

Producer board reformer quits

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Bob Edlin

Tony Baldwin has quit as head of the government's producer board reform team.

When advising the board of his decision, Baldwin said he needed a break. Government officials say his contract term had ended.

The team will continue to work under former Treasury official Phil Barry, formerly the team's manager of dairy issues.

Baldwin told the board much remains to be done to restructure the dairy, apple and kiwifruit industries under the new legislation.

"I'm sure that the regulatory issues relating to game, pork, meat and wool will come back into focus in the relatively near future." In charge of electricity industry restructuring before taking up the producer board job, Baldwin is said to have been farewelled last Friday.

Three major pieces of legislation in the face of initially fierce resistance are the measure of the project team's achievements while led by Baldwin.

The restructuring began with the Budget announcement in May last year that the nine boards must submit proposals to the government within six months on moving to shed their statutory powers.

Legislation restructuring the three main trading boards - dairy, pipfruit and kiwifruit - was rushed into law this year with board acquiescence.

Draft legislation to restructure the non-trading boards was subject to protracted discussions involving the government, the project team and the meat, wool and game industry boards.

These boards' aim to become incorporated societies but an impasse on levying issues prevented legislation being introduced to Parliament before the election.

Even so, one meat industry source acknowledged of the project team's work: "In a short space of time, that was a significant achievement." Baldwin upset agricultural industry leaders as he had done in the electricity industry, Industry leaders criticised him for his dry approach, for being autocratic and for being unready to listen to their side of the story.

But he was given a clear mandate by government.

It regarded him as a clear thinker, philosophically attuned its deregulatory aims and appropriately skilled to manage a team of officials.

The project team ran into difficulties only towards the end, when ministerial ranks became divided over whether there should be a compromise to get a deal with the non-trading boards or whether the differences were so profound that it was better to put them on hold till after the election.

While let off the project team's restructuring leash for now, the Wool Board's future is very much in the hands of farmers who will attend the annual general meeting on 19 October.

Remits of no confidence will be debated and voted on, along with remits calling for levies to be reduced.

The meeting also must approve the wool industry development project, a study to show the best way for the industry to go, which chairman Bruce Munro says could recommend the board's demise.

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