

Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport,
Parliament House,
Canberra.ACT.2600.

Dear Sir,

I am a grain and livestock farmer from Rankin's Springs in South Western NSW.

I pay compulsory levies to the GRDC and MLA.

Despite paying these levies, I do not have an opportunity to participate in an open transparent election process as a voter or as a candidate for a position on either board as a director.

I believe that this is a most unsatisfactory situation and could be described as taxation without representation or as Senator Heffernan described it (as reported in the media) ; as a 'kremlin like' process.

I believe that as a consequence of a poor process the director appointments are rife with cronyism. This system of appointments demeans the producer sector by inferring that they are incapable of being directors or of electing their chosen fellow growers to the boards.

The selection committee process is open for political interference; the Minister for Agriculture has a right of veto over the selection committee makeup and the recommendations that the selection committee makes.

In the case of the GRDC, the system has become further corrupted by the fact that an organisation known as the Grain Producers of Australia, despite having reportedly less than 100 members and what could be seen as a dubious history, has gained the status of Representative Organisation (RO) under the Act and makes recommendations to the Minister on the makeup of the selection committee. GPA was able to procure the ABN of the defunct Grains Council under circumstances that have not been satisfactorily explained and further more, was granted RO status despite not being supported by all of the State Farming Organisations or satisfying the requirements of a representative organisation as laid down in the Act.

GPA has a tops down corporate structure which is inappropriate for an organisation that purports to represent producers.

There is a very strong disconnect between the two boards (MLA and GRDC) and grass roots producers, because the directors do not have to place themselves before the levy payers in an open democratic process.

Prospective directors merely have to apply for a position and then the selection committee considers whether they are worthy of an interview and during the interview, decides whether the applicant is suitable to become a director.

There are many applications for a director position because of the sheer simplicity of applying and the lack of commitment required, as there is no need for an applicant to spend time and money on election campaigns in order to connect with the levy payers.

As a consequence levy payers are unfamiliar with the directors and are very suspicious of the two organisations.

GRDC and MLA are seen by many producers as empires which have access to huge amounts of funds but are disconnected from levy payers.

Producers also have concerns about appointments within the organisation and the obvious political links of many of the appointees.

I strongly believe that the GRDC and MLA must be restructured and that a fully transparent and democratic approach be adopted for director appointments.

Proposed Structure.

That the various states have a director who is voted onto the board by that state's levy payers. All levy payers from that state are entitled to vote and to nominate for election.

A one producer one vote arrangement should be put in place otherwise smaller producers will be disenfranchised.

The Chairs of both GRDC and MLA should be a producer levy payer and the Chair be elected by the Board.

If there are to be non producer directors,(Special expertise)these should be chosen by the Board.

There should also be one Government elected representative on each Board.

Australians are proud of their style Westminster democracy where the nation's representatives are chosen through open elections and all citizens are equal.

The director appointment process for GRDC and MLA is a gross anomaly and a change to a fully transparent democratic process is long overdue.

I would like to appear before the Senate Committee to further discuss my views on the above matter.

Jock Munro.