

**WoolProducers Australia Ltd submission into improving RDC
consultation with industry**

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The need for a recognised Industry Representative Body in the Australian Wool Industry

Introduction

This submission addresses the criteria set out in the *Guidelines for Appointment of Registered Organisations* and outlines not only the need for a single Industry Representative Body for the Australian Wool Industry, but why WoolProducers Australia is the only body that has the capability and capacity to fulfil this vitally important function.

Wool Industry Structural Issues

The 2018 Independent Review of Performance (ROP) of Australian Wool Innovation Ltd. (AWI) conducted by Ernst Young, found many issues surrounding the governance of the organisation and its capacity to effectively and meaningfully engage with wool growers. This was equally applicable when determining both the expenditure of compulsory levies and the strategic priorities of the company. Since the handing down of the review, there has been some effort from AWI to address issues highlighted by the report, but there remains an underlying theme indicating strong resistance to implement meaningful change aligned to the recommendations. This also demonstrates resistance to genuine acceptance of the review's recommendations. AWI currently claim that they have implemented 99.76% of the recommendations and this has been rubber stamped by the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE), this is not the view of industry and would indicate why the Minister again finds himself having to intervene in wool industry matters – there must be a circuit breaker in this debate.

Through the ROP it has been confirmed that there is not enough opportunity for shareholders to provide input into the direction of their company and very little recourse for them to act if they have concerns. This report has further demonstrated that there must be a greater level of industry oversight over AWI as currently, the company is run at the sole discretion of its Board. This is inadequate for a semi- statutory body that collects a compulsory levy from growers.

Further, the 2021 Review of Performance of AWI conducted by Accenture found that there is still need for greater stakeholder engagement, even though claims by AWI that they have implemented the stakeholder engagement recommendations from the 2018 ROP.

AWI is unique in that it is a public company but is also a semi-statutory body. As such AWI requires a unique set of governance arrangements and should have higher levels of governance and grower oversight than ordinary shareholders do for non-statutory public companies. Unlike shares held in other public companies, shares held in AWI are compulsory through a levy and shareholders are unable to trade their shares if they are dissatisfied with the direction of the company.

A key theme of the 2019 Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry was culture and governance and the impact of these factors on leadership.

*"...the entities concerned and those who manage and control them, effective leadership, good governance and appropriate culture within the entities are fundamentally important."*¹

Time has now demonstrated that these present governance arrangements are reactive, inflexible

¹ Pg 47; 4.4 Culture, governance and remuneration, www.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/fsrc-volume-1-final-report.pdf

and are not fit for purpose. This lack of accountability and transparency is not acceptable in any such organisation.

Independent and grower-based oversight of AWI is required to address these issues to ensure that the company is operating in line with the expectation of all its stakeholders.

Constitution and Statutory Funding Agreement

Unlike similar RDCs who operate under the *Primary Industries Research and Development Act 1989* (PIRD Act) or the *Australian Meat and Livestock Industry Act 1997* (AMLI Act), AWI operates under the *Wool Services Privatisation Act 2000*, and is an Industry Owned Company.

In addition to the *Wool Services Privatisations Act 2000* and other corporation and levy related legislation and regulation, AWI is also governed by:

- Their company Constitution, *and*;
- Statutory Funding Agreement (SFA) between AWI and the Australian Government

The AWI Constitution is the agreement between AWI and its shareholders and can be amended Subject to the Law, via a special resolution passed by at least 75% of votes cast by shareholders entitled to vote on the resolution.

- Under the current arrangements the AWI Board are solely responsible with developing, implementing and assessing if the organisation is meeting these requirements to a satisfactory standard.
- There is little to no recourse for either government or statutory levy payers to challenge the operations of AWI, which is completely inappropriate given the compulsory levy paid by woolgrowers and the significant monies received from taxpayers.

The SFA broadly sets out the roles, responsibilities and management of compulsory wool levies. Like all SFAs, the AWI SFA is generalised and non-prescriptive. AWI determine the detail of how these functions are implemented in conjunction with DAWE.

While the document is high-level, there has been very little enforcement of its requirements by government, particularly regarding potential breaches of clauses covering agri-political activities and a lack of industry consultation.

The SFA has strict requirements for AWI to not engage in agri-political activities, however there are many examples of undertakings by AWI that could be argued to fit this criterion. Broadly speaking, there have been numerous times AWI have acted as an industry representative body and made policy determinations on behalf of industry.

It is important to highlight that AWI are explicitly prohibited from performing this role with industry under the SFA.

9.2 AWI must not, at any time, act as an Industry Representative Organisation or reference or provide information which implies to stakeholders or trading partners that AWI is an Industry Representative Organisation.²

² Pg 14, Statutory Funding Agreement 2020-2030 between the Commonwealth and AWI, <https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/about-awi/who-we-are/statutory-obligations/awi-statutory-funding-agreement-2020-2030.pdf>

It is fair to say that AWI's role is not well understood by many industry participants, which is furthered evidenced in this year's ROP, whereby Accenture stated, *'Our independent analysis of AWI's corporate strategic planning found an overcomplication of levels of planning and lack of clarity of the organisation's purpose and objectives.'*³

Since 2015, WoolProducers have been advocating to DAWE (or previous iterations of the department) that at a minimum there needed to be a definition of 'effective consultation' in the SFA. There are four key principles to effective consultation that must be adhered to and could be prescribed in such a document, consultation must be:

- Inclusive
- well-informed
- equitable; and
- accountable.

Industry Consultation and Input into the Operations of AWI

In terms of directing AWI, growers have two main mechanisms:

1. The biennial director elections, and
2. The triennial vote in WoolPoll.

Both of these processes and the apparent ability of levy payers and shareholders to have input into them, despite amendments following the 2018 ROP continue to impede the genuine ability of shareholders to exercise influence on the company and has also demonstrated that the current governance and regulatory frameworks that AWI operates within continue to have issues.

Whilst new measures relating to director elections as recommended by the 2018 ROP have been implemented, including the establishment of a more independent Board Nomination Committee, AWI still have a disproportionate amount of influence which was evidenced in this year's director nomination process, for example AWI reluctantly advertised for nominations *only after* they were called on to do so by the WICP despite this being an explicit requirement of the recommendation.

Further, this year's ROP found that approximately 40% of levy payers perceive board culture as being an inhibitor to potential candidates, while approximately 43% believe a Board role involves agri-politics⁴.

So, while there may claims that there is opportunity to direct the company through the AWI director election process, the reality is that some quality candidates may be completely deterred from running in the election due to negative cultural perceptions of the board/organisation, which ultimately inhibits one of the main mechanisms that enables shareholders to have adequate influence in the company.

AWI's inadequate industry consultation mechanisms have continued even after release and apparent implementation of the 2018 ROP recommendations. Although consultation is another requirement under the SFA, there is an inability by AWI to distinguish between consultation, communication and engagement. This issue is further compounded by the lack of transparent processes that demonstrate how any consultations with shareholders and industry are addressed

³ Pg 44, 2021 AWI Independent Review of Performance

⁴ Pg 46, 2021 AWI Independent Review of Performance, <https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/about-awi/media-resources/publications/rop-2021/awi-2021-independent-ROP-report.pdf>

by the AWI Board.

The 2021 ROP found that 57% of survey respondents to the Levy Payer Survey found that agri-politics continues to divide the industry, believing that this presents a high or very high risk to industry.⁵

The Wool Industry Consultative Panel (WICP) is one of the two main consultation mechanisms established post the 2018 ROP, however 56% of woolgrowers surveyed in the 2021 ROP did not know who their industry representative was on the WICP⁶.

Further, both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 AWI Annual Reports show an Operating Target of *'WICP and WCG members report AWI consultation efforts have been maintained or improved at 8.9 (approval rating out of 10)'*⁷, however in both of these financial years these targets have not been met with WICP members providing a rating of seven out of 10, which completely contradicts claims made in the 2021 ROP that *'The set up of WICP and WCG and the addition of an independent chair has constituted real improvement to the industry consultation approach'*⁸. This is neither effective nor acceptable.

Some current members believe that the WICP could be the Industry Representative Body and have advocated for this move, however this claim provides a further insight into the lack of understanding of industry structures and governance by some producer representatives, as this activity is explicitly prohibited under the WICP Terms of Reference.

Additionally, one of the five pillars of success for the Wool 2030 Strategy is *'Fostering a prosperous woolgrowing community'*, which states that *'In 2030, the woolgrowing community in Australia is cohesive, collaborative and committed, speaking with one voice.'*⁹

The Wool 2030 Strategy which was developed as a recommendation of the 2018 ROP and was conducted by independent consultants who facilitated a prolonged consultation throughout 2020, gained consensus on the need for a singular voice for industry, this coupled with the concerns expressed by levy payers during the 2021 ROP over the damaging impact of a fragmented and disunified industry, means that there must be the appointment of an Industry Representative Body.

Unless effective, independent and genuine oversight is established, there will continue to be a culture of inadequate transparency and accountability, which will ultimately result in continued damage to the industry.

WoolProducers Australia's capacity to be appointed as the National Industry Representative Body in the Australian Wool Industry

WoolProducers acknowledges that there are many voices representing the Australian wool industry, and that collective unity is paramount in protecting and promoting the interests of individual growers.

⁵ Pg 16, 2021 AWI Independent Review of Performance

⁶ Pg 21, 2021 AWI Independent Review of Performance

⁷ Pg 110, AWO 2020-21 Annual Report, https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/about-awi/media-resources/publications/agm-2021/awi_2020-21_annual_report.pdf

⁸ Pg 18, 2021 AWI Independent Review of Performance

⁹ Pg 16, Wool 2030 Strategy, <https://www.wool.com/globalassets/wool/about-awi/how-we-consult/wool-2030-strategy/wool-2030-strategy.pdf>

Accordingly, the WoolProducers charter dictates that it must represent the interests of **all** Australian woolgrowers. Compared to other wool industry groups, WoolProducers is not sectorial by nature, and at its core allows for, and encourages participation from every part of the wool growing sector.

WoolProducers Australia Ltd Structure, Leadership and Governance

WoolProducers Australia Ltd Vision

An Australian wool growing industry that is financially, socially, ethically and environmentally sustainable.

WoolProducers Australia Ltd Structure

WoolProducers is led by a National Executive comprised of woolgrowers from across Australia. Each state farm organisation member has a representative on our National Executive, and they are joined by three independent National Executive members who are directly elected by growers Australia-wide.

Independent National Executive member positions provide anyone involved with wool growing in Australia the opportunity to be a part of the WoolProducers leadership team through biennial democratic elections.

WoolProducers is ideally positioned as the only national organisation that can speak on behalf of the mainstream wool industry and represent the concerns and hopes of wool producers.

Industry Leadership

WoolProducers plays a key role in working with companies that are financed by grower funds, whether they are compulsory levies or fees for service, to develop constructive, profitable and sustainable outcomes for industry.

WoolProducers is the only wool industry member of the National Farmers' Federation and through this membership, provides strategic input into national agricultural policy through the Economic Policy and Farm Business Committee (drought, taxation, infrastructure), Rural Affairs and Farming Systems Committee (animal welfare, biosecurity and community and consumer trust building) and Trade Committee.

WoolProducers is also the only woolgrower representative body who is recognised by the two industry service bodies, Australian Wool Testing Authority (AWTA), and Australian Wool Exchange (AWEX). This recognition is acknowledged through their company constitutions by nominating WoolProducers to provide a grower representative to serve as a director on both of their respective Boards.

WoolProducers is the only woolgrower member of Wool Industries Australia (WIA), which sees WoolProducers as the Australian woolgrower representative body at the International Wool Textiles Organisation (IWTO).

WoolProducers currently provides representation through the IWTO at an international level within the:

- Joint Australia-China Wool Working Group;
- Growers Forum (also providing the Secretariat services);
- Sustainable Practices Working Group;
- Biosecurity Tarde Working Group, and
- Animal Welfare Working Group.

Additionally, WoolProducers are the only grower body to have representation on the recently established Joint India-Australia Wool Working Group and have been involved with other domestic supply chain partners and the Federal Government in discussions regarding a reinvigorated Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian and Indian Wool Industries.

WoolProducers is the only wool member of Animal Health Australia (AHA), providing advice on behalf of the industry through representation on national animal health, welfare and biosecurity committees. As part of this membership the organisation is also the Australian wool signatory to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA), which is a unique contractual arrangement between industries, state governments and the Commonwealth providing the ability to respond quickly and effectively to an EAD incident while minimising uncertainty over management and funding arrangements.

As the signatory, there are a number of prescribed EADRA obligations, of which WoolProducers takes extremely seriously, including: the development and maintenance of industry wide Crisis Communication Plans (this has been done in collaboration with the domestic wool and sheep meat supply chains, including the RDCs); risk management, response and preparatory activities for industry through surveillance, training and policy setting and the provision of industry personnel during an incursion.

Additionally, WoolProducers is responsible for oversight of the compulsory levy collected for animal health, welfare and biosecurity on behalf of Australian wool growers under the *Australian Animal Health Council (Livestock Industries) Funding Act 1996*.

This function demonstrates WoolProducers capacity and experience in successfully performing an oversight function.

In 2014 WoolProducers established the levy funded Animal Health and Welfare Advisory Committee. Its establishment has enabled WoolProducers to work towards unifying the fractured wool industry by inviting other national wool groups to have input in the direction of expenditure of the wool levy collected under the *Australian Animal Health Council (Livestock Industries) Funding Act 1996*.

This advisory committee consists of representatives from:

- Australian Wool Growers Association
- Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association
- MerinoLink
- SRS Genetics Pty
- Animal Health Australia
- Australian Wool Innovation
- Australian Veterinary Association

In terms of industry-wide leadership, in 2021 WoolProducers established the Post Farm Gate EAD Working Group, with the objective of preparing the entire domestic wool supply chain for an EAD incursion.

Membership includes representatives from:

- AWI
- AWEX
- AWTA
- Australian Council of Wool Exporters and Processors

- National Council of Wool Selling Brokers Australia
- Shearing Contractors Association of Australia
- WA Shearing Industry Association
- WIA
- Australian CVO
- State CVOs
- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (Animal / Export division)

2021 has also seen WoolProducers launch two important campaigns on behalf of all Australian woolgrowers, starting in March with the launch of the [Trust in Australian Wool](#) campaign. This was developed in partnership with Animal Health Australia, after WoolProducers identified a major knowledge gap in our global supply chain regarding our world-leading industry and government frameworks in the areas of animal health, welfare, biosecurity, traceability, sustainability, clip preparation and quality assurance. The content of this campaign was developed by industry partners across the domestic supply chain to explain in a transparent and accountable manner, how our industry operates in order to produce the world's most sought-after wool.

Secondly, in collaboration with AWI, Meat and Livestock Australia and Sheep Producers Australia, we launched the [Sheep Sustainability Framework](#) (SSF), which is a world-first for the sheep and wool industry. The SSF is an evolving document that has identified four key themes: caring for sheep, enhancing the environment and climate, looking after our people, customers and the community and ensuring a financially resilient industry. These themes are underpinned by 21 priorities, 41 indicators and 70 metrics on which to collect data on and will be used to benchmark industry's performance over time.

In essence, the Trust in Australian Wool Campaign is about telling our story and the Sheep Sustainability Framework is about proving it.

Additionally, commencing in 2020, WoolProducers initiated, facilitated and chaired a series of meetings between AWI, the DAWE and levy collection agents (National Council of Wool Selling Brokers and Private Treaty Wool Merchants of Australia) to enable the Digital Levy Payer Database arrangements to be implemented. We did this successfully as talks between these three groups had broken down and a solution was needed, which WoolProducers achieved.

Governance

The National Executive of WoolProducers is a strong advocate of good corporate governance principles and is committed to fulfilling its corporate governance obligations and responsibilities in the best interests of the company and its stakeholders.

WoolProducers' governance is demonstrated through:

- Board Charter - this document sets out the Board's terms of reference and provides and explanation of the Board's approach to the following key corporate governance matters:
 - Board's responsibilities;
 - Board composition;
 - Board meeting procedures;
 - Powers retained by the board, and
 - Roles and responsibilities of individual directors, chairman, CEO and company secretary.
- Code of Conduct;
- Conflict of Interest Policy;

- Schedule of Delegation;
- Communications and Media Policy;
- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee;
- WoolProducers Australia Strategic Plan and Annual Operating Plan, and
- WoolProducers Australia National Executive (Board):
 - Six non-executive directors nominated by each of the State Farm Organisation (SFO) members;
 - Three elected independent directors, who can be from outside of the SFO network, and
 - An independent Chair.

A complete list of the company's strategic objectives, priorities, capabilities, membership and financial capability is provided in [Attachment A](#).

Summary

It is evident that the mechanisms created by government to provide oversight and accountability for Australian Wool Innovation Ltd. are insufficient to ensure the company is accountable, and transparent in its operations, to levy payers and key stakeholders. These current mechanisms have simply not kept pace with modern corporate governance principles and have been proven to be inadequate when applied to the unique structure of AWI.

Considering the 2018 ROP's 82 recommendations, and AWI's subsequent reluctance to work toward their meaningful implementation, it is apparent an additional level of independent and grower-based oversight is required to ensure that both growers and government can have confidence in the future of the company.

WoolProducers Australia Ltd. is suitably structured, positioned and prepared to fulfil the roles and responsibilities required of a National Wool Industry Representative Body, and effectively engages and represents all Australian wool growers, including the various wool industry representative bodies that currently exist.

WoolProducers has demonstrated its leadership capability over many years and is a trusted source of policy which has contributed to the sustainability of the Australian wool industry and will continue to do so into the future.

If successfully appointed, WoolProducers looks forward to working with AWI and other industry stakeholders to ensure woolgrowers, the government and the wider community derive improved benefit from its research, development, marketing and extension activities through improved governance and consultative measures.

ATTACHMENT A

WoolProducers Australia Ltd Objectives

To represent all Australian woolgrowers by providing them with a unified policy forum on national wool issues.

To promote and carry on those activities necessary or advisable for the benefit and advancement of Australian woolgrowers' social and economic well-being.

To maintain WoolProducers Australia Ltd as the recognised peak national body for the Australian wool- growing industry.

WoolProducers Australia Ltd Strategic Priorities

- I. Ensuring efficient and accountable expenditure of compulsory levies or fees paid by wool growers and to seek constructive and profitable returns on these investments.
- II. Representation of wool growers in respect to national animal health and welfare priorities
- III. Membership of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) on behalf of wool growers.
- IV. Developing policy and strongly advocate to government and other stakeholders on domestic and international issues that may affect the profitability of our wool growing members.
- V. Participation in national training and educational activities that support and promote on-farm business and profitability.
- VI. Efficient, effective and professional management of WoolProducers Australia Ltd, and maintaining a high profile as Australia's peak wool grower body.

Capability

WoolProducers office is located in the National Farmers Federation House in Canberra. The management team of WoolProducers has vast experience and expertise in delivering outcomes for the betterment of Australian woolgrowers.

The management team have a thorough knowledge of the wool industry from production through to the trade environment in which the industry operates, and have experience in:

- Policy development
- Research and project applications, in collaboration with:
 - o Animal Health Australia
 - o Sheep Producers Australia
 - o Cattle Council of Australia
 - o National Farmers Federation
 - o Shearing Contractors Association of Australia
 - o Australian Wool Innovation
 - o Livestock Contractors Association of Australia
 - o Invasive Animal CRC
- Project development and management, including Commonwealth grants for Leadership in Ag and Traceability

Examples of policies and submissions that WoolProducers have recently completed include:

| Policies | Submissions |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Biosecurity - supporting the National Biosecurity Statement | European Union's consultation on the Apparel and Footwear Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR) |
| Industry COVID-19 safety protocols | Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation on the definitions of meat and other animal products |
| Fully integrated traceability system for the sheep industry, both for the animal and wool | Australian Trade and Market Access Cooperation (ATMAC) Program |
| Effective representation for the Australian sheep and wool industries | Draft National Feral Pig Action Plan: 2021-2031 |
| Market diversification, including domestic processing | National Wool Declaration – 2021 NWD Review |
| Climate change | Australian Wool Selling Program (AWSP) Review of Recess Weeks |
| Live export | Independent Review of the Agvet Chemicals Regulatory System |
| WoolPoll recommendation of 1.5% | Pre-budget submission 2021-22 |
| Alignment of levy cycles between AWI and MLA | A New Animal Welfare Act for Victoria |
| Wool harvesting labour shortages | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement |

WoolProducers also represent Australian woolgrowers in approximately 50 different committees and working groups at a national level, encompassing trade through to endemic disease management.

Membership

National Membership

WoolProducers membership consists of the six State Farm Organisations (SFOs) in wool producing states:

- AgForce Queensland
- New South Wales Farmers Association
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association
- Livestock South Australia
- Western Australian Farmers Federation

WoolProducers represents the members of each of these organisations as well as direct members of WoolProducers, according to Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) the membership of each of the wool representative organisations who participate in the AWI Wool Industry Consultative Panel are as follows:

MEMBERSHIP OF WICP MEMBER:

ORGANISATION

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Australian Superfine Woolgrowers Association (ASWGA) | Approximately 100 |
| Australian Wool Growers Association (AWGA) | Not provided |
| Broad wool | Approximately 1,650 |
| Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders (AASMB) | Approximately 950 |
| WoolProducers Australia | Approximately 18,000 |
| PGA of WA | Approximately 1,300 |
| Commercial Merino Ewe Competitions Association | Unknown |

Whilst numbers are approximated, there is no dispute that WoolProducers represents the single largest body of woolgrowers in Australia compared to other wool industry representative bodies.

The ability of non-SFO members and other wool organisations to become directors or members of WoolProducers reinforces WoolProducers ability to be considered as truly nationally representatives.

Financial Capability

WoolProducers income is currently dependent on two financial streams, the first being subscriptions from members and the other from a service level agreement with Animal Health Australia to undertake services in the animal health, welfare and biosecurity areas on behalf of the Australian wool industry.

Whilst our budgets are extremely lean, we have demonstrated our capacity to achieve significant outcomes on behalf of Australian woolgrowers.

As a Not-For-Profit (NFP) organisation our audited financial reports show marginal profits in line with the requirements of NFPs.

WoolProducers do not have the ability to access levy funding, either directly or through Service Level Agreements with our industry Research and Development Corporation.

In undertaking the role of Industry Representative Body, WoolProducers would expect that adequate resourcing from AWI would be provided to undertake this role, such as a service level agreement as is provided to those prescribed bodies within other industries, such as the red meat or grains industry.

Copies of WoolProducers audited financial statements can be provided on request.

Levy Payer and Member Support

The SFO membership of WoolProducers are in support of the appointment as the Industry Representative Body (IRB). As the representative body of the single largest body of woolgrowers we are confident that there is strong support for WoolProducers as the IRB.

WoolProducers has continued to show leadership in a number of diverse issues, both domestically and internationally that critically affect Australian woolgrowers and the ongoing sustainability of their enterprises.

WoolProducers has also has a demonstrated track record of consulting widely and impartially, while accurately and neutrally reflecting the views of the majority of levy payers.

