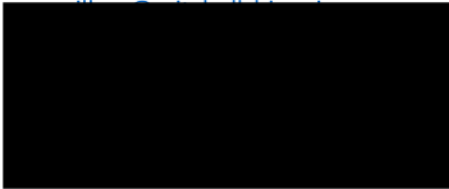




Glenhope East Vic 3522

14 August 2024

Via email to:



Vote No to the Land Assessment Study

The proposed SLO is completely unnecessary and counterproductive and I urge Councillors to vote against its implementation.

Landholders are true custodians of the land.

The farmlands encompassing Nulla Vale, Emu Flat, Pyalong, Pyalong West, Baynton, Glenhope, Glenhope East & Tooborac are productive and beautiful. The question is "What is the best way to ensure that they remain productive and beautiful?"

They have been farmed for over 150 years and this is an essential part of their beauty. The current Farming Zone regulations are effective in maintaining and protecting them. There is absolutely no justification for imposing further regulations and bureaucratic creep in the form of the proposed SLO.

Every past and current landholder I have met in the district clearly considers themselves to be a custodian of the land and they take a long-term perspective. The families who have farmed for generations have been, and continue to be, motivated to protect the land for future generations. The newer landholders such as myself have purchased their properties from a lifetime of work and are not about to desecrate it for short term gains at the expense of the future.

Put simply, this proposal is an exercise whereby a consultant has driven around in their air-conditioned car and then gone back to their air-conditioned office in an urban location to write up a report. The report then advises urban based bureaucrats and Councillors on further constraints and regulations to impose on local landholders who have formed an intimate connection with the environment through living and working in it every day. I am reminded of the old definition of a consultant as one who takes your watch and then tells you the time.

The cumulative actions of local landholders have made the environment so attractive that the bureaucrats and consultants now feel a need to intervene to "protect" it. The landholders have to live with the consequences of their decisions whereas those seeking to impose changes will move onto their next cause célèbre.

It is supremely ironical (or farcical) that the only Councillor who has a genuine knowledge and connection with the area will not be able to vote because he will be deemed to be conflicted. The decision rests with those who only have a passing interest and would not have to deal with the consequences of the proposal.

In short, the landholders, as custodians of their properties for current and future generations, have a deep connection which is central to their identity and are far better placed and motivated to protect the area than are remote bureaucrats who have no direct connection to the land.

Risk of Selective Implementation

My experience with Council and its officers at the time of the proposed wind generation project on the McHarg Ranges in the period 2005 to 2010 leaves me with concern about the way Council and/or its officers might administer the SLO if the proposal is successful.

In that case an anemometer was allowed to stay in place for a period far more than the 3 years specified under the then Mitchell Shire Planning Scheme. Council officers ignored my attempts to discuss the situation and refused to order the removal of the anemometer which was in breach.

In contrast, exactly the same situation arose in Macedon Ranges Shire, the Council ordered the removal of the facility and insisted that a new permit be sought in accordance with the planning provisions. When the permit was granted, a ratepayer, the late Mr Peter McLaughlin and others applied to VCAT to review the decision. VCAT found in favour of the ratepayers (VCAT Reference P937/2010).

Of course, the other irony is that the beautiful landscape which "needs" this extra protection is only in such outstanding condition because of the efforts of the custodian landowners who resisted the closet support of Council for proposals which would have scarred and despoiled the McHarg Ranges.

There are other experiences of selective enforcement by Council officers which support my concern but it is not appropriate to detail them here as this would disclose details which would identify individual officers

"Disneyland" farming.

This is a move towards "Disneyland farming" which prevails in much of the UK and Europe. The city folk want to see idyllic vistas and fairytale attractions when they venture to rural areas. There are direct and opportunity costs to such regulation and obligations. Europeans are prepared to pay massive subsidies to achieve their objectives whereas this proposal seeks to place the costs squarely on the farmers and landowners.

The current Farming Zone regulations are already effective. The landscape is being maintained successfully, even with the removal of the small amount of assistance formerly provided by the Mitchell Shire Land Management Rebate and the severe cuts to Landcare funding. The Reports do not demonstrate a need to change the current provisions.

To be clear, I am not advocating European style subsidies for farmers. I am objecting to farmers bearing the full cost of the proposals which will impose superfluous regulations and costly permit processes on the farmers who are already doing a fine job of maintaining the landscape under the current overlays.

Practical Implications

Permits

The maps indicate that parts of our property would be subject to the SLO. It "clips" a sliver of our home block and, on the face of it, we could require a permit to trim the trees which grow to intrude over the clothes line.

Further, there are trees in the vicinity of our house which we regularly trim to manage the fire risk. It is unreasonable to require a permit or reliance on a decision by a Council officer to allow me to protect my family.

Powercor regularly trims native vegetation for fire risk management under the power lines which cross several of our paddocks. Some paddocks are in the proposed SLO area and some are not. Powercor is privately owned, not a public authority and so would appear to require a permit to carry out the work. This is untenable and dangerous when urgent fire prevention works are required, as has happened in recent years.

Council has tried to clarify the requirement to obtain permit to remove, destroy or lop any native vegetation via FAQ. They do not provide clarification or any reassurance, rather, they have reinforced the inconsistencies.

The proposed permit requirements are onerous, costly and unnecessary and should not be adopted.

Definition of Native Vegetation.

If the Study is adopted with the permit requirements, the term “native vegetation” must be defined.

I did not find a definition in the documents.

The indigenous tree cover on our area of the northern slopes of the McHarg Ranges consists of box and ironbark trees with some red gums along water courses. There are, however, introduced Australian trees in some areas (eg lemon-scented gums). I consider that these introduced “natives” should not be treated differently to introduced European trees.

An example of why centrally imposed native vegetation provisions are problematic is that, in the early 2000’s Greening Australia convinced some landowners to allow them to plant some complete paddocks to trees in Dons Lane, Glenhope East. They planted a mixture of Australian natives, many of which were clearly unsuitable for the area. Of course, they moved on as soon as they collected the subsidies. The landowners received no payments. The schemes were designed by experts and bureaucrats and did not provide any long-term incentives or penalties for the proponents. Consequently, there was no support or maintenance of the plantations. Those plantations are now mostly stunted and/or dead trees. As well as being almost useless for Farming Zone purposes they are a fire hazard.


This would not have happened without the perverse incentives provided by a scheme designed by ‘experts’ who had good intentions but no connection to the land nor long term perspective.

Summary

I urge you to vote against any motion to adopt and implement the Landscape Assessment Study.

If the Study is adopted, I urge you to delete the requirement that “a permit is required to destroy or lop any native vegetation.

Yours faithfully,



Glenhope East, Vic. 3522

Mobile:



Email: