

Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Rural R & D

Focusing on the Australian Sheep Industry

The Australian Sheep Industry R & D is serviced by two main industry-owned companies (IOC) namely MLA and AWI. In general there is more evidence of controversy with the functioning of AWI ultimately relating to its Board. It would seem unlikely that the controversy within AWI will change with the current structure. My suggestions for improvements to AWI:-

1. Board structure include 3 nominees from the Productivity Commission plus
2. Four elected as follows;
 - 2.1 Relevant expert (Veterinary, Wool Processing, Genetics etc.) or
 - 2.2 General members that have an advisory expert based group

General on Australian Agricultural Research:-

1. Given that with current world population growth forecasts and predicted food shortage forecasts in the next 20 years or so it is important that Australia maintain its position as a significant producer. Some research can not be turned of and on as it depends on depends on a longer term commitment to both human and physical resources.
2. There is a trend for increasing public and consumer concern with the environment, ethics, food quality etc. Rather than looking at this as a threat we should turn it into a positive and be at the forefront to capitalise on upmarket and value added production as well as looking after our environment.
3. Farmers and their representatives should be consulted on how their research levies are paid. However, when they are asked to set research priorities they tend to focus on what will impact on currently fashionable issues. Although this needs to be addressed there is also a need to invest in some 'Blue Sky' research to be ready for emerging issues or new potentials.

I have a sheep research background as well as a sheep farm. I am involved with breeding sheep that are fit for the environment such as worm, fly resistance and sheep that don't need mulesing. I am also interested in developing ruminants that are good at converting roughage into animal products rather than too much reliance on high quality grain that should be preserved for human food. In general I want to produce without too much reliance on chemicals with potential environmental and health connotations. I also think we should develop production systems that will allow us to promote our produce as 'clean and green'.

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