

# Sowing seeds of farming reform

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A meeting of 90 leading farm representatives unanimously supported a new levy-based model to represent the industry's 14,000 farmers *Source: AP*

**THE South Australian Farmers Federation is moving towards being replaced by a new organisation to represent the state's farmers.**

A meeting of 90 leading farm representatives in Adelaide yesterday unanimously supported a new levy-based model developed by former premier Rob Kerin to represent the industry's 14,000 farmers.

The Kerin model includes an umbrella organisation, tentatively named the Primary Producers Council of South Australia, to deal with cross-commodity issues.

Under it would come five or six commodity groups including grain, livestock, horticulture, dairy, wine grapes and possibly one other to cater for groups such as honey producers.

The Kerin model proposes a structure with a small board, a chief executive and two to four employees.

The proposal is based on the state's system of Primary Industries Funding Schemes where everyone pays a levy, rather than the present method where only a few pay much larger fees to benefit all farmers.

Mr Kerin said there had been strong support for a levy-based system because farmer representation had fallen on too few shoulders in recent years.

The new organisation would also have the potential to raise revenue through other means such as sponsorships, but it would not need a huge budget because the organisation would be relatively small and lean.

Growers at yesterday's meeting demonstrated strong support and goodwill for the Kerin model, although he agrees considerable detail still needs to be worked out.

Mr Kerin said farmer organisations were in trouble generally because of confusion about commodity and cross-commodity issues stemming from big grain issues in Australia which had washed over other parts of farm organisations.

"If there is a big issue at commodity level don't let that wash over the other commodity groups," Mr Kerin said.

The aims of the new organisation include forming a strong and respected group to speak for the primary producers on cross-commodity issues, autonomy for individual commodity groups and strong, viable and well researched commodity organisations.

Mr Kerin said it was important to get the new organisation right because farmer representation has had a tough time in Australia.

"Structure and viability are the two things that need to be focused on," he said.

SAFF president Peter White said the board had made a commitment that the reform process would be driven by farmers and it will deliver their recommendations to the federation's annual general meeting on August 31.

"This has been needed for quite some time," Mr White said. "Across Australia there are a lot of eyes on us, they are saying, 'I hope you get it right because we have to do something!'"

National sheep and cattle industry leaders Geoff Power and Andrew Ogilvie both strongly backed the need for an umbrella organisation, with livestock growers representing by far the largest group at the meeting with producers from across the state. Cattle Council of Australia president Mr Ogilvie said livestock producers had already decided to form a specialist livestock group that would fit under the new model.

"We strongly support Rob's model and see it as a great opportunity to deal with members' problems," Mr Ogilvie said.

The South Australian Dairy Farmers Association and Horticulture Coalition of SA also strongly supported the concept