

ABC Rural

FREE EP EYRE GROUP

By Annabelle Homer

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In late November last year, a group of farmers came up with the idea of forming a company that would help farmers value-add their products. Workshops were held across Eyre Peninsula to gauge whether farmers and agri-businesses would be interested to financially back the idea - and the group known as the Free Eyre Group received an overwhelming response.

After four weeks, \$830,000 was raised, a figure beyond their wildest expectations. Today, six months later, the group is now publicly unlisted - known as Free Eyre Limited - it now has a board and has just appointed a new chair.

To get the update on what the company's next step is - we spoke to board member and Cleve farmer Ben Ranford. "When the drivers first had the vision they thought if they raised \$100,000, Free Eyre would go ahead in some form, so...the support was extraordinary.

"Two hundred and forty businesses have made that investment...they're mainly farmers but they also include regional businesses and...some pastoral businesses. There's a cross-over from the steering committee, which has been working on the vision to turn it into the company, since November, and there's three steering committee members, which I'm one of, and the other members have a range of agricultural, and probably more importantly, non-agricultural backgrounds, and I think that's what will make it a strong board - is that experience beyond agriculture.

"The value adding and control scheme is still at the heart of Free Eyre, and the amount of projects is just about unlimited that could be in the pipeline down the track."

In this report: Ben Ranford, Free Eyre Limited Board member & Cleve farmer.

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