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Gov't report slammed

The Canadian Wheat Board has issued a harshly worded response to a task force report looking at how to end the grain seller's marketing monopoly, calling the recommendations "poor and irresponsible" public policy.

The task force, struck earlier this fall by federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl, recommended ending the board's monopoly or "single desk" on marketing western wheat and barley in 2008. The report also suggested a new version of the CWB be created.

But the CWB posted a formal response on its Web site Monday, saying the task force failed to outline how the new entity would survive if the proposed changes are put in place.

It says the task force is proposing the CWB lose its single desk and "attempt to enter, with absurdly little in the way of assets, a concentrated, consolidated, mature grain handling and marketing industry with notoriously high barriers to entry, dominated by transnationals."

The response also charges the task force with being silent on how the new CWB would design a business plan to succeed "other than to lay that task at the feet of the current CWB."

As well, farmer control and ownership of a new version of the CWB, as outlined by the task force, is "unrealistic and naive," the board said.

"It is poor and irresponsible policy to strip an internationally-recognized, farmer-controlled organization of its market power, propose to replace it with some minor entity that is intended to take on transnationals, but with severe structural and capital disadvantages, and then tell farmers it is their own fault when it fails," stated the board response.

Strahl has said he plans to study the recommendations in the task force and listen to what farmers say about the ideas put forward. He has also announced western farmers will vote on the future of barley marketing through the board.

346 words / mots.

