

Farm group to fight new planning overlay

By Geoff Adams

Mitchell Shire Council wants to protect its unique landscapes in key areas of the shire, but a group of landholders has sounded an alarm over how a new planning measure will interfere with farming.

The council is considering introducing a new 'significant landscape' overlay.

"Its purpose is to identify significant landscapes, and conserve and enhance their character," a council statement says.

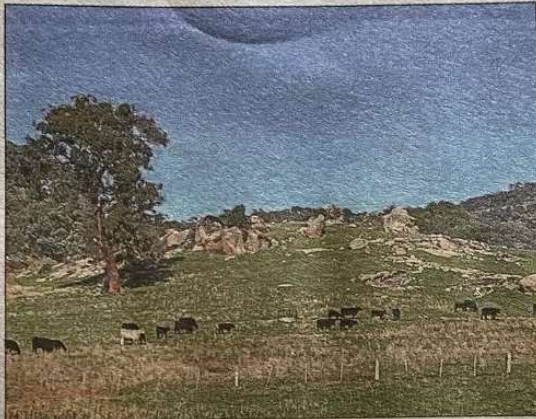
"Mitchell Shire's landscapes are unique and diverse. They include rolling hills, river valleys, foothills, granitic uplands, volcanic plains and cones.

"To protect our most valued landscapes, the Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) is proposed to be applied to land in Pyalong, Tooborac, Glenhope and Highcamp area and Mt Piper.

"The existing Significant Landscape Overlay in Tallarook is proposed to be extended into Trawool."

Farmers have been telling the council they are worried about how the scheme will affect farming operations.

A new group called Protect Our Farms has been formed to oppose



Mitchell Shire Council's planning overlay wants to protect Tallarook's landscape – farmers want to protect Tallarook's farmland.

the introduction of new overlays.

The group, chaired by Tallarook farmer Geoff Albers, has launched a website to raise awareness and mobilise support against these changes.

The group fears the changes will lead to the degradation of pastures and increased bureaucratic burdens, making it nearly impossible to maintain productive agricultural activities.

Mr Albers said farm livelihoods were at stake, and yet many of

farmers were left in the dark about these proposals.

"The council's materials make it seem like these changes are minor, but the reality is they will impose severe restrictions on how we can use our land," he said.

Mitchell Shire councillors are expected to vote on the scheme on August 19.

Pyalong landowner Therese Ryan said landholders need to act. "This vote is a turning point," she said.

"If the council approves this study, it's the first step towards permanent and restrictive changes that will devastate our farming communities.

"I urge all Mitchell farmers including those not currently in an SLO to stand with their neighbours and fellow farmers and email councillors ASAP."

The group maintains that the overlay shifts the emphasis from protecting rural amenity to enhancing rural views.

According to the council, it has acted to implement changes to the proposal which will remove planning permit requirements for several agricultural-related works, exempting agricultural buildings up to 200 square metres from requiring a planning permit, exempting construction of a farm access track from requiring a planning permit, and exempting solid fencing below 1m in height and livestock yard fencing from requiring a planning permit.

Water tanks, open-sided agricultural buildings and post and wire fences remain exempt from requiring a planning permit as exhibited last year.

For more information on the new Protect Our Farms group, go to: <https://farmprotect.org/>

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