

Dear Councillors,

I write to express my concern and opposition to the proposed expansion of the Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) in the Mitchell Shire.

By way of introduction, my name is [REDACTED] and I have had the privilege to be custodian of the land I farm at Pyalong for more than 30 years. During this time, I have been able to achieve the twin objectives of sustaining a small business beef cattle operation while also continuously improving my farm's biodiversity & landscape.

These experiences form the basis for my opposition to the SLO proposal. My reasons are as follows:

- ***There is not a compelling case for change – Our region's farmers are long-term custodians of their land, who have continuously improved the region's natural assets without being compelled by complex regulation.***
 - o The starting point for the proposed regulation is fundamentally flawed as it has failed to understand the farming models used in our region
 - o The assessment and proposed regulations appear to assume that intensive farming practices are the key risk to the visual amenity and biodiversity in the region
 - o The practical reality is that the farming models used in this region are the opposite, and are the critical tool to protecting our unique landscape
 - o If I use my farm as one practical example. Over the last 30 years, I have planted in the magnitude of 20,000+ trees (see Figure 1). This has had dual commercial and environmental benefits, enabling:
 1. Sandy soils to be regenerated, with erosion remediated & prevented
 2. Shelter to be built in every farm paddock to support the highest standards of animal welfare
 3. An expansion in the region's biodiversity, which is characterised by the diverse array of birds that live across it
 - o I am not alone. This farming approach is typical of those in the region
 - o We are long-term, sustainable operators and supported by community & volunteer organisations such as Landcare
 - o For decades, the region's farmers and the models they use have enhanced the region's visual amenity. They don't need further complex, contradictory regulation to sustain this model
- ***It risks triggering negative environmental consequences – The regulation as currently written will make it more difficult for farmers to manage bushfire risk, control noxious weeds and operate effectively***
 - o The regulation as currently written seeks to impose further restrictions in the form of 'guidelines' and permit requirements that do not reflect the practical realities of operating a farm
 - o To pick one example – it is specified that farmers will need a permit to 'remove, destroy or lop any native vegetation'. While perhaps well intentioned, this ignores the practical reality that some level of vegetation maintenance is critical so that:
 1. We can effectively control fuel loads and farm accessibility, particularly near roads and buildings
 2. Weeds can be eradicated. While many weeds are introduced, some would be classified as native vegetation and require a permit despite being detrimental to farmland, livestock and the ecosystem when left untouched e.g. Chinese Scrub (Cassinia Sifton), Dock

3. Biodiversity is encouraged. If left without management, single species will proliferate and create scrub e.g. Black Wattles
- These are basic day to day activities that farmers need to be able to conduct so that they can operate their business, keep their livestock safe and manage fire risk
- Completing permit applications and hoping for a favourable (and timely) response from a Council is just not a realistic way to operate
- **There are better alternatives – *The Council should instead focus its resources towards working collaboratively with farmers to address the key environmental challenges that could threaten our region's unique visual amenity***
 - As touched on above, two of the most critical threats to our environment are noxious weeds and bushfire
 - To elaborate firstly on noxious weeds:
 1. Plants such as Thistles, Spiny Rush, St John's Wort, Blackberries and Patterson's Curse are a continual threat
 2. I manage these to the extent possible on my property through an ongoing weed control program year-round. They require constant attention
 3. Unfortunately, this vigilance is partially offset by the lack of attention to weed management on our roadsides. As an example, over the last 2 years there has been a significant outbreak of St John's Wort (see Figure 2), a toxic plant for livestock, on the roadsides adjoining my property. I have picked these myself by hand on the roadside, but this is certainly not a sustainable solution
 4. Fully controlling weeds across our roadsides may best be described as an aspiration. Nevertheless, I believe that investing time, funding and resources into this task would better achieve the stated aims associated with the SLO proposal than additional regulation
 - Secondly, on bushfire mitigation:
 1. Bushfires are an inevitable aspect of our Australian landscape and condition, with mitigation measures such as fuel reduction and clearing critical for reducing the likelihood of severe, life-threatening events
 2. While there is much good work done to support this ambition, there is further room to increase the scale of roadside mowing and maintenance across the Shire to reduce the volume of fuel in the peak bushfire months
 3. Similar my point above on weed management, this would be a more productive use of finite Council resources
 - I acknowledge these are difficult issues, but I do believe that a collaborative approach between Council and Farmer using practical solutions like those described above would achieve better outcomes

If it would be of further assistance, I would be happy to invite members of the Council to visit my property so they could see these examples in action.

I thank you for your time and consideration of my letter.

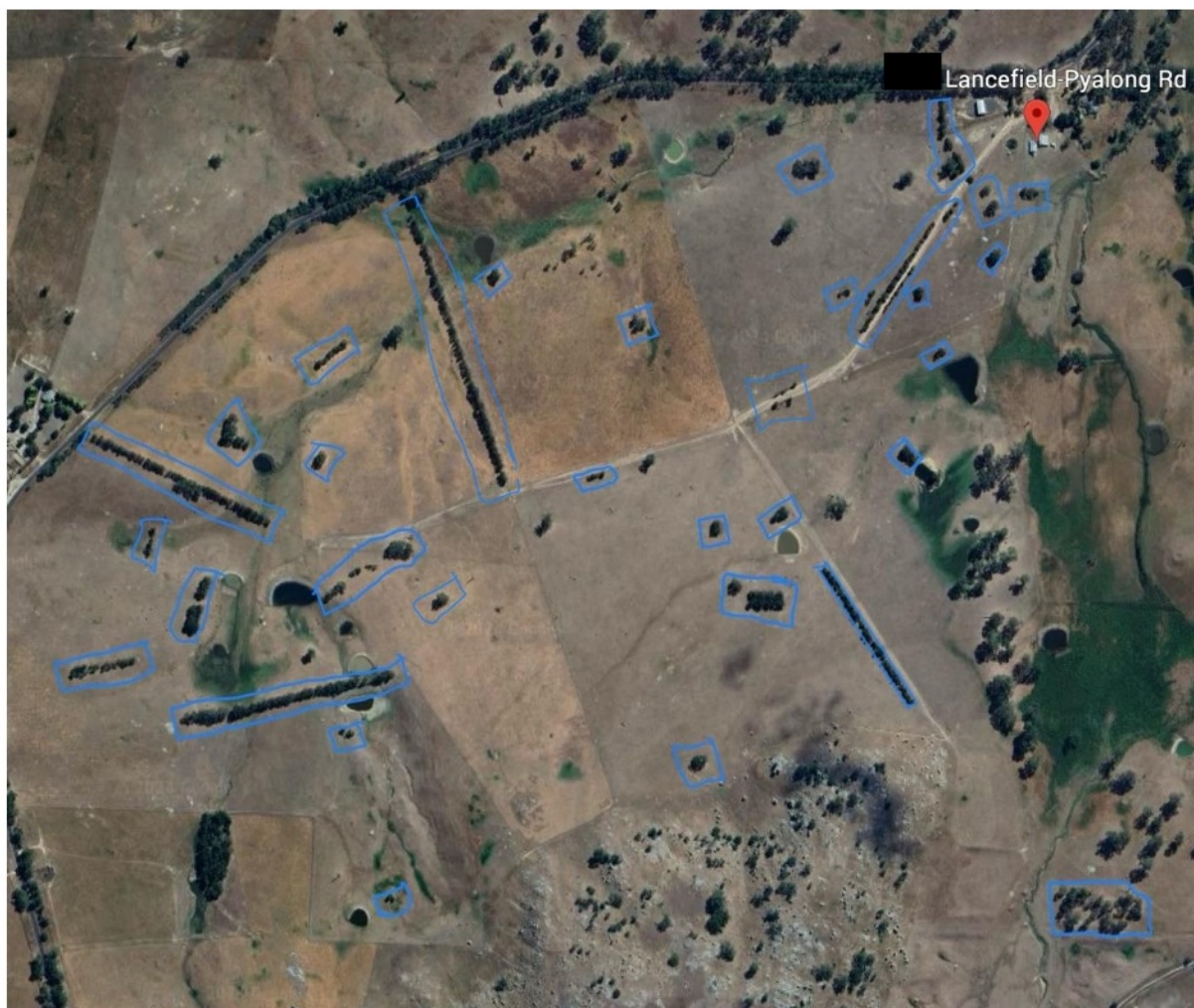
Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

5 August 2024

[REDACTED] Lancefield-Pyalong Rd
Pyalong Vic 3521

Figure 1 – Blue circled boxes highlight the extensive tree planting completed across the property over the last 30 years



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Figure 2 - This visual shows the locations, denoted by blue, where I have picked St John's Wort over the last 12 months on the roadside near my property. This is an invasive, toxic plant that can cause serious harm to livestock if ingested

