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Wheat taskforce begins meetings

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A TASKFORCE considering options for overhauling Australia's beleaguered wheat marketing system begins a hectic schedule of public meetings tomorrow.

Prime Minister John Howard announced the consultation process following last year's Cole inquiry into disgraced monopoly exporter AWB's payment of \$290 million in kickbacks to Iraq.

The government-appointed Wheat Export Marketing Consultation Committee kicks off the first of 25 meetings in five states tomorrow afternoon in the central Queensland town of Emerald.

The committee, which includes former Woolworths chief Roger Corbett and former National Farmers Federation president Peter Corish, was set up last month to examine options for permanently changing the single desk for wheat exports.

It has been given a tight timeframe for reaching a conclusion, with a deadline of March 30 to report to the Government.

The Government intends to decide on changes to the single desk by the end of June to give growers certainty before they plant their next crop.

AWB is widely expected to lose at least some of the monopoly export powers it has held for almost 70 years.

The public meetings include three in Queensland, four each in Victoria and South Australia, seven in NSW and seven in the biggest wheat producing state - Western Australia.

The final meeting will be in Melbourne on March 1.

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