tight' on genes

A LEADING sheep geneticist has blasted Australian Wool Innovation's decision to divert money from a sheep management training program.

Dr Jim Watts, from The SRS Company at Bowral in NSW, said it was "a bad mistake" for AWI to abandon the Bred Well Fed Well workshops, and called on AWI to reinstate funding and support.

Several candidates who have nominated for the AWI board - to be decided at its November 22 annual meeting - said they were aware many people were disappointed with the decision, but the board had access to better information than other growers.

AWI board candidate and Sutton Grange Merino breeder Jock MacRae said: "I am hearing that people are unhappy with the decision to drop" the program, which he acknowledged had been well supported by industry.

"I am not in a position to make comment, we don't have the same level of information as the board members do," Mr MacRae said.

Fellow candidate Martin Oppenheimer of Walcha in NSW attacked the AWI for making "poor decisions" on genetic research and extension.

Queensland's Will Roberts of Victoria Downs is among the eight contesting positions on the board and said he was unable to comment on the controversy.

"We don't have all the information so we can't (comment)," he said.

Dr Watts said the workshops had taken important information to sheep producers across Australia and many had applied it to their flocks.

AWI had originally committed \$181,000 to the one-day Bred Well Fed Well workshops for which participants are asked to pay \$50 each.

An AWI spokesman said the program was cut in favour of a new course being developed next year with a stronger wool focus.

The spokesman said proof of AWI's willingness to back key scientific strategies was the \$800,000 that had been committed to continue a lifetime ewe management program.

AWI chairman Wal Merriman said there would be a funding shortfall of \$4-\$6 million if the workshops were continued.

Earlier this year AWI came under fire for refusing to back an extension of the Sheep Co-operative Research Centre.

Last year it withdrew its funding of the Sheep CRC information nucleus flock.

http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2013/10/02/584929_wool.html



Another look needed: Dr Jim Watts said it was "a bad mistake" for AWI to abandon the Bred Well Fed Well workshops.

