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AWI Director Elections - a vote to retain mulesing or more of the same?

4 November, 2019

Peak woolgrower representative body, WoolProducers Australia (WoolProducers) is questioning how incumbent AWI directors seeking re-election will maintain growers' rights to continue mulesing given their previous strategy appears to be failing.

In a letter to woolgrowers, AWI board candidates Mr Wally Merriman, Mr David Webster and Dr Michelle Humphries have stated that they have a *'strong belief in the importance of maintaining the practice of Mulesing (sic) for best practice animal welfare and industry viability'*.

WoolProducers Australia is questioning this stance from the two incumbent directors given that they are part of the board that have overseen AWI's approach to mulesing for over a decade which is now culminating in loss of markets for our wool that is from sheep that have been mulesed and premiums for non-mulesed wool.

WoolProducers President Mr Ed Storey said 'AWI have consistently had their head in the sand when it comes to mulesing and have had an unwavering position of not acknowledging the issue publicly.'

'This tactic may have been appropriate 10 years ago, but over recent years has obviously been to the detriment of industry, as mulesing is not seen as acceptable by many of our customers. Can we as an industry afford more of the same?'

"It is very surprising that this letter makes any comment about mulesing, given that WoolProducers have for several years approached AWI to have constructive dialogue about this issue to ensure our industry is effectively communicating to the trade about the excellent welfare credentials our growers possess. Each time WoolProducers have made these approaches we have been rebuffed by AWI or completely ignored.'

'It is unfortunate that these three candidates have chosen to now politicise the issue of mulesing and make it a platform for election, and in doing so has left WoolProducers with little choice but to point out some facts on this issue'. Mr Storey said.

WoolProducers took the policy position of calling for mandatory pain relief for mulesing in November, 2018 and have continued to lobby for this position in that time, including calling on the AWI board to support this position through their messaging, in correspondence sent in May this year, which AWI has not bothered to respond to.

'WoolProducers did not take this position of calling for mandatory pain relief for mulesing lightly, however it was determined that this was the most appropriate course of action to place the practice of mulesing on a firmer footing legally and socially.' Mr Storey said.

WoolProducers is of the firm belief that mulesing with pain relief in many circumstances is the highest standard of animal welfare that can be provided to a sheep during the course of the animals' life, however this fact does not appear to have cut through in the marketplace.

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‘The reality is that with the availability of three registered pain relief products, the argument for the retention of mulesing is only plausible if industry is calling for the mandatory application of pain relief. There is simply no valid argument against this position’. Mr Storey said.

Last week the National Council of Wool Brokers reported on the ongoing premiums for non-mulesed wool, indicating that these premiums should help growers with their management decisions regarding mulesing.

Mr Storey said ‘What is disappointing about AWI’s approach to this, is that growers are simply not getting this information from the industry’s marketing body, who purports to have the relationships with our customers’.

The lack of response from AWI on WoolProducers call for support on mandatory pain relief for mulesing demonstrates that the current Board have no interest in providing an industry solution, coupled with complete arrogance and a lack of will to collaborate with other groups in the best interests of industry.

‘What are Mr Merriman and Mr Webster going to do differently? If re-elected are they, and the rest of the AWI Board going to acknowledge that this is an issue that is not going away so that levy payers can make informed decisions?’

WoolProducers are currently the only national grower body that are actively doing anything to preserve growers’ rights to legally mules their animals in the interest of animal welfare.

‘WoolProducers will continue to be proactive in this space as opposed to AWI. Shareholders need to consider this issue when they take the time to vote in this year’s AWI election’.

‘Woolgrowers need to ask themselves; can we afford more of the same or are we going to make a change in the interests our of industry? This is why we are urging shareholders to vote for Dr Holmes, Dr Hocking-Edwards and Mr Noel Henderson.’ Mr Storey said.

ENDS

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