



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

GENERAL POLICY PLATFORM

AS AT JULY 2024



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It gives me great pleasure to present the VFF's General Policy Statement. This document provides a record of the policy positions adopted and agreed to by Victorian farmers and is the culmination of a rigorous policy setting process undertaken by the VFF Policy Council, its Issues Advisory Committees and the VFF Commodity Policy Councils.

In putting together this statement it has been our mission to properly renew, record and share the fundamental positions that the VFF takes on a range of issues that affect farmers, regional communities and the agricultural industry.

It is a living document that will evolve as the VFF and our members continue to grapple with and respond to the issues of the day.

To ensure unity amongst Victorian farmers, VFF members are reminded that the best way to achieve our collective objectives is to ensure that unity is maintained with the positions set out in this statement.

VFF members ultimately determine the policy platform of the organisation and are welcome to influence our position through the policy setting structures of the organisation. Robust engagement with the issues is important to ensuring that VFF is reflective of the farming community we represent.

Many of the positions outlined in this statement reflect longstanding principles that the VFF has stood by for decades.

They are documented here to ensure that the focus of our members is pointed towards tackling emerging issues, rather than unnecessarily repeating discussion and debate that we may have forgotten we had in the first place.

Effective advocacy means we must be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and be flexible with our demands. That requires our policy positions to not be so prescriptive as to prevent the VFF from seeking a negotiated solution to various issues.

The VFF Policy Council takes this view into account when setting the policy and advocacy direction of the organisation, and our policy statement has been crafted with this in mind.



EMMA GERMANO

VFF President

Disclaimer

This document or the information in it may be subsequently updated or amended. This document does not constitute legal or business advice, and should not be relied on as a substitute for obtaining detailed advice. This document does not reflect all policy positions adopted by the VFF. The VFF Policy Council is systematically reviewing all positions and will progressively publish revised statements through this document. All queries related to the VFF policy positions should be addressed to the VFF Policy & Advocacy Team.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	How we create policy
06	Farm Business
07	Farm & Rural Crime
09	Tax
13	Local Government Rates & Responsibilities
15	Drought
17	Foreign Investment and Ownership
19	Food Relief Donations
20	Farming Systems
21	Biosecurity
24	Animal Activism
26	Animal Welfare
28	Virtual Herding
29	Planning, Environment and Climate Change
30	Climate Change
32	Renewable Energy & Efficiency
36	Emergency Management (Natural Hazards)
41	Good Neighbour
43	Pest Plant and Animal Management
46	Managing Entry to Farm
49	Water
50	Water for Traditional Owners
51	Transport and Infrastructure
52	Fuel Security
53	Autonomous Vehicles
54	Low Emissions Vehicles
555	High Productivity Freight Vehicles
56	Agricultural Machinery Right to Repair
57	Workforce
58	Agricultural Education
60	Rural Health
63	Childcare

HOW WE CREATE POLICY

The VFF uses an agreed and understood approach to policy and advocacy that promotes collaboration and unity for all Victorian farmers. Farmers determine VFF policy outcomes through active involvement of members including consultation, surveys, focus groups, and representation through Policy Council, Commodity Policy Councils (CPC's), Issues Advisory Committees (IAC's) and, Branches that all seek to understand the aspirations and concerns of the farming community and determine policy and advocacy outcomes.

The Policy Platform

The VFF's Policy Platform is the official record of the VFF's position on general policy issues and is set by members through a representative democratic model. The VFF Policy Council is responsible for developing and preserving the VFF Policy Platform and has the authority to act to give effect to the platform.

The VFF Policy Council is assisted by Issues Advisory Committees that develop and review policy statements in line with the committees' areas of responsibility. These statements are submitted to the VFF Policy Council for review and approval. In developing any policy statements, an Issues Advisory Committee shall ensure all relevant Commodity Policy Councils have been consulted.

Commodity Policy Councils are responsible for developing and preserving policy statements that relate to specific issues that only impact members of the relevant Commodity Group.



HOW WE CREATE POLICY

In developing and reviewing the VFF Policy Platform and individual policy statements, the VFF takes into account contextual factors such as the political, economic and social climate, as well as the organisation's strategic direction as set by the Board.

Putting policy into action

The VFF creates Policy and Advocacy Plans every two years which outline the policy outcomes we are seeking to achieve as well as the strategies and activities for policy analysis, policy design, advocacy and engagement activities to achieve the stated outcomes.

Policy and Advocacy Plans are established using a Priority Setting Framework which uses multi-criteria analysis to ensure the effective allocation of resources and that efforts are focused on the most pressing concerns. Priorities are regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure that resources are effectively used to achieve meaningful policy change.

FARM BUSINESS



Farm & Rural Crime

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 175 9 March
2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF believes farm and rural crime is a serious concern for rural communities and that governments have neglected to adequately deal with it. These crimes negatively impact on the safety and security of farmers and their families and contribute to significant economic loss for the rural economy.
2. The VFF supports increased government support for preventing, investigating and penalising farm and rural crime.
3. The VFF believes the farming community has a duty to proactively manage and mitigate farm and rural crime. The VFF supports increased government support to assist the farming community achieve this objective.

Victoria Police

4. The VFF supports the adequate resourcing of a dedicated farm crime unit in Victoria Police to ensure that it can fulfill the duties of investigation, analysis, intelligence gathering, media and community outreach.
5. The VFF supports the continuation of the Victoria Police Farm Crime Liaison Officer Program for specialist general duties officers to receive training in farm crime related matters, maintain contemporary knowledge of local issues and trends, providing assistance and guidance to other officers and to engage and liaise with the farming community.
6. The VFF supports the creation of a specialist Farm and Rural Crime Squad to sit within Victoria Police Crime Command. The role of the squad would be to respond to and provide primary investigation accountability for offences including livestock theft, farm machinery and equipment theft, trespass, firearms offences, rural related fraud and other crimes that significantly impact rural communities. The squad should have a dedicated command structure and dedicated resourcing separate to Divisional Command.
7. The VFF believes police officers working in rural areas and regional centres should be trained in matters of rural crime; this includes both theoretical/research-based knowledge in rural criminology as well as the practicalities of responding to farm crime.
8. The VFF supports measures undertaken by Victoria Police to recruit and support officers from rural communities.

9. The VFF supports adequate staffing of 24-hour police stations in regional areas to ensure that rural communities can receive a reliable level of service and protection.

10. The VFF supports greater coordination between state jurisdictions to better prevent and respond to criminals operating across state borders.

Penalties

11. The VFF believes penalties and sentences for rural related crimes are not strong enough and that the judiciary has failed to impose penalties and sentences in line with community expectations, or to a level adequate as to be a strong deterrent to offenders.

12. The VFF supports government action to ensure adequate penalties and sentences for rural related crimes, and to ensure the judiciary understands the significance of these crime when imposing penalties and sentences.

13. The VFF believes trespass and illegal hunting offences need to be treated more seriously by government and the judiciary and that these crimes multiply the likelihood of opportunistic crimes such as firearm theft, diesel theft, property damage and vandalism. The VFF supports tougher sentencing for these offences.

Crime Prevention

14. The VFF supports government developing crime prevention education, tools and strategies that are purpose built to address farm crime.

15. The VFF believes that farmers should be supported and encouraged explore new and innovative technological approaches to combatting farm crime.

16. The VFF believes government should support farmers to financially to uptake crime prevention efforts given the unlikelihood of an immediate policing response. Financial assistance should aim at ultimately reducing cost to government through prevention.

17. The VFF supports the provision of mechanisms to allow direct feedback from farmers on crime issues to increase opportunities for police intelligence gathering and crime reporting.

18. The VFF supports ongoing research into farm and rural crime related issues to expose and allow for comparative long-term analysis.

Public Awareness

19. The VFF supports government funding state based and national rural crime campaigns to increase wider community awareness about the prevalence and impact of farm crime.

20. The VFF supports government funding of campaigns to create public awareness and confidence in the actions being undertaken to address farm crime and to highlight areas in which authorities are having success.

Tax

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 174
17 November 2021

NB: Nothing in this statement should be interpreted in any way as to constitute tax advice. VFF members should seek advice from a qualified accountant or tax practitioner for all tax issues relating to their business.

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF recognises the agriculture industry's responsibility to contribute to the public good through a fair and efficient tax system. As a generator of wealth, the agriculture industry should make a fair contribution to funding the efficient delivery of public services and infrastructure that underpin a reasonable living standard for all Australians, including those in rural and regional communities.
2. The VFF supports reform of Australia's tax system to promote the principles of efficiency, simplicity, transparency, equity and fairness. Reform should focus on assisting industry and businesses to maintain and enhance competitive advantage and access to markets. Reforms should be funded through efficiency in government spending, reprioritisation of government expenditure and through defining state and federal taxation powers.
3. The VFF opposes any net increase in taxation. The VFF believes any proposal to increase a tax must be matched by an equivalent reduction in a less efficient or less equitable tax.
4. The VFF believes the specific circumstances and characteristics of the agriculture sector and rural communities must be recognised appropriately within the tax system including factors such as the variability of income, and the limited capacity to pass on increased costs.
5. The VFF supports the use of tax concessions and exemptions designed to eliminate the disproportionate impact of certain types of taxes on farm businesses (eg. stamp duties) and to promote investment in the agriculture industry.
6. The VFF believes taxes should be reduced on transactions and investment. More reliance should be placed on taxes that have less impact on economic growth – resulting in fewer, more efficient taxes.
7. The VFF supports tax incentives for primary producer activities that result in broader public good and positive environmental outcomes.

Business Structure

8. The VFF believes all businesses should choose the structure that best suits their business objectives and needs. The VFF seeks similar tax treatment for farm businesses irrespective of their business structure.
9. The VFF supports regular review of the turnover threshold for small business tax concessions. An increased threshold should also be indexed in accordance with CPI.

GST

10. The VFF believes any increase to the rate of the GST should be commensurate with the removal of other inefficient and inequitable taxes such as payroll tax and stamp duties.
11. GST reform should focus on ways to simplify the system and reduce the compliance burden imposed upon businesses.
12. The VFF opposes the broadening of the GST to include fresh food.

Company Tax

13. Recognising the increasing proportion of farm businesses adopting company structures, the VFF supports lowering the company tax rate.

Capital Gains Tax

14. The VFF opposes Capital Gains Tax on the sale or transfer of business assets.
15. The VFF seeks an exemption for farm businesses for capital gains tax liability against intergenerational farm asset transfers, consistent with the stamp duty exemption that exists in Victoria.

Tax Averaging

16. The VFF supports the ability of farmers to average their income tax to minimise the extent that variable timing of income influences tax liabilities over time.

Accelerated Depreciation

17. The VFF supports the choice and ability for farmers to accelerate the depreciation of business assets for tax purposes, recognising accelerated depreciation as a useful tool to offset the high costs of capital improvements as quickly as possible.

Farm Management Deposits

18. The VFF supports the continuation of the Farm Management Deposit scheme.
19. The VFF supports improvements to make the Farm Management Deposit scheme more flexible including linkages to existing or new financial programs, expansion of the scheme to broader business structures and measures to improve access and withdrawal provisions during drought, which do not disadvantage farmers.
20. The VFF supports the cap on deposits being increased subject to periodic review.

Superannuation

21. The VFF supports consideration and examination of the need to remove tax rules that disproportionately disadvantage farmers from contributing to and accessing their superannuation.

Payroll Tax

- 22. The VFF opposes the imposition of payroll tax on all businesses.
- 23. The VFF seeks exemptions and concessions for all farm businesses, and for businesses in rural and regional Victoria.

Land Tax

- 24. The VFF opposes the imposition of state government land tax on all farmland.
- 25. The VFF opposes the Victorian Government's Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution scheme.
- 26. The VFF opposes land taxes based on government initiated rezoning decisions.
- 27. The VFF will seek concessions and exemptions for all farmland that may be subject to land taxes.

Stamp Duty: Sale and Transfer of Land

- 28. The VFF opposes the imposition of stamp duties on all conveyancing transfers.
- 29. The VFF supports the use of stamp duty exemptions and concessions to assist young farmers entering the market.

Stamp Duty: Insurance

- 30. The VFF opposes the imposition of stamp duties on all insurance products. The VFF will seek concessions and exemptions from stamp duty for insurance products related to primary production.

Stamp Duty: Motor Vehicles

- 31. The VFF opposes the imposition of stamp duties on the sale and transfer of all motor vehicles. The VFF will seek concessions and exemptions from stamp duties for the transfer of motor vehicles used solely for primary production purposes.

Luxury Vehicle Tax

32. The VFF opposes all forms of luxury vehicle taxes that affect the affordability of farm vehicles for primary producers. Where luxury vehicle taxes are in place, the VFF will seek an exemption for primary producers.

Fuel Tax Credits Scheme

33. The VFF supports the continuation of the Fuel Tax Credits Scheme which ensures businesses are not disadvantaged by paying excise on the off-road use of diesel in the production of goods and services.

34. The VFF believe the Fuel Tax Credits Scheme should remain as a rebate system to help maintain administrative efficiency.

Agricultural Workers

35. The VFF supports consideration and examination of the appropriateness of tax incentives to entice people to live and work in rural and regional Australia including, exemptions, concessions and zoning taxation whereby people living a certain distance from the metropolitan areas would gain a tax advantage.

Grants and Subsidies

36. The VFF opposes all tax on income that has come in the form of a grant or subsidy from government.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:
VFF Local Government Rates and Funding Policy Statement

Local Government Rates & Responsibilities

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 169
16 September 2020

Policy Statement

Responsibilities of Local Government

1. VFF policy is that the role of Local Government should be limited to a set of core responsibilities that provide an agreed basic level of service across Victoria.
2. The core responsibilities shall include maintenance of local roads; control of municipal planning and provision of planning services; waste disposal; control of pest animals and plants on council owned land; social and economic services only where those services provide a benefit to the community as a whole; provision of information to the community on council activities; advocacy to state government on matters relevant to the interest of the community as a whole.

Funding of Local Government

3. In recognition of the financial inequity and inequity in services received between rural and metropolitan ratepayers, the VFF believes that the level of financial assistance from state and federal governments to rural councils should increase.
4. The VFF supports the abolition of minimum financial grants distributed by the Federal Grants Commission that advantage wealthy and densely populated metropolitan councils.
5. The VFF rejects the process of cost shifting, whereby state and federal governments initially fund local government to provide programs and then ceases funding so that if the council wants to continue the program, it must use its own funding.
6. The VFF supports the use of special user charges for services provided by local government that are beyond its core responsibilities to maintain the 'user pays' principle.

Local Government Rates

7. It is the long term policy of the federation that farmland be exempted from local government rating.

8. In recognising the inequity in rates paid by rural and regional ratepayers compared to metropolitan ratepayers, the VFF supports the restructuring of Victoria's rating system to one based on an equalised funding system whereby the state government redistributes rates to local government on the basis of equity and need.

9. Where farmland is to be rated the VFF supports the separation of house and curtilage from the farmland to be rated differentially. The level of rates for each class of land should be commensurate with the level of service received by each.

10. The VFF supports the use of differential rates including compulsory differential rates for all farmland to establish a fair and equitable distribution of the rate burden for each class of land.

11. The VFF supports the use of minimum and maximum rates as a means to flatten the rating profile across local government authorities and to take the rating burden away from productive agriculture. Where minimum rates are not implemented, the VFF supports the use of a municipal charge to be raised at no less than 20% of the total rates and charges within a council area.

12. The VFF supports the averaging of individual property valuations for the purposes of rating to prevent volatility and the effects of 'rate shock'.

Drought

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 170
24 February 2021

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The long-term objective of government drought policy should be to prioritise drought preparedness, sustainability, resilience and risk management for farming businesses and communities in order to reduce the need and dependency on short-term government programs and assistance.
2. The VFF supports a nationally consistent approach to drought policy, underpinned by an intergovernmental agreement that specifies objectives and clearly defines roles and responsibilities for each level of government.

Government Programs and schemes

3. Immediate drought assistance should prioritise animal welfare and land management issues, as well as providing personal assistance to farmers (e.g. mental health services).
4. Government drought assistance programs must be flexible to ensure all drought-impacted farmers, irrespective of their location, are able to access support.
5. Government must work to reduce confusion among farmers and rural and regional communities about their eligibility for drought assistance.
6. Government should avoid implementing programs and schemes that may have the effect of distorting existing markets, especially in the areas of farm inputs such as feed, chemicals and water.
7. Government should streamline the administrative processes for obtaining drought assistance to reduce the cost of administering programs and the administrative burden on those seeking to access assistance.
8. Government must establish industry consultative mechanisms to enable farmers to contribute to program development and performance monitoring.
9. Government must develop clear service standards for drought program delivery, both in relation to program administration and the processing of individual applications, coupled with a nationally consistent data collection and reporting framework.
10. The VFF supports the establishment and operation of the Future Drought Fund to enhance drought preparedness and resilience.

Farm business assistance

11. The VFF supports the delivery of capacity building programs, tools and technologies to improve farming business skills and promote preparedness and resilience, thereby helping to reduce dependency on on-going government programs and assistance.

12. The VFF supports incentives that support farming businesses' risk management including taxation concessions, Farm Management Deposits Scheme and concessional loans.

13. The VFF supports programs that provide drought impacted farm businesses relief from government imposed rates and charges (e.g. local government rates) via abolition, concessions or deferred payment schemes.

14. The VFF supports programs that enable farmers to invest in infrastructure specifically for the purpose of drought preparedness and resilience.

Personal and family assistance

15. The VFF supports a time limited household support payment (such as the Farm Household Allowance) based on individual and farming family needs. Government should require farmers in receipt of this assistance to undertake mutual obligations that develop long-term resilience in their business.

16. The VFF supports government assistance for Rural Financial Counselling services and believes government should provide long term funding certainty to guarantee the ongoing provision of these services.

17. The VFF supports the provision of health and well-being services that mitigate the effects of drought for farming families and farming communities.

Non-farm business support and Regional Development

18. The VFF supports government assistance for farming communities impacted by drought and dry conditions that are specifically targeted for the purposes of community support and regional development.

20. Government assistance for industries other than agriculture and those directly linked to agriculture should not be supported by any program that also supports farmers and farm businesses. Rural communities suffering from economic downturn caused by drought-induced decline in the agriculture sector should be supported through regional development programs, not dedicated drought assistance programs.

21. Funding provided to Local Government Authorities or non-government organisations for drought assistance programs should only be used for the direct benefit of farmers and farm businesses. The VFF does not support discretionary spending on non-farm related community projects by program managers.

Foreign Investment and Ownership

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 188 7
December 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF recognises that foreign investment is important for Australia's long term economic success, stability and prosperity. Foreign investment strengthens the agriculture industry by delivering needed capital to create jobs, expand skills, promote competition and create market access.
2. The VFF believes government policy towards foreign investment must achieve a balance between continuing to attract foreign investment and ensuring investments do not harm the national interest.
3. The VFF believes that all foreign investment in Australia must occur on a genuine commercial basis, and that foreign investment should not be allowed where it undermines national security and sovereignty.
4. The VFF acknowledges the nexus between foreign investment and trade in developing trusting and collaborative bilateral economic relationships. Government policy must avoid threatening existing and potential free trade agreements.
5. The VFF supports government screening of foreign investment proposals on a case-by-case basis. Rigid laws that prohibit any single class of investments can have the unintended consequence of preventing valuable investments.
6. The VFF believes foreign investors must obey all Australian laws and maintain high standards of conduct at all times.

Foreign Investment Review Board

7. As part of applying the national interest test, the FIRB should take consideration of all economic, environmental and social effects of the proposed investment.
8. As part of the national interest test, the FIRB should take consideration of any undue localised impacts on the community where the proposed investment is to occur.

9. In assessing the character of any investor, the VFF believes the FIRB should require investors to commit to paying any and all industry and transaction levies, regardless of the level of vertical integration in the business.

10. The VFF supports the ability for the Commonwealth Treasurer to have discretionary powers and the ability to call in foreign investment proposals. However, the VFF believes the national interest test lacks clarity around how it is interpreted from case to case. The VFF supports tighter policy guidance around the application of the test to ensure transparency and confidence for investors and the public.

11. The VFF supports the publication of reasons for decisions to block proposals to ensure transparency and confidence for investors and the public.

12. The VFF believes the threshold for screening of agricultural land purchases should be set at \$5 million. The threshold for screening of purchases by sovereign entities should remain at nil.

13. The VFF believes fees for applications should represent a reasonable cost to business so that they do not discourage foreign investment, whilst also ensuring administration is adequately funded.

Registers of Foreign Ownership

14. The VFF supports the need for a dedicated registers of foreign owned agricultural land, water and assets as an important tool to monitor foreign investments and their effect on Australia's agricultural industry.

15. The VFF believes that foreign ownership of 'critical' strategic assets should be subject to the same scrutiny as foreign ownership of agricultural land and water, taking into account the importance of strategic assets to national security.

16. The VFF believes the registers of foreign ownership should be publicly accessible and searchable with basic data published including the name and business address of the owner and the locality of the land.

17. The VFF believes that for all transactions of foreign owned land, water and assets, the value of the land, water, assets and incidences where a foreign entity divests interest in these resources should be recorded and published on the register.

18. The VFF believes that in addition to the publishing of an annual report, live data should be published on a monthly basis.

Tax Treatment

19. The VFF believes government should ensure that all foreign investors are treated similarly to Australian owned and operated farm businesses for the purpose of taxation. The VFF believes the imbalance of market power created by Low and No Tax Entities competing for land unfairly disadvantages Australian farmers.

Food Relief Donations

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 173
1 September 2021

Policy Statement

It is VFF policy that:

1. Food relief charity organisations play a critical role in providing access to fresh and nutritious produce to Australians facing acute food insecurity.
2. The VFF affirms the right of individual farm businesses to choose to provide produce to individual food relief organisations as charitable donations and will encourage farmers to do so where appropriate.
3. Whilst an important mechanism, produce donations do not represent a solution to the broader issue of food waste or excess produce throughout the food production supply chain.
4. Farmers must not be expected to provide delivery or any associated processing of the donated produce unless they choose to do so.
5. Where possible, food relief organisations should use existing logistic channels and supply chains.
6. Preference should be given for processing produce donations intended for regional areas as locally as practicable.
7. It is critical that donation practices do not contribute to market distortion.
8. Tax deductions should be available for farmers donating produce to food relief organisations.
9. It is the shared responsibility of the State and Federal Governments and food relief organisations to address acute food insecurity amongst vulnerable sections of the population.
10. The State Government has a key role in funding initiatives that streamline processes and remove barriers for farmers wishing to donate produce.
11. Individual food relief charities and the State Government must work together to reduce duplication and improve efficiency within the food relief system.
12. The State Government has a clear role in improving access and distribution of food relief, especially in rural and remote communities.

FARMING SYSTEMS



Biosecurity

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 181
22 November 2023

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF actively promotes a collaborative and proactive approach to biosecurity management and control, as the Victorian farming community are key stakeholders frequently placed at the forefront of the biosecurity continuum.
2. The VFF believes that biosecurity is a shared responsibility, involving industry, research institutions, federal and state governments partners, and the community working together.
3. The VFF believes all community members should have a general duty to ensure that they do not spread pests, weeds and diseases. All persons and corporate bodies corporate must be responsible for managing biosecurity risks that are under their control, or that they are aware of. This duty should be enforced by law.
4. The VFF believes acknowledges that Victorian farmers act as the first line of defence against persistent threats to biosecurity, and are suitably placed to deliver best practices in accordance with their respective industries. Farmers should be acknowledged by the government for the important contribution that they make to minimise ensuring biosecurity risk on farms.
5. The VFF recognises that a well-resourced national biosecurity system will safeguard Victorian agriculture, the environment and the community from imminent threats to biosecurity while preserving domestic, international, import and export market access. However, the VFF insists that the cost of biosecurity protection and management resources including, but not limited to training, staffing, compensation and scenario planning must be appropriately and practicably shared across the whole community. distributed across the biosecurity continuum.
6. The VFF supports the introduction and national streamlining of traceability arrangements in the primary industries, provided these enhance, and do not impede agricultural productivity in Australia.

7. The VFF supports a biosecurity system that prioritises stringent and coordinated biosecurity management across the supply chain. This is necessary to preserve and protect the prosperity of Victorian agriculture from the persistent threat of endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases.

8. The VFF believes that where a farming system may be compromised by a biosecurity breach or incursion, that mechanisms for preparedness funding, cost recovery and compensation frameworks can be implemented immediately to minimise losses incurred by farmers. On-farm biosecurity management

9. The VFF believes that the creation of biosecurity management plans is integral to safeguard farmers, as they are the conduit between best practices and the maintenance of strict biosecurity controls. Moreover, the VFF endorses the installation of visible biosecurity signage to protect the Victorian farming community from threats to biosecurity.

10. The VFF strongly opposes any unauthorised entry and/or trespass onto properties as this violates biosecurity plans, and places production systems at greater risk of biosecurity breaches.

Endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases

11. The VFF supports ongoing surveillance of endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases at the international, interstate and intrastate levels, recognising that surveillance is key to early detection of threats to biosecurity which could detrimentally impact Australian agriculture.

12. The VFF believes that there must be shared responsibility of importers, exporters and government in the screening, surveillance, monitoring, chemical treatment or destruction of import products coming into Australia to protect agriculture from exotic pests, weeds and diseases.

Preparedness and emergency response

13. The VFF strongly supports a rapid response to biosecurity threats or outbreaks through unified early detection, control and communication between the farming community, industry and government, emphasising a practicable and measured approach to dealing with threats to biosecurity as they arise.

14. The VFF acknowledges that practical containment strategies are the gold standard to for managing a disease outbreak or biosecurity breach, and supports extensive training and staffing by the government, industry and the farming community to conduct a coordinated biosecurity response.

15. The VFF believes that close consultation must continue in the event of zoonotic disease, noting that a cohesive biosecurity response by the agricultural and the primary and allied health sectors is key to mitigating impacts to human, plant and animal health during a biosecurity incursion.

16. The VFF affirms that the delivery of scaled emergency preparedness exercises or practical stress testing must involve local, state and Commonwealth governments, while including the farming community as key stakeholders in the biosecurity emergency response.

17. The VFF believes that in the interest of enhanced preparedness, personal information must only be used by the government to identify localities impacted by a biosecurity emergency. The VFF strongly opposes the use of personal information contrary to this sole use, and insists that the privacy of farmers must be protected at all times.

Market access and reducing market disruption

18. The VFF believes that sufficient mitigation of biosecurity threats enables continued domestic and international market access for Victorian farmers. The minimisation of market disruption to agriculture must be a priority in the design and implementation of industry and government biosecurity protocols.

Biosecurity funding arrangements

19. The VFF opposes any government enforced tax, levy or charging arrangement on farmers to fund biosecurity activities that are imposed without the agreement of the affected agricultural industries.

20. The VFF believes that primary producers already fulfil their financial responsibilities in supporting the Australian government's biosecurity activities. Additional levies and taxes should be imposed on importers, as they are the primary source of biosecurity risks.

21. Contributions should promote growth in the primary industries and manage risks effectively. It is essential that any new levy proposal or amendment is supported by industry bodies and is formulated with clear, efficient, and practical implementation plans in line with the system's principles.

22. The VFF supports the ability of agricultural industries to establish statutory levies for biosecurity activities and emergency response in line with the Commonwealth Government's 12 levy principles established in 1997.

23. The VFF believes that any tax, levy or charge imposed by the government to fund biosecurity activities must be directly hypothecated to those activities agreed with industry, and not allocated to government consolidated revenue.

24. New levy proposals and amendments to existing levies must meet the Commonwealth Government's 12 levy principles, explicitly indicating the allocation of funds and demonstrating the benefits this expenditure will bring to levy payers.

Animal Activism

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 179
22 March 2023

Policy Statement

1. The VFF believes that animal activism activities present risks to biosecurity, animal health and welfare. All laws that apply to biosecurity, animal health, welfare must apply to animal activists who trespass on property and interact or threaten to interact with livestock.
2. The VFF believes animal activism activities presents risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of farmers, their families and the agricultural workforce. The VFF opposes all activities by animal activists which may constitute criminal, bullying, intimidatory and harassing behaviour.
3. The VFF believes laws concerning trespass, theft, vandalism and biosecurity are insufficient in preventing animal activists from entering farms and disrupting lawful farming operations. The VFF supports the strengthening of these laws in order to prevent animal activists from invading and disrupting farms and homes.
4. The VFF supports any measures designed to prevent animal activists (individuals or organisations) from inciting others to undertake unlawful activities such as farm trespass.
5. The VFF supports any measures that will empower law enforcement to sufficiently deal with animal activism and will help direct the courts in issuing appropriate penalties to animal activists who unlawfully trespass on farms and livestock related businesses (eg saleyards and abattoirs), including through the use of minimum fines and minimum prison sentences.
6. The VFF opposes the publishing of farm business information or data (including contact and location information and imagery) without the consent of the farm business owner or manager. Such activity should constitute harassment and the VFF supports penalties for animal activists who publish this data without permission. Publishers such as social media companies should be held accountable for the information and data which is published on their platforms.

7. The VFF believes governments must only seek to regulate animal agriculture industries based on peer reviewed science. Governments must not take any action to further regulate animal agricultural industries in direct reaction to the information that is distributed by animal activists.

8. The VFF believes that government must not take any actions that seek to limit or prevent the production of animal agricultural products where legitimate markets for those products exist.

9. The VFF opposes secondary campaigns and boycotts that target businesses which supply services to animal agricultural businesses, or that sell animal products that are produced in a lawful manner. The VFF supports any measures designed to protect businesses from such campaigns.

10. The VFF opposes discriminatory corporate practices that seek to deny products and services to animal agriculture and associated businesses that are undertaking lawful operations.

Animal Welfare

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 177
7 September 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF strongly believes that farmers are committed to providing the highest standards of welfare by prioritising the health, welfare, and safety of livestock in their care.
2. The VFF recognises that safeguarding animal welfare is key to maintaining animal health and production outcomes and supports Victoria's world-leading animal welfare regulations. The development of legislation and regulations should provide adequate protections to animals, while reinforcing the importance of animal agriculture to the broader community.
3. The VFF believes that Victorian farmers lead innovations in animal agriculture that benefit animal welfare and enable international market access using the most recent peer-reviewed, scientific evidence.
4. There must be a clear distinction between animal welfare regulation in primary production species, companion animals and pest species. The VFF supports the objective separation of animal welfare regulation by its respective industry, noting that each animal species has unique requirements, guidelines and regulations which may not be applicable nor practicable when applied to the other.
5. The VFF supports the role of science in the formation of animal welfare legislation, regulation, and guidelines, but only where it is objective and practicable. The VFF believes that the Five Domains Model is an appropriate scientific Model upon which to construct animal welfare legislation, regulation and guidelines. Where there are practical or economic difficulties in executing standards, government support for industry is necessary to achieve change.
6. The VFF supports animal welfare legislation underpinned by education and extension in the primary animal production sector. This legislation must be communicated clearly to all stakeholders, including the non-farming community, whose perception of animal agriculture is important to farmers.

7. The VFF accepts co-regulation where the government recognises compliance with industry-led quality assurance schemes or other industry-agreed arrangements as satisfactorily meeting animal welfare objectives in order to minimise the regulatory impact on farmers. The government should recognise that many industry-led quality assurance schemes go further than the minimum required under national Standards and Guidelines.

Animal sentience

8. The VFF believes that animals are living beings that can feel and perceive the world around them. Legislation and regulation in place to safeguard animal welfare must be designed based on peer-reviewed evidence informing the scientific understanding of sentience. The VFF firmly opposes the use and definition of animal sentience outside the current definition that is backed by peer-reviewed, scientific evidence.

Permissions, restrictions, and controlled procedures

9. The VFF opposes restrictions of husbandry practices to veterinarian-only procedures, understanding that Victorian producers deliver the best practice approach to regularly delivered on-farm practices.

10. The VFF rejects the notion of animal welfare and production training and licencing above current lawful compliance, noting that Victorian farmers regularly seek to improve and deliver best practice in a safe and humane manner.

Pain relief

11. The VFF recognises that farmers voluntarily use pain relief in husbandry procedures in line with agricultural best practice.

12. The VFF opposes the subjection of animals to practices which induce an unnecessary, identified, and uncontested negative affective state under the Five Domains Model. Consequently, the VFF supports the restriction or prohibition of these practices provided there is appropriate Government assistance and consultation with industry. This must be accompanied by an organised phase-out period to assist industry with adapting to these changes.

Virtual Herding

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 181
22 November 2023

Policy Statement

1. The VFF recognises the potential of Virtual Herding Technology (VHT) to enhance livestock management in Victoria, contributing to a more productive and resilient agriculture sector.
2. The VFF advocates for the revision of current animal welfare legislation to allow wider commercial use of VHT, aligning Victoria with progressive steps taken by Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, and international benchmarks. Countries such as New Zealand, the UK, some EU member states, Canada, and the USA have already endorsed this, with no barriers to its commercial use.
3. The VFF supports the use of VHT, given its foundation in robust scientific evidence, ethical application, practicality, and benefits for livestock and farmers.
4. The VFF emphasises the importance of animal welfare in the use of VHT. This technology not only provides a method for managing livestock aligned with high welfare standards but also enhances animal management. It allows for swift navigation of animals during natural disasters or disease outbreaks, enhancing the resilience and adaptability of farming operations.
5. The VFF recognises the potential of VHT to contribute to animal health. By tracking animal behaviour, the technology can help detect potential health concerns early, facilitating prompt intervention and aiding in maintaining livestock health.
6. The VFF acknowledges the role of VHT as a climate adaptation strategy, with potential benefits including the management of soil erosion, regulation of overgrazing, and enhancement of soil and water quality.
7. The VFF calls on State and Federal Governments to incentivise and streamline the development of technologies that promote sustainable and efficient farming practices.
8. The VFF urges the Victorian Government to provide a policy framework that enables the adoption of innovative solutions to emerging challenges, ensuring the competitiveness and future success of the Victorian agriculture sector.

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Climate Change

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 173
1 September 2021

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF acknowledges that climate change both poses challenges and presents potential opportunities for Victorian farmers.
2. The VFF acknowledges and respects the diverse views held by the Victorian farming community regarding the impact of human induced climate change and natural climate variability. Irrespective of these views, the VFF's priority is to ensure that public responses to climate change have limited negative impacts on the agriculture industry.
3. The VFF acknowledges that agriculture is both a greenhouse gas emitting and sequestering industry. The VFF believes it is essential that the role of carbon cycling and methane's atmospheric lifetime is considered in climate change policy affecting agriculture.
4. The VFF believes that government mitigation programs in the agricultural industries should be measurable to ensure farmers' efforts to reduce emissions are reported and recognised in Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions reporting framework.
5. The VFF believes governments must acknowledge the work of Victorian farmers to date in reducing emissions and adapting to climate change including through their investment in renewable energy, changed farming practices and investment in new technology.
6. The VFF commits to constructively participating in government and industry discussions and policy development regarding adaptation, mitigation and natural capital markets.

Emissions Reduction Targets

7. The VFF recognises agriculture's role in helping to meet national emissions reductions goals and targets. The VFF supports the National Farmers Federation led economy-wide aspiration of net zero emissions by 2050.

8. The VFF's support for emissions reductions targets specifically for the agriculture industry is contingent on those targets recognising the relevant factors outlined in Items 3, 4, 5 and 9 of this Policy Statement.

9. The VFF supports the establishment of strong emissions baselines for the agricultural industry and a strong recording framework to ensure measurable outcomes from mitigation efforts.

Farm Business and Industry Support

10. The VFF believes government and industry mitigation efforts should not negatively impact productivity and should support and reward farmers in their emissions reduction and sequestration efforts.

11. The VFF encourages investment in research and development regarding the observed and future impacts of climate change to assist farm business decision making and adaptation.

12. The VFF encourages investment in adaptation and emissions reduction technologies to ensure Victorian farmers have the tools to adapt and contribute to mitigation efforts.

13. The VFF supports investment to improve the accessibility and affordability of on farm emissions and sequestration measurement, management and reporting tools.

14. The VFF supports improvements in the accessibility of and the development of natural capital markets.

15. The VFF encourages government financial support for adaptation and mitigation efforts on farm, including but not limited to:

- a. Renewable energy technology
- b. Energy, resource and input efficiency projects
- c. Stock feed and water infrastructure
- d. Genetic and animal husbandry research and projects.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following VFF Policy Statements: Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Policy, Right to Farm Policy, Land Access Policy

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Policy

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 183
22 May 2024

General Principles

1. The VFF supports a smooth transition for Australia's energy market towards renewable energy based on commercial consent from landholders and project selection and design that improves reliability of energy distribution and without significant increase to energy consumers.
2. The VFF believes the generation, transmission, and storage of electricity on agricultural land must be based on the principle of commercial consent. Infrastructure proponents should negotiate fair terms with landholders that encourages voluntary land access/acquisition through fair compensatory measures.
3. The VFF recognises that Australia's energy generation mix needs to change as existing infrastructure assets reach the end of their useful lives and to meet emissions reduction targets. Government policy must not favour specific technologies, but rather enable the technologies to compete on their merits.
4. The VFF supports research into development and adoption of new generation technologies including both centralised and decentralised generation, and support and promotion of improvements in on-farm energy efficiency and self-sufficiency in generation and storage capacity.
5. The VFF supports efficient investment in generation, transmission, distribution, and storage capacity to avoid over investment or 'gold plating' of the energy network. This includes support for the transition to appropriate transmission, distribution and storage assets and facilitating investment in targeted and necessary interconnectors.
6. The VFF believes that the avoidance of impacts to agricultural production and supply chains is central to the consideration of efficient investment in generation, transmission, distribution, and storage capacity. The VFF believes all decision-making processes for site selection, design, construction, operation and maintenance of renewable energy and transmission facilities include an agriculture impact statement.
7. The VFF calls for a preapplication meeting to be held with landholders and communities prior to the lodgement of a planning permit application.
8. The VFF opposes the early decommissioning of existing power plants where the continued supply of dispatchable power cannot be guaranteed. VFF supports investment in new on-demand generation capacity in Victoria to offset the loss of baseload generation facilities in the Latrobe Valley.
9. The VFF believes that impacted landholders and communities have third party appeal rights to appeal decisions to grant approval for a renewable energy facility that will have material detriment to their property.

10. To foster community cohesion and to increase the likelihood of a proposed renewable energy development gaining a Social Licence to operate, the VFF recommends that financial compensation should be paid to neighbouring properties who are impacted by the proposal.

On-farm renewable energy and energy efficiency projects

11. The VFF supports targeted policies and programs that seek to ensure support farmers' knowledge and decision making in developing on-farm energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

12. The VFF believes government must reduce integration barriers to enable farm businesses to invest in larger on-farm renewable energy developments and take advantage of feed-in tariffs, thereby also helping to decentralise energy distribution networks.

13. The VFF supports the provision of low-cost finance to farmers for on-farm energy efficiency and renewable energy projects through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and other sources.

14. The VFF opposes policies such as the Large-scale Renewable Energy Target discriminating against small-scale renewable energy developments. Government should promote small-scale developments that have less impact on agricultural land compared to large-scale developments because farm businesses have control over their scale, location, and construction. Setting of a Renewable Energy Target and Renewable Energy Zones should include publication of the Agriculture Impact Assessment and recommendations for how co-existence with agriculture will be achieved.

15. The VFF supports the regulation of renewable energy installers and contractors to prevent unscrupulous behaviour that targets and disadvantages farm businesses.

Renewable energy developments and agricultural land

16. The VFF encourages the construction of large-scale renewable energy and associated developments on non-agricultural land. Where large-scale renewable energy and associated developments must be located on agricultural land, the VFF believes developers must design and operate the facility on the principles of co-existence and commercial consent. That is, the proposal must mitigate the development's impact on the agricultural use and productive output of the land and any surrounding agricultural land, unless a commercial payment is made to a sum agreeable by all parties as being commensurate to any losses incurred. The VFF will oppose renewable energy and associated developments that risk the ongoing and long-term productive use of agricultural land.

17. The VFF opposes restrictions being placed on agriculture industry by renewable energy and transmission facilities.

18. The VFF opposes renewable energy and associated developments being located on irrigable farmland where agricultural production is displaced on high quality soils.

19. The VFF encourages the undergrounding of transmission and distribution powerlines to ensure minimal disruption to agricultural land use and regional communities, eliminate fire risks, and avoid the failure of above ground infrastructure, due to the impact of severe weather. Where possible transmission and distribution should be located within existing linear transport corridors on crown land.

20. The VFF calls for the establishment of a statewide strategic plan for renewable energy developments that considers all issues concerning impacts to agricultural production and regional communities. Formulation of a strategic plan must include consultation with the VFF and impacted regional communities.

21. The VFF supports local governments to have the ability and power to identify and protect agricultural land through the planning scheme where it is considered that renewable energy developments pose a threat to the ongoing and long-term agricultural productivity in a region. This should include the ability to determine setbacks to adjoining properties to be met by renewable energy generation and storage facilities.

22. The VFF supports local content policies aimed at supporting local industry in the construction of renewable energy developments. Such policies must be targeted towards supporting economic development and job creation within the region where renewable energy developments are taking place, not just at a national or state level.

23. The VFF believes that when establishing statutory processes governing renewable energy developments, government must consider all issues concerning their eventual impacts on land use and rehabilitation including decommissioning on the site and neighbouring properties. Developers, via an appropriate bond, not landowners, should be held responsible for all decommissioning and remedial works. This includes placing requirements on developers to recycle or reuse any materials at the end of the development's life cycle. Where the developer is unable to meet these obligations, or the bond is insufficient to meet the obligations, the government must be responsible for costs associated with carrying out all decommissioning and remedial works.

24. the VFF believes that operation of renewable energy generation, transmission or storage should not restrict land use rights or operations, including through the creation of exclusion zones or buffers on dwellings or creating difficulties farmers' ability to obtain insurance.

25. The VFF believes the energy infrastructure developers are responsible for any increased costs for insurance, local government rates, land tax, farm operations and compliance with safety regulations.

26. The VFF supports the development of safety standards and guidelines for the construction of large-scale battery storage to minimise any risk to soil, water, groundwater, crops or livestock from these facilities.

Regulatory Improvements

27. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform to apply a comprehensive and enforceable land access code to licensed parties. This must give rights and protections for landholders who host or are impacted by transmission, distribution, storage, or generation facilities from project design through to decommissioning and rehabilitation.

28. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform to require energy facility operators to consult with landholders in the design of operational guidelines and are required to recalculate compensation if changes lead to increased costs of production or restriction to use of machinery and practices. This should include the preparation of agriculture impact statements prior to adopting any rule or requirement that may impact on existing agricultural practices.

29. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform to require the opportunity for input from landholders in relation to any requirement, regulation, guideline, inquiry, or direction that may impact on their safe occupation and use of land. Direct notification to landholders must be provided of any such proposal.

30. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform to maintain landholder awareness of safety risks and regulations relating to energy infrastructure located on land in their ownership.

31. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform to ensure regulations are clearly written to exempt ordinary operation of farm machinery.

32. The VFF supports relevant legislative and regulatory reform so that all energy infrastructure operators are responsible for ensuring infrastructure is constructed and maintained to allow the safe operation of farm machinery, irrigation and land and crop management practices such as aerial spraying, GPS enabled agriculture, stubble and fuel reduction burns and use of drones.

Planning System

33. The VFF supports rigorous planning policies that restrict large-scale renewable energy developments on agricultural land by requiring a permit. Permit requirements should be less restrictive for large-scale developments where agricultural production continues to be the predominant use of the land (co-existence). More restrictive permit requirements should be in place for proposed developments where agriculture is not the predominant use of the land. A permit should not be required for on-farm small-scale developments where the energy generated is to be predominantly used in the farm business.

34. The VFF supports amendments to the Victorian Planning Policy Framework and relevant Guidelines to ensure that there is appropriate guidance in requirements to protect against unplanned or permanent loss of land.

35. The VFF supports amendments to the Victoria Planning Provisions to ensure all irrigation areas are identified and strategic agricultural land is identified.

36. VFF supports amendments to the Victoria Planning Provisions to ensure Councils can establish additional application requirements for the consideration of facilities. This may include minimum setbacks to uses or boundaries or local issues to be addressed in an agriculture impact statement.

Wind energy developments

37. The VFF supports farmers having the choice to enter into arrangements with companies to locate wind energy generation facilities on their properties where projects have been approved in accordance with government policy and planning guidelines. However, wind energy developments must not result in a loss of agricultural productivity or disruption to affected landowners.

38. The VFF supports the right of farmers and local communities having their views considered in the planning assessment and approval process for wind energy developments by:

- a) Requiring an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process for wind energy generation projects greater than 30 megawatts.
- b) Providing neighbouring farmers the opportunity to review and make submissions to the approval or EES process.

Emergency Management (Natural Hazards)

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 178
7 December 2022

Policy Statement

The Victorian Farmers Federation is a recognised organisation in the emergency management sector. As there is no government agency in fire, flood and storm management with detailed knowledge of agricultural impacts, the view of the VFF should be sought by Emergency Management Agencies.

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seeks the acknowledgement that farms are not only a place of residence but a place of business that are key to Victoria's economic well-being and to ensure all Victorians access to high quality and affordable food and fibre. Many farmers will acknowledge that the easiest asset to recover on farm is a dwelling.
2. The VFF seek Government recognition at all stages of emergency management of the impacts of natural hazard-based emergencies (fire, flood, storm) on farm assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability.
3. The VFF believes that:
 - a. all emergency management agencies should specifically address agriculture and farms in control, command, co-ordination, consequence, communication and community connection stages;
 - b. all risk and consequence assessments and models are based on all four aspects of property in the State Emergency Management Priorities, including detailed consideration of farm property and assets in relation to the priority of protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability;
 - c. rapid dispatch of aircraft to ignition must be maintained, including removing any requirement to seek power companies' approval to approach powerlines
 - d. impacts on farm assets are specifically considered before undertaking any in event management action (eg control line, back burn or temporary levee) and full compensation for impacts on farm assets is facilitated.
4. The VFF seeks a commitment from Government to VFF representation in regional and state risk assessment and planning.

5. The VFF seeks a commitment from Government to establish and fund a network of Community Reference Groups to engage with community leaders on consequence and community connection. These should be facilitated at regional and township level and support agency risk assessment processes.

6. The VFF seeks the Government to commit to delivering a range of public land and safety improvements as identified in the *current VFF Emergency Management Public Land and Safety Improvements* document forming Attachment 1 to this policy.

7. The VFF seeks acknowledgement by Government in all relevant statutes that private landholders should have the right to protect their assets, including being able to request appropriate risk reduction actions on crown land.

8. The VFF seeks a fully funded risk management program to undertake management actions to minimise risk emanating from Crown Land. This should include the Crown ensuring a qualified arborist assesses the risk to life and property of any tree on crown land identified as a hazard to private property.

9. The VFF calls for a review of planning provisions relating to managing risk to ensure that they apply to undertaking actions to protect assets. Specifically, clear provisions to exempt reinstatement of fences and structures on farm (to protect animal health and welfare).

Preparedness – avoiding impacts

10. That the VFF be consulted in relation to consequence assessment (management of the effect of emergencies on individuals, the community, infrastructure and the environment) on farmland.

11. That VFF encourage farmers to prepare an emergency plan for their business that can form a land access guide for their farm to provide to local responders. The plan could include, where relevant:

a. The type of production and identification of priority or critical actions in relation to asset protection

b. key locations on farms (assets and obstacles including in and above ground farm infrastructure; dairy sheds; intensive livestock sheds; stock containment yards; machinery sheds; pump stations) including any safety issues or business continuity issues; the nature of systems in use (e.g. dairy power type) and ensure emergency management plans

c. minimise impacts on farm businesses

d. the location of renewable energy generation, batteries, tyres and chemicals

e. conditions / permissions for entry and contact details.

12. That Government work with VFF to determine how to allow incident responder access to farm emergency plans, including who can access the information and under which circumstances. (privacy management).

13. That the government ensures that Incident Controllers have passed competency test on identifying farm property impacts and how these impacts can be avoided or minimised.

14. That the VFF be designated as an agency that can provide an Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) to an incident control or management centre.

15. That the Government fund the training of VFF representatives as EMLOs.

16. The State should require telecommunication and power providers to monitor their infrastructure and have emergency response plans to ensure that they maintain service to rural communities during high-risk bushfire periods, during flood warnings or during storms.

Fire

17. The Government establishes a fuel load management strategy based on the elements of the current VFF position on fuel load management and residual risk at Attachment 2.

Flood

18. Consistent with existing Water Act, public flood mitigation works should not increase impact on farms from the likelihood of floods, the depth or rate of flow of water or the length of inundation.

19. Where impacts to agriculture from flood mitigation works cannot be avoided, commercial compensation for increased risk and impacts should be provided.

20. Flood warning stations should be expanded to give greater warning to farmers to move stock.

Storm

21. That investment is made into improving meteorological information in areas with higher risk from storms to improve modelling of events and to support risk management.

Incident Response – minimising impacts

22. That in conjunction with VFF, the Government prepare training modules be prepared for all Incident Controllers on understanding agricultural impacts and risks and ensuring clear and timely messaging in accordance with the current VFF position on emergency warning and communications – Attachment 3.

23. That the VFF, as a partner agency, be given EMLO access to incident control centres and the state control centre as applicable.

24. Ensure Agriculture Victoria presence in State Control Centre / Incident Control Centre during events impacting agricultural areas.

25. Ensure agriculture industry membership on municipal and regional emergency committees.

26. Ensure that there are evacuation areas with bio secure holding facilities (such as showgrounds) where landholders may transport key breeding stock.

27. That emergency relief areas serving farming communities provide biosecure stock containment areas to provide opportunities to provide refuge for key breeding stock.

Fire

28. To improve response and reduce impact the following actions should be implemented: Designate all farming land adjacent to crown land reserves greater than 10ha as 'asset protection zone' and ensure mineral earth breaks are permanently maintained within crown land. Ensure all fuel reduction plans minimise impact on areas of agricultural production. Amend Victoria Planning Provisions to ensure fuel breaks and safe management of vegetation along roadsides and fence lines. In the planning stages land access agreements should be developed with farmers such that there is clear understanding of what disruption there may be to the farmer's property in the event of a fire necessitating control actions (e.g. containment lines).

Recovery

29. The State, working with the VFF, publish a set of rehabilitation standards for reinstating land, fencing and other assets with targeted timeframes to assist in working with private landholders.

30. That the Government develop a targeted recovery plan in accordance with the current VFF position on recovery plans in attachment 4. As farmers often lose their home and their means of earning an income, the recovery system needs to understand that the process of recovery is long and stressful. A delay in rebuilding a fence or a farm building can have a compounding impact on recovering productivity.

This plan should include:

- Expedited access for local Vets, farmers and animal health staff to assist farmers to care for livestock and animals affected by fires, floods or storms.
- Increased resourcing of Access Safety Assessment Teams and arborists to reduce road reopening delays. The list should be shared for both State and municipal road reopening assessments.
- Programs to share the burden of cost in replacing boundary fencing, public and private
- landowners on adjoining properties should be treated equally in terms of paying for fencing under the Fencing Act 1968, particularly after the devastation of a bushfire, flood or storm event with impact on fencing from crown property.
- Where property damage occurs, including to fences, fodder and soil from emergency works full rehabilitation should be funded by the Crown with recovery teams expediting works to agreed timelines.
- Assistance in establishing stock feed depots (where required), established channels with Defence for emergency generators, access to 'banks' to store genetic material to facilitate recovery post loss of seed / breeding stock. Databases of companies willing to assist in fodder programs Rapid referral of missing / lost stock for recovery action and investigation by Victoria Police. Dedicated website (that remains live for an extended period of time) with resourcing information for the recovery and rebuilding phase with information about Site clearance; rebuilding advice; Agriculture advice – recovery; financial and other assistance; Links to resources and Community information.
- Dedicated 'recovery' co-ordinator – maintaining regular contact / newsletters etc. & organising community sessions with speakers. The coordinator would be responsible for delivery of targeted Streamlined approvals processes by government (where required)
- Knowledge of Department of Defence resources and deployment protocols.
- Records of key infrastructure needs and deployment of essential infrastructure such as emergency generators, mobile exchanges on wheels and cellular on wheels to minimise impacts on operations.
- Access to 'banks' to store genetic material to facilitate recovery post loss of seed / breeding stock.
- Planning permit provisions to remove the need for a planning permit for rebuilding farm structures and buildings.
- Rate relief / assistance package for primary producers.

Fire

31. The State should pay the full cost of fire control line rehabilitation and refencing where a control line was established by government agencies.

32. Fences removed by incident response should be replaced within 2 months of the event. Where fencing is critical for business continuity this must be expedited.

This policy should be read in conjunction with: VFF Good Neighbour Policy

i State Emergency Management Priorities The State Emergency Management Priorities underpin and guide all decisions during a response to any emergency.

The priorities are:

- Protection and preservation of life and relief of suffering is paramount. This includes:
 - Safety of emergency response personnel; and
 - Safety of community members including vulnerable community members and visitors/tourists
- Issuing of community information and community warnings detailing incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to assist community members make informed decisions about their safety
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that support community resilience
- Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.

<https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-10/Victorian%20State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20%28SEMP%29%20-%20Interactive%20and%20functional%20PDF%20document%20%20October%202021.PDF>

Good Neighbour Policy

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 173
1 September
2021

Policy Statement

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seek Government recognition of the high level of stewardship occurring on Victorian farms through financial and in kind assistance to ecosystem services provided on farm.
2. Public Land Management standards will include assessments of potential risks to private land emanating from public land. This includes fire risk, prevalence of pest plant and animals including overly abundant wildlife, biosecurity risks and risk to life and property from vegetation on boundaries or unauthorised access onto private property.
3. The VFF seeks a commitment from the Victorian Government that Public Land Management standards shall be equivalent to those required of private landholders, including recurrent funding for management of identified risks.
4. The VFF seeks a commitment to recurrent funding of the management of pest plants and animals on public land, so as to reduce the risk of weed incursions from public to private land.
5. Differential standards based on tenure that lead to additional risks / costs to the private land holder should be removed. For instance safety considerations in relation to vegetation and property boundaries should apply equally to public and private landholders and fencing costs should be shared.
6. Private landholders should have the right to protect their assets, including being able to request appropriate risk reduction actions on crown land.
Consultation
7. VFF seeks a commitment from Government to ensure a VFF representative is included in the Stakeholder Reference Group for any Park Management plan or policy / statute review process where the park adjoins land actively farmed or where the policy or legislation has the potential to have an impact on farming.
8. The VFF seeks to ensure a representative is included in any emergency management processes, for example fuel reduction plans or flood mitigation strategies.
Crown land interface
9. The VFF seeks a commitment to the provision of appropriate buffers on Crown land boundary fence lines, to help with the overall management of fire, weeds and pests and in the maintenance of fencing. The width should allow for emergency access / staging within the crown land and minimise the likelihood of damage to private property.

Fencing and Safety

10. The VFF seeks a commitment to the Government accepting responsibility to contribute half the cost of constructing and replacing dividing fence lines between crown land and private property.

11. Where animals are using crown land to access private property and that access is leading to lost production the VFF seeks crown grants for the additional cost to construct exclusion fencing.

12. The VFF seeks a commitment for Government to consider risk to life and property in consideration of native vegetation applications and to accept the legal and financial consequences of management actions not being undertaken.

13. The VFF seeks a risk management program requiring inspection by a qualified arborist of any tree deemed a risk by an adjoining owner and a program to implement the appropriate risk management activities.

Fire and Emergency Management

14. The VFF seeks a commitment to conduct fuel reduction along all national park and state forest boundary areas at a minimum interval of once in every 10 years, and development of a community education program to explain the importance of reducing fuel loads and maintaining forest biodiversity into the future.

15. State Emergency Management Priorities include farm businesses in the definition of property however fire risk and management is based on a dwelling as a default for life and property. This leads to failure to consider impacts of fire on farms in preparedness, response and recovery. As a dwelling is not the only indicator for risk to life and property on farms the VFF seeks the use of State Emergency Management Priorities in all fire and emergency management strategies and actions prepared by Government agencies.

16. The VFF seeks a commitment to ensuring that the development and maintenance of fire access tracks on public land meets appropriate safety standards and bushfire response preparedness.

17. The VFF seeks amendments to Native Vegetation Regulations to ensure that vegetation along roads can be managed to ensure safe access and egress by the public and emergency services.

This policy should be read in conjunction with: VFF Pest Plant and Animal Policy Statement VFF Right to Farm Policy Statement

Pest Plant and Animal Management Policy

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council
Meeting 173
1 September 2021

Policy Statement

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seeks a public acknowledgement by the State of Victoria that pest plants and animals and overly abundant wildlife are key threats to biodiversity, biosecurity and productivity and that active management across tenure is required to reduce these impacts.
 2. The VFF seeks a commitment from the Victorian Government that Public Land Management standards shall be equivalent to those required of private landholders.
 3. The VFF seeks assurances that a full range of tools to manage pest plants and animals will be available for use in any area where appropriate control methods are in place, including capacity to deal with biosecurity outbreaks impacting of food and fibre production, human health or animal welfare.
 4. The VFF seeks a commitment by the Victorian Government to fully fund actions required by the Crown to stop the spread of all weeds and pest animals across Victoria. This should include investment in biosecurity programs to prevent and manage incursions of new and exotic pests and diseases and increase efforts to deal with established pests and diseases. No area will be deemed 'decontrolled'.
 5. The VFF calls on the Victorian Government to require each crown land management body to report on the extent of their compliance with the Catchment and Land Protection Act in their annual reports.
 6. Key performance indicators for senior management of departments and agencies with public land management responsibilities should include compliance with Catchment and Land Protection Act General Duty of Landholders.
 7. The Conservation Regulator should be responsible for monitoring the prevalence of pest plants and animals and overly abundant wildlife on public land and government compliance with its statutory duty as a landholder.
 8. The impact of pest plants and animals on the Victorian economy and on biodiversity should be reported to Parliament annually.
- Cross Tenure Approach
9. The VFF calls for ongoing funding to Catchment Management Authorities to coordinate cross tenure management of pest plants and animals.

Crown Land Management

10. The State Government should ensure that all crown land managers have dedicated funding to manage pest plant and animal issues on crown land and are able to comply with actions required under cross tenure pest plant and animal plans.

11. A fully costed and funded management plan should be prepared to manage pest plants and animals, including overly abundant wildlife for each crown land reserve.

12. Mineral earth buffers shall be provided on the crown land side of public – private fence lines, to protect private assets and assist in management of fire, weeds and pest animals.

13. State of Environment Reports should include assessments of the management of pest plants and animals on crown land.

Control methods

14. Farmers need access to a range of chemicals and control mechanisms to manage the risk of pest plants and animals to their property.

15. VFF seeks the removal of barriers to use chemicals or other control mechanisms near urban areas, including the need to notify neighbours.

16. Private land holders should be able to manage threats to their assets from pest plants and animals, including overly abundant wildlife.

17. The Crown will pay for the price differential between a standard farm fence and a fence able to keep pest animals or wildlife from accessing private land.

18. The VFF seeks an ongoing program of research into the development of new and innovative pest weed and animal control technologies.

19. The VFF seeks commitment to ongoing funding of pest plant and animals task forces.

20. The VFF seeks a dedicated stream of funding for Landcare programs to manage pest plant and animals issues.

21. The VFF seeks maintenance and expansion of programs, including fox bounties and aerial baiting for wild dog control.

Regulatory Systems

22. VFF seeks commitment to using legislative tools to enable farmers to manage overly abundant wildlife.

This policy should be read in conjunction with: VFF Good Neighbour Policy Statement VFF Right to Farm Policy Statement i 20 General duties of land owners (1) In relation to his or her land a land owner must take all reasonable steps to—

(a) avoid causing or contributing to land degradation which causes or may cause damage to land of another land owner; and

(b) conserve soil; and

-
- (c) protect water resources; and
 - (d) eradicate regionally prohibited weeds; and
 - (e) prevent the growth and spread of regionally controlled weeds; and
 - (f) prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, established pest animals.

21 Additional duties of the Secretary

- (1) The Secretary must take all reasonable steps to eradicate State prohibited weeds from all land in the State.
- (1A) The Secretary must take all reasonable steps to control restricted pest animals on any land in the State.

Managing entry to farms

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council
Meeting 173
1 September 2021

Policy Statement

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seeks to ensure that the public understand farms are workplaces. Entry to farms needs to be controlled to ensure compliance with the requirements of government safety and biosecurity laws. Agreements should be in writing and include biosecurity plans.
2. The VFF seeks changes to all laws and policies that grant permission to ensure to protect the rights of farmers and compliance with farm management plans. We seek requirements that all entry to farms (land access) will be subject to landholder consent including consultation and notice, compensation for loss and rehabilitation of affected land, and be supported by rigorous compliance and review mechanisms.
3. The VFF supports the right of all farm landowners to veto any proposed farm entry / land access arrangement where they reasonably believe the proposed land access activities would adversely affect food and fibre production, pose a safety or biosecurity risk or reduce their financial return from the farm land.
4. The VFF believes that the Land Access and Compensation Act should be amended to ensure that any access to or use of farmland consider all impacts on farm business operation, not just the impact on land value or production in the corridor used but the total impact of the access or use has on the farm business and landholders.
5. The VFF seeks assurances that farm entry / land access agreements and easements will be specific to a project. Any changes to the project or requirements for use of the area by another party will be subject to a separate agreement.

Entry to farm (Land Access) Agreements

6. The VFF believes all farm entry / land access arrangements must be covered by a formal land access agreement between the landowner and the farm entry / land access proponent. All agreements should operate on a commercial contractual basis. All reasonable costs of the landholder should be met by the proponent including induction and supervision costs.
7. Where farm entry / land access is granted farmers should be able to determine conditions relating to that farm entry / land access.
8. Any easement placed on the land will be specific to that proposal and cannot be amended or used by other parties without landholder consent including compensation.

9. There must be no long-term adverse on site or off-site impacts from farm entry / land access. Compensation for impact should be calculated on the whole farm operation not any specific corridor.

10. Baseline information and agricultural impact assessments must be collected/prepared prior to the development of any proposal requiring entry or access to farms.

11. Land access agreements should require that the proponent is liable and responsible for all matters arising under all relevant public safety and workplace laws including that the party seeking farm entry / land access will be responsible for compliance with all public safety and workplace law stemming from their occupation, including public liability insurance.

Biosecurity

12. The VFF believes a biosecurity clause or statement must be included in every farm entry / land access agreement. This must require an annual report on biosecurity compliance. During the period of land access activity occurring, a weekly report should be provided to the landholder including personnel in attendance, locations accessed, materials or chemicals utilised and any other information required under the farm's biosecurity plan.

13. Proponents should be aware of industry biosecurity standards prior to seeking entry / access so as to be able to discuss specific requirements with the landholder.

14. A minimum of 48 hours' notice is required prior to farm entry / land access under the biosecurity plan.

Consultation

15. The VFF believes farm entry / land access proponents should supply the landholder with complete information that sets out the relevant party's rights under an agreement, and any other relevant information about the land access proposal.

16. Proponents shall pay for any advice required to understand the impact of the proposal on the farm business and any formal agreements.

17. Landholders must agree to the brief and to consultants hired to undertake impact assessment, technical studies, monitoring and compliance systems and rehabilitation plans. Landholder consent to these documents must be sought.

Compensation

18. The VFF supports the rights of farm landowners to compensation arising from any loss associated with a farm entry / land access arrangement. Compensation formulas should ensure landowners receive appropriate compensation for loss of income, decrease in property value, increased costs of production, supervision and any other associated costs.

19. The VFF believes farm landowners should be compensated for all reasonable associated costs involving the landowner seeking information and advice, including technical, financial and legal advice, involving any proposed farm entry / land access agreement.

20. The VFF believes compensation payments should include a solatium of at least 20% to compensate for intangible impacts.

21. In the case of long term farm entry / land access agreements, the VFF supports an annual compensation payment to the farm landowner that reflects any impacts on asset value, operations, income, maintenance impacts, legal or technical costs.

22. The VFF believes additional compensation should be provided where farm entry / land access is required in response to a fault requiring unplanned or emergency access or where farm entry / land access is required to manage impacts from an emergency event such as fire, flood or storm.

23. Where farm entry / access is for infrastructure or works which increase the capital improved value of the land the farmer will be compensated for any increases in rates and charges stemming from farm entry / access arrangements.

Rehabilitation

24. Legislation will require full decommissioning and remediation of impacts. Landholder consent to the rehabilitation plan will be a requirement of any farm entry / land access agreement.

25. Remediation plans should be for the whole farm to ensure all impacts are remediated.

26. The VFF believes that any breaches of a farm entry / land access agreement must be rehabilitated immediately with compensation paid for any loss to the landholder. This includes removal of any easement.

27. The VFF support farmers having the right to approve the post construction and post decommissioning 'rehabilitation plan' for the land as a result of any development requiring farm entry / land access.

28. In the case of any onsite or offsite impact on land, air, or water the onus should be on the company with farm entry / land access to prove their activities are not causing the impacts.

29. Statutes should ensure that the landholder is not liable in relation to construction, operation or decommissioning of projects.

Review

30. The VFF believes independent monitoring to ensure compliance with farm entry / land access conditions must be undertaken, at the expense of the land access proponent.

Compliance

31. The VFF supports the establishment of an independent tribunal or ombudsman for hearing landholder complaints and appeals regarding farm entry / land access issues.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:
VFF Renewable Energy Policy Statement
VFF Right to Farm Policy Statement

WATER



Water for Traditional Owners

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 175 9 March
2022

Policy Statement

1. The VFF acknowledges government efforts at both a state and federal levels to deliver water to Traditional Owners.
2. The VFF expects that any recovery of water for Traditional Owners should not reduce the consumptive pool.
3. The VFF expects that water will only be returned to acknowledged and registered Traditional Owner groups working to benefit their members.
4. The VFF does not support water buyback programs for Traditional Owners as these programs reduce the consumptive pool.
5. Traditional Owner groundwater and surface water entitlements should only be made available within the existing provisions of the Water Act 1989.
6. Costs associated with Traditional Owner water (storage and delivery fees) should not be subsidised by existing entitlement holders. The VFF believes Traditional Owners and/or government must meet these costs.
7. Water recovered for Traditional Owners must be counted towards environmental targets including the Murray Darling Basin Plan.
8. The VFF expects that when government funds are used to upgrade infrastructure to generate water savings, the water savings be shared among all water users. Irrigators are expected to contribute to future maintenance of irrigation infrastructure, and therefore they must receive a share of the water savings from the project.
9. The VFF supports Traditional Owners having input into the planning and management of environmental water to achieve Traditional Owner cultural values.
10. Traditional Owner Groups appointed to Government agencies should not have input into:
 - a. The delivery of water through irrigation systems;
 - b. How irrigators manage water on their farms;
 - c. Transfer of groundwater and surface water among consumptive users.

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Low Emission Vehicles

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 175
9 March 2022

Policy Statement

1. The VFF supports the development of low emission technologies including but not limited to battery electric or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles to provide consumers options to reduce their carbon emissions and improve fuel security.
2. Regulatory barriers to the rollout of new technologies should be reduced to stimulate private sector investment.
3. Recognising the significant improvements the industry has already undergone, the VFF strongly opposes the use of taxes or penalties on older vehicles as a mechanism to encourage greater adoption of alternate fuelled vehicles.
4. The Federal and State Governments have a key role to play in addressing market failures or gaps in the rollout of charging infrastructure by encouraging new technology uptake in both metropolitan and regional areas to promote fair access and consumer choice. Rural and regional communities and businesses should not be penalised for their isolation.
5. It is critical that electric infrastructure is sufficiently prepared to be able to cope with forecast local demand.
6. Recognising Australia's high value critical mineral mining and manufacturing capabilities, the Federal and State Government should incentivise domestic manufacturing of transport technologies and future fuels.
7. It is critical the Federal Government ensures secure and reliable supplies of future fuels.
8. Where practicable, Australian Design Standards should be aligned with international markets to reduce costs for manufacturers to import electric vehicles.



Fuel Security Policy

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 172 21 June
2021

Policy Statement

1. Recognising the critical strategic importance of agriculture and food production, farm businesses must be considered 'essential users' in the event of fuel rationing at a federal or state level.
2. Australia's strategic fuel reserves must be located within Australia's borders in a range of strategic regional locations to minimise risk.
3. The Federal Government must commit to maintaining levels of domestic refining capacity.
4. The Federal Government should provide incentives that encourage an increase in the quantity of privately stored fuel including but not limited to private on-farm storage to improve Australia's resilience to fuel shortages.
5. Increased fuel stocks must be held by industry and government in the lead up to periods of known increased demand such as fire periods.
6. The development of alternative fuels must be encouraged wherever possible and practical, including a road map for on-farm transition and implementation.

Autonomous Vehicle Road

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 176
9 June 2022

Policy Statement

1. The VFF believes that the development and adoption of autonomous vehicle technology presents a significant opportunity for innovation within Australian agriculture.
2. Recognising the significant regulatory reform required to adopt autonomous technologies, a nationally consistent reform agenda will play an important role in supporting innovation.
3. State and Federal Governments should incentivise and streamline the processes for automated vehicle trials.
4. Jurisdictions should share the learnings and outcomes of trials to avoid duplication and increase jurisdictional knowledge.
5. To ensure future technologies and regulatory reform is fit-for-purpose for Australian agriculture, it is critical trials are conducted regarding the unique requirements of agricultural machinery and operating in regional remote Australia.
6. Trials should take a whole-of-journey approach, considering non-technological issues such as infrastructure, native vegetation on the side of the roads.
7. Cross-border trials between jurisdictions are crucial for the long-term success and commercialisation of autonomous vehicles.
8. Autonomous vehicles must be considered in the design of future infrastructure, including digital connectivity.
9. Jurisdictions should develop road maps for transitioning existing infrastructure to meet the needs of autonomous vehicles.
10. Whilst on road autonomous technology is still being developed, jurisdictions should develop guidance for manually moving autonomous agricultural machinery on the road.
11. Australian can play a key role in the developing the technology.

High Productivity Freight Vehicle

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 176 9 June 2022

Policy Statement

1. The VFF supports the increased use of performance based standard accredited high productivity freight vehicles which have the potential to substantially improve freight efficiency, increase safety and reduce emissions.
2. The State Government should continue to invest in the expansion of the existing Victorian high productivity freight vehicle network by strengthening and upgrading bridges and intersections.
3. It is critical high productivity freight vehicle compliance and administration requirements including infrastructure assessments and road access permits are streamlined in order remove barriers for smaller operators.
4. Performance based standards should accommodate the unique requirements of agricultural freight.
5. Operators must not be penalised for not being able to adopt new technologies, recognising that it isn't appropriate for all operators to adopt newer technologies or newer models of vehicles.
6. Recognising the significant cost associated with purchasing a performance based standard accredited high productivity freight vehicle, the State Government should explore ways to incentivise agricultural freight operators to adopt new technologies.
7. The State Government should work with neighbouring jurisdictions and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to ensure greater harmonisation of high productivity freight vehicles regulations to facilitate the efficient movement of cross-border freight.
8. It is critical high productivity freight access is incorporated into the design of future infrastructure including roads, bridges and intersections, as well as private commercial freight receival sites and locations where appropriate.
9. NHVR and the State Government should work with local government to increase high productivity freight vehicle access on local roads.
10. The State Government should reduce redtape for high productivity freight vehicles crossing rail lines.

Agricultural Machinery Right to Repair

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 175
9 March 2022

Policy Statement

1. The VFF strongly supports the need for greater competition and consumer protections within the agricultural machinery market.
2. Purchasers of agricultural machinery should have the option to use independent third-party repairers.
3. In the event of a product malfunction, it is critical purchasers of agricultural machinery have sufficient consumer protections and avenues of recourse.
4. The Australian Consumer Guarantee should be extended to include all agricultural machinery.
5. The VFF strongly opposes the use of geographic restrictions on dealership sales as they reduce competition and lead to poorer consumer outcomes.
6. Whilst the VFF acknowledges that dealerships have invested significant funds into training, parts, tools and equipment and they deserve to have a return on that investment, this should not be a reason to limit competition.
7. Delays in accessing spare parts during key production cycles pose a threat to Australia's food security.
8. Manufacturers and dealers must ensure sufficient stocks of machinery parts are stored onshore.

WORKFORCE AND SOCIAL POLICY



Agricultural Education

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 177
7 September 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

- 1.The VFF believes agricultural education and skills training must be a key focus of government industry policy to ensure farmers are able to improve their knowledge and skills, and to have access to a highly skilled workforce, to improve productivity and contribute to the growth of industry.
- 2.The VFF believes agricultural education must be supported through a working collaboration between industry, government, education providers and teachers. The VFF's objective is to provide leadership on behalf of industry as part of this collaboration to ensure the issues that matter to farm businesses are considered.
- 3.The VFF believes that all agricultural education and skills training must be relevant to the requirements of farm business and industry. Industry must be provided the opportunity to provide direct feedback to subject and course providers to ensure the ongoing supply of job ready graduates.

Schools

- 4.The VFF believes agricultural education in schools must be focussed on promoting the agricultural industry to generate community understanding of, and empathy towards farmers and the agricultural sector.
- 5.The VFF believes agricultural education options must be provided in the school curriculum to promote the diversity of employment opportunities in the agriculture industry, and that course content be relevant to the requirements of industry, farm businesses and further education providers.
- 6.The VFF supports current students receiving adequate information about career paths in agriculture and supports careers counsellors being given adequate resources to promote jobs in agriculture.
- 7.The VFF supports the creation of a dedicated public agricultural high school in Victoria (such as NSW's Yanco Agricultural High School) to increase the quantity of skilled agricultural students.

8. The VFF believes government must provide greater support to attract specialist agriculture teachers to the profession, as well as increasing the awareness and understanding of agricultural issues amongst general teaching staff to ensure the ongoing quality of teaching in agricultural subjects.

9. The VFF believes government must better promote the availability of the Agricultural and Horticultural Studies subject as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) to all students to increase the uptake of agriculture studies in secondary schools.

10. The VFF believes government must better promote the availability of the Agriculture, Horticulture, Conservation and Ecosystem Management subject as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education Vocational Education and Training (VCE VET) program to all students to increase the uptake of agriculture studies and practical work-related training in secondary schools.

TAFE

11. The VFF supports the inclusion of agricultural courses under the Victorian Government's Free TAFE program to encourage the uptake of practical agricultural education and skills training.

12. The VFF believes agricultural course TAFE teachers should have practical industry experience. Farmers should be encouraged to become TAFE teachers to ensure training is relevant to the needs of farm businesses and industry.

13. The VFF believes agricultural course TAFE teachers should be supported to maintain up to date knowledge on the contemporary requirements of industry and best practice.

Higher Education

14. The VFF believes agricultural and related subjects should be taught at regionally located universities to ensure direct and equitable access for regional students.

15. The VFF supports the creation of partnerships between universities and the agriculture industry to ensure agricultural graduates have streamlined access to career opportunities.

16. The VFF believes universities must engage in more effective promotion of their agricultural courses to drive enrolments and increase the number of skilled agricultural graduates.

Funding

17. The VFF believes Registered Training Organisations delivering agricultural studies should only have to reapply for government funding periodically rather than every year if their courses have already demonstrated to be producing effective learning outcomes, to save on administrative burden and costs.

18. The VFF believes the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment should continue to be subsidised for those working at Registered Training Organisations as it is for those employed at TAFE colleges, to ensure the high quality of teaching delivered at Registered Training Organisations and in particular for agricultural course providers.

19. The VFF believes that agricultural colleges as Registered Training Organisations should receive capital building funding commensurate to TAFE campuses through regular capital expenditure funding to maintain and improve assets.

Health

Agreed to by the VFF Policy
Council Meeting 188 7
December 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF believes all farmers, rural, and regional Victorians must have access to essential basic healthcare services in their community to ensure the long-term wellbeing and health of farmers and regional, rural and remote communities.
2. The VFF believes that farmers and rural and regional communities deserve equitable access with metropolitan counterparts in having timely access to necessary specialists and support services, to improve and increase quality of life and life expectancy in regional areas.
3. The VFF believes the contribution of farmer health organisations in supporting farmer and regional health is valuable and these organisations should receive the necessary ongoing funding to continue to provide services and training to support farmers.
4. The VFF values the differences between regional communities in Victoria, and believes that regional communities throughout Victoria require targeted and specific health support to adequately meet their needs and achieve the best health outcomes possible.

Workforce and Training

5. The VFF recognises that regional communities are experiencing a shortage of health professionals including doctors, registered nurses, nurses and allied health workers which we believe must be addressed for the health and safety of regional Victoria.
6. The VFF believes that a Regional Health Workforce Plan should be developed for the government to properly understand the breadth of health workforce needs across Victoria and adequately address these needs.

7. The VFF believes that health training in regional communities should be expanded to meet workforce needs in these regions and allow regionally based health professionals to remain in their local communities.

8. The VFF believes that the availability of TAFE allied health services courses must be expanded and adequately funded to improve the healthcare outcomes of those in regional communities.

9. The VFF believes that support programs to attract and retain General Practitioners should be implemented to meet community needs, as well as support programs for attracting and retaining necessary Registered Nurses, Allied Health Professionals and Specialists.

10. The VFF recognises the essential nature of emergency volunteer services to the ongoing survival of rural and regional Victoria. The VFF supports increased and ongoing funding from the Victorian state government, free training and support for emergency service volunteers and their organisations.

Funding

11. The VFF believes that health funding must at a minimum meet the rate of inflation to ensure that the investment into health infrastructure, ambulance Victoria, equipment and workforce is meeting the nominal health funding budgets implemented in previous years.

12. The VFF believes that there should be a 'No Gap Guarantee' for Urgent Care Centres, to effectively remove out of pocket expenses for patients in rural and regional areas and ensure that all Victorians have equitable access to health care in their community.

13. The VFF believes that funding models to provide rural, remote hospitals and bush nursing centres with Medicare benefits for non-admitted and non-referred patients must remain ongoing to meet community need and ensure no-gap payment for patient attendance.

Emergency and Urgent Care

14. The VFF believes that the availability of appropriately staffed Urgent Care Centres to meet regional health needs must continue accordingly to meet regional demand.

15. The VFF believes that Emergency Services Telecommunication Authority (ESTA) workforce shortages, ambulance shortages and ambulance response times in regional areas must be improved to meet minimum standards in providing care to regional Victorians.

16. The VFF believes that the state government should reintroduce their funding program to provide defibrillators and expand them to farm businesses and facilities across regional Victoria to improve the safety of more Victorians on farms.

17. The VFF believes the provision of First Aid Courses, particularly in regional areas must be expanded and increased to improve farmer safety, family and worker health outcomes.

18. The VFF supports further research on how to support and engage with rural communities to improve health outcomes and life expectancy most effectively, which is necessary to bring regional outcomes closer to metropolitan outcomes.

Mental Health

19. The VFF recognises that there is a shortage of appropriate regionally accessible mental health supports available and must be improved by increased staffing, training and funding caps for regionally located training, alongside increased incentives and mobilisation of metropolitan mental health professionals to regional areas.

20. The VFF recognises that stigma around seeking assistance for mental health issues effects rural and regional community members in seeking necessary support. The VFF supports ongoing efforts to reduce stigma around mental health in regional and rural communities.

21. The VFF believes the provision of increased mental health support for farmers, particularly during a time of crisis such as drought, floods, bushfires, and biosecurity incidents is essential and should be funded appropriately by state government.

22. The VFF supports the expansion of telehealth to support farmers and vulnerable people in regional communities due to time pressures, accessibility issues, local health workforce shortages and community needs.

23. The VFF believes that digital health delivery services must be appropriately funded and staffed, whilst ensuring that this does not occur at the expense of physical services in rural and regional locations.

24. The VFF believes that rural and regional outreach program workers should be appropriately trained in understanding the lived experience of farmers, to provide the most appropriate mental healthcare to the agricultural industry.

Child and Maternal Health Services

25. The VFF supports the expansion of maternity services in regional areas to adequately meet the needs of farming families and regional communities, with maternity services to be expanded and staffed accordingly to improve family care and family safety.

26. The VFF supports ongoing state government funding to meet regional need for maternity ward staff including midwives, nurses, support staff and specialists to reduce travel times and meet patient-to-midwife ratios for regional families requiring care.

27. The VFF supports increased full-time employment of midwives, to ultimately reduce the necessity of utilising casual staff and significantly reduce the overall cost burden on hospitals.

28. The VFF supports increased regional paediatric services to provide comprehensive support to young farming families.

Childcare

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 188
7 December 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF believes regional and rurally based Victorians must have easy access to essential basic childcare and early education services in their local community to ensure the long-term wellbeing of families and ongoing viability of regional and rural Victoria.
2. The VFF values the differences between regional communities and farming families across commodities in Victoria, and recognises that farming families throughout Victoria will benefit more greatly from increases in targeted and specific childcare services, such as family daycare centres, flexible hours care, out of school care and early learning centres to best meet their needs.
3. The VFF supports initiatives to increase the rate of regional and rural childcare, family daycare and early childhood education options to ensure the longterm strength of regional and rural communities, as well as providing rural and regionally based families with equality of opportunity for educational and social parity with metropolitan areas.
4. The VFF supports increased resources and services for farming families and children with complex medical needs to allow all regional and rurally based Victorians to lead quality lives as part of their community, regardless of their proximity to major centres.
5. The VFF supports initiatives to attract and retain childcare staff in rural and regional locations to ensure the reliability and ongoing availability of childcare services.
6. The VFF supports initiatives to make childcare more affordable on an ongoing basis, particularly for farmers who are ineligible for current streams of government funding support due to restrictive assets tests.

7. The VFF supports initiatives to address and support parents, particularly mother's access to education and work opportunities, notably in cases where previous work or study has lapsed due to parental and childcare obligations, to ensure that all rural and regional Victorians are given the opportunity to actively and fully contribute to their community.
8. The VFF supports the proliferation of community based organisations and local government initiatives to fund and support regionally appropriate childcare in addition to state government supported childcare centres to address community need.
9. The VFF supports sustainable funding models and ongoing expansion of government operated regional and rural childcare centres and kindergarten services to provide greater support for families returning to work with children.
10. The VFF supports targeted funding for families who must travel outside their local communities to receive appropriate childcare, to bolster parents' ability to return to work and reduce the financial burden of travel and childcare fees on families.
11. The VFF supports revision of the Healthcare Card asset testing to instead focus on take home income testing for farming families, to enable access to affordable childcare, improve on-farm safety and support parents, particularly mother's career progression.



**Victorian
Farmers
Federation**

Farrer House
Level 3, 24 Collins Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000

P 1300 882 833
E vff@vff.org.au
www.vff.org.au

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