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WPA slams AWI over levy



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WOOLPRODUCERS Australia (WPA) has slammed Australian Wool Innovation's (AWI) decision to leave out a 1.5 per cent levy option at the WoolPoll vote.

WPA senior vice president and NSW Farmers wool committee chairman, Ed Storey, Yass, NSW, claimed the exclusion of an incremental levy decrease was a deliberate move from AWI to ensure the levy was not lowered from two per cent.

As [previously reported by FarmOnline](#), the 2015 WoolPoll was launched last week at the Rural Press Club, Melbourne, with the AWI board recommending growers vote in support of retaining the 2pc wool levy for the next three years.

"Farmers are conservative by nature and will not vote to halve the income of the company (AWI), whereby they might have voted to reduce it by 25pc if it was an option. It's a tactical play from the board to leave a 1.5pc option out," he said.

"If this is how WoolPoll is going to be conducted, it's a myth that it's a real choice for growers."

Options put forward for consideration by growers at the vote included 0pc, 1pc, 2pc, 2.5pc and 3pc, leaving growers with the option of only a 50pc or 100pc decrease on the current 2pc levy.

Mr Storey said he was aware other representatives on the WoolPoll Panel had put forward 1.5pc as an option.

"WoolProducers, along with other grower groups with a representative on the Panel were asked to put forward levy options for consideration. We put forward 0pc, 1pc, 1.5pc, 2pc and 2.5pc as this enabled producers a fair range of options to vote on," Mr Storey said.

"We know that other groups put forward options and included 1.5pc as it's a reasonable alternative that enables growers the opportunity to reduce the amount of levies paid without having to make the drastic decision to halve the current amount going towards research, development and marketing, so it is disappointing that growers were not given this choice.



AWGA - News Update

"Growers are compulsory levy payers and I want them to have a real choice to reduce the levy if they want, but AWI have set the levies for the poll with the intention to reduce the chances of the levy being dropped and that's not their role."

While Mr Storey was supportive of the process that allowed wool growers to vote on such an important decision, he said the questions around transparency of the process needed to be asked - particularly when, according to AWI the cost to growers to conduct the WoolPoll is \$1.4 million.

Mr Storey believed it was not appropriate for AWI to deny growers the opportunity to vote for an incremental decrease in the levy.

"The AWI board talk about this being a real chance for growers to set the levy for the industry as it's a democratic process, but that's a very hollow comment when levy options have been manipulated," he said.

"The board may have very sound reasons to not include 1.5pc, but if that is the case what is the point of convening a panel and having the expense of bringing this group together for numerous face-to-face meetings when their preferences can ultimately be ignored, particularly when the levy options put forward have remained the same for the past four WoolPolls?" Mr Storey said.

<http://www.farmonline.com.au/news/agriculture/sheep/wool/wpa-slams-awi-over-levy/2742024.aspx?storypage=0>