

# The New Zealand Herald

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## Inaction frustrates producer boards

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By Philippa Stevenson

Three months after producer boards met a Government deadline for presenting reform plans, their frustration is growing with a process many say is stifling change.

On November 15, a Government backdown on quick reform meant that after six months of preparation the well hyped D-day was a non-event.

But even that proved less of an anti-climax than the deafening public silence since the reports of the nine boards reached the three groups within the Government which will assess their proposals.

The Wool Group policy manager, Roger Buchanan, said resignedly: "It's election year."

A disappointed Kiwifruit New Zealand chairman, Doug Voss, presumed: "Something will happen. Don't know when, don't know how."

Asked to explain the Government's process, the Dairy Board chairman, John Storey, said: "I thought you might explain that to me."

Neil Taylor, chief executive of Meat New Zealand, said: "We're expecting some progress but it is not as rapid as we would hope."

He is over-optimistic, according to a spokesman for the Minister for Food and Fibre, John Luxton.

Mr Taylor was expecting a discussion paper in response to his board's report next month. But the spokesman said no paper was scheduled.

Six ministers, including the Prime Minister, form the Ministerial Oversight Group, whose job is to supervise the reform process.

A ministerial advisory board, made up of senior industry representatives Sir Peter Elworthy, Graham Calvert, Joe Pope, John Palmer and Alan Haronga, is a go-between for industry and the ministers.

The Producer Board Project Team, an officials group headed by **Tony Baldwin** of the Prime Minister's department, is staffed from the Treasury and the Ministries of Commerce and Agriculture and Fisheries.

Its job is to assess the boards' proposals, advise the ministers and work with the boards to put the plans into practice.

Meanwhile, the Dairy Board is continuing with its three initiatives for self-reform. Kiwifruit NZ says it has worked with the project team but "not made much progress," Meat NZ is continuing consultation meetings with farmers and the Wool Board will consult its farmers in the middle of the year.

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