

Free Eyre to spread wings

BY PAULA THOMPSON

A FEER setting up a joint grain-marketing venture – Eyre Peninsula Grain – Free Eyre is now looking at other options such as value-adding to prime lamb.

Free Eyre was established mid-2007 with the aim of developing new businesses opportunities developing value-adding enterprises managing profits and reducing costs along the supply-chain for Eyre Peninsula farming enterprises.

The company has a shareholding membership of more than 240 farming enterprises and EP investors. It announced recently that Free Eyre would join with grain trader Emerald to form EP Grain, offering marketing services.

Managing director Susi Tegan said there were exciting opportunities for the company.

Free Eyre began last year but has taken us some time to find the right business partner with similar values and complementary resources," she said. "In addition, it was important for Free Eyre to be part of the new business – not an agent.

"We have met various grain companies and in the end we joined a partner with a grass

- ### Key points
- Free Eyre explores options
 - Early order program established
 - CEO recruitment underway

roots farmer focus. It was important for us to work with people who also had experience with grain marketing, were known in the industry and had a good track record."

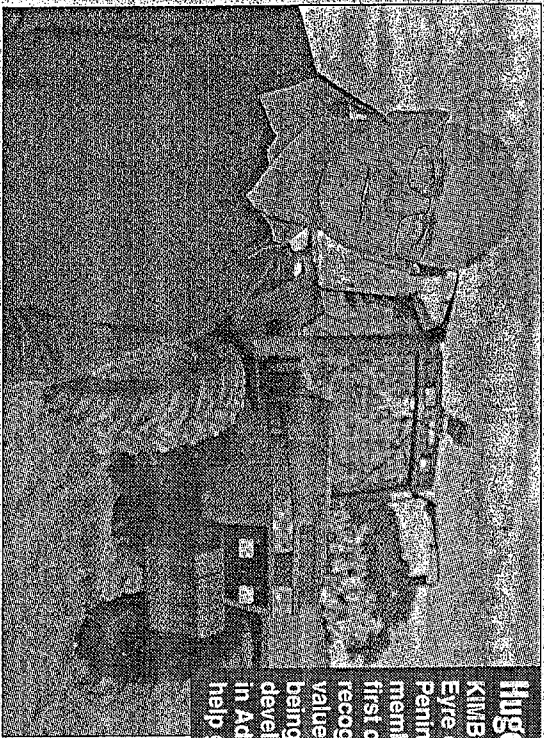
The company was also exploring ventures outside grain marketing.

"It's part of Free Eyre's charter to look for opportunities to add value or complement existing industries," Ms Tegan said.

"We're looking at the supply chain for lamb and the development of an Eyre Peninsula prime lamb industry. With the ability to reach scale as a group there may be opportunities to develop a consistent supply to the market."

"We're looking at a feasibility study with the Eyre Peninsula Development Board and Primary Industry & Resources SA.

"Grain marketing was our first focus, because it's the main commodity for our farmers and



Huge opportunities

KIMBA cropper David Jericho (pictured) says Free Eyre offers many opportunities for Eyre Peninsula's farmers. David is a foundation member of Free Eyre and chaired the company's first committee. "For me the motivation was the recognition that we, as a community, needed to value-add," he said. "We needed to look at ways of being able to value-add to what we grow and develop a domestic market, that is not necessarily in Adelaide or the eastern states." Free Eyre can help growers overcome the "tyranny of distance

an area where farmers were looking for broader choice and change.

A prospectus would be released in the next couple of weeks.

"We're looking at increasing our membership and raising more capital to put in then effect the EP Grain venture and develop more of the ideas raised in the Eyre region," Ms Tegan said.

Grower meetings at 11 locations across EP last week drew 160 farmers.

"Most were Free Eyre members, but about a third who wanted to meet with us were non-members interested in joining-up and in what the EP Grain venture had to offer," Ms Tegan said.

EP Grain was offering an early-order program, offering an upfront pool premium for wheat, barley and canola.

"This means that farmers have the added security of a minimum pool price and allows farmers to budget with confidence," Ms Tegan said.

Emerald recently received authorisation from ESCOSA to export barley from South Australia.

A recruitment process is under way for the chief executive position with EP Grain.

"We're looking for somebody with a good understanding of grain and agriculture, and the issues facing farmers as a whole but particularly on EP," Ms Tegan said.

"We aim to appoint somebody in the next four to four weeks. Applications are being sent in and we encourage suitably skilled people to apply." EP Grain joint venture was expected to be fully operational from July 1.

• Details www.free-eyre.com.au