

Federal government to sack wheat board head: letter
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Federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl has indicated his intentions to let go of Canadian Wheat Board president and CEO Adrian Measner within weeks.

Measner has been a critic of the federal government's plan to dismantle the grain marketing agency's monopoly on wheat and barley.

In a letter to Measner received Wednesday and obtained by CBC News, Strahl wrote, "I am informing you that I am contemplating recommending a change to the membership appointed by the governor-in-council to the Canadian Wheat Board, notably a recommendation that your appointment as president be terminated."

Canadian Wheat Board president Adrian Measner received notice from the federal government he could be terminated.

Measner is president of the wheat board by an order-in-council, so can be let go by a vote of the federal cabinet. Strahl asked Measner to forward any comments in writing related to the termination by Dec. 14.

"The government needs to be confident that as an appointee, Mr. Measner will actively support the government's position," Strahl spokesman Conrad Bellehumeur said Thursday.

Measner told staff at the Winnipeg-based grain marketing agency of the notice on Thursday, wheat board chair Ken Ritter told CBC News.

Ritter said the notice came as a shock.

"It came right out of thin air. I'm chairman of the board [and] I never received a phone call or any notice that it was coming," Ritter said.

"Mr. Measner is the board's employee, and I find that rather peculiar that we would not have advance notice of this kind of a move."

Ritter said the board of directors will meet Friday to discuss the latest developments.
Thrown into turmoil

Deanna Allen, the wheat board's vice-president of farmer relations and public affairs, said news of the notice has thrown the organization into turmoil.

"It's a very unsettling time for all staff, and you know; Adrian has had a career here that spanned 32 years," Allen said Thursday.

Allen described Measner as "a man of tremendous integrity and a guy who's given service to the company, service to farmers for just so many years. And I think it's a hard thing to come to grips with."

Measner was not speaking publicly Thursday about the impending firing.

A 30-year veteran of the Canadian Wheat Board and head of the agency since 2003, Measner has been a vocal opponent of the Conservative government's intentions to strip the board of its wheat and barley marketing monopoly and let farmers handle their own grain in an open market.

Plans called 'un-Canadian'

Speaking to the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce on Oct. 19, Measner called such plans "as wrong as it is un-Canadian," adding that most farmers support the wheat board because it gives them a better price on their grain on the international market.

Earlier in October, the federal government imposed an order-in-council directing the board not to spend money to lobby for continuation of its monopoly.

But Manitoba Agriculture Minister Rosann Wowchuk accused Strahl of not following his own orders.

"It's an absolute attack on the powers of the wheat board. Everybody that Minister Strahl has appointed has been anti-wheat board. And he is doing this during a time when he has told others, such as the wheat board, not to make comment during the election period," she said, referring to wheat board director elections for voting farmers that end Friday.

Results of those elections are expected to be announced Dec. 10.

Wowchuk cried foul over an "undemocratic" move by Strahl.

"The federal minister is ignoring everything that producers have said and is railroading his decision through to destroy the wheat board. Mr. Measner is working ... for the grain producers of Western Canada," Wowchuk said Thursday.

The Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments have said they will conduct their own farmer plebiscites on the future of the wheat board's monopoly on marketing wheat and barley if Ottawa doesn't hold that vote itself. Strahl announced in October that Ottawa will hold a plebiscite, but only for barley farmers.

David Rolfe, president of the Manitoba-based Keystone Agriculture Producers, said the news was bound to hit the wheat board's directors, some of whom are elected by farmers.

"It certainly appears to be a slap in the face for western Canadian grain farmers who have control over the Canadian Wheat Board directors," Rolfe said Thursday.

"Mr. Measner was recommended by the elected board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board, and the elected board of directors are directly answerable to western Canadian grain farmers. So it appears that Mr. Strahl has taken a very unusual step in process of choosing who would be the CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board."

But the Western Barley Growers Association applauded Strahl's letter Thursday, saying Measner should be let go for not following ministerial orders.