

14 August 2024

Dear Councillors.

Trust your Farmers.

I write to urge you, the councillors of Mitchell Shire to continue to place your trust and confidence in your farmers, now and for the future, and reject Significant Landscape Overlays in the Farming Zone.

The SLO's will burden farmers with multiple restrictions on their farms as the planning permit triggers increase. The permit process is expensive, slow and time-consuming.

Requiring a permit to "remove, destroy, or lop any native vegetation" which also includes regrowth, lacks common sense. Grazing livestock will neither control nor eradicate regrowth, leading to swathes of useless and unattractive scrub. Eucalypts and wattles are prolific seeders given the right conditions. Whilst Chinese Scrub (*Cassinia Sifton*) is native, it is an agricultural weed due to its invasiveness, unpalatability, harbouring of vermin and a fire hazard. (Weeds Australia). It grows on the roadsides of Mitchell Shire, just waiting for the right conditions to invade productive pasture.

The entire Farming Zone of your shire is dependent on its CFA volunteers, many of them farmers. The impact of native vegetation rules in an SLO will worsen the fireground conditions, risks and accessibility of the CFA to fight, control and mop up a bushfire.

The council should not actively discriminate by imposing more restrictions and costs on farmers in an SLO and the foregrounds, than those outside one. It is also discriminatory to allow public authorities to operate permit free in an SLO when the farmer cannot.

Your farmers have diligently controlled noxious weeds, vermin, stabilized fragile soils with better grass species, planted trees and shelterbelts, controlled erosion and salinity, built and maintained appropriate infrastructure. We are more adept at managing our land and livestock during droughts. We adhere to the world's best animal welfare practices, must meet OH&S requirements, livestock production assurance rules, traceability and bio security etc.

Food chain supply and security is paramount, yet in 2024 this has never been more under threat – not from drought or recession – but from the overreach and ideology of all three tiers of government in the thrall of an activist minority. Maintaining productivity is vital, keeping the farm profitable and ensuring fresh food is affordable for all Australians.

Your farmers have championed Landcare since its inception nearly 40 years ago. Thousands of native trees were propagated by the Pyalong Shire in the late 1980s and given to landholders and residents free of charge. During all these years farmers have created swathes of native habitat, returning large areas to how they were found by the early settlers. Native fauna has benefitted through having refuge areas and corridors. This is irrefutable proof that farmers are dedicated to preserving the character of our landscapes.

Your farmers consistently adopt new practices and technology when there is a benefit to their land, livestock and profitability. Profitable and sustainable agriculture is integral to your shire and every small town. It fosters local employment, generational farming families, commitment to neighbours and the local community.

Consistently referred to as “significant and unique and highly valued by the local community” with the Granitic Uplands being “sculptural, granitic boulders resting in paddocks, folded ridges and the craggy, granite-studded peaks that contrast with the cleared, rolling pastoral landscape”, would confirm that the current custodians, your farmers, are doing an excellent job of preserving these landscapes alongside their farming enterprises.

Farmers not included in the SLO, and its foreground are equally as worried about further overreach by the planning department and council.

Similar changes to Planning Schemes in Farming Zones in other municipalities have failed to go ahead. Two examples are Macedon Ranges and Hepburn Shire, who listened to their farming community. Mitchell Shire must do the same.

After 45 years of farming in two municipalities, I am saddened that Mitchell Shire has spent ratepayer’s funds on a three-volume study which was totally unnecessary for the Farming Zone. Whilst Claire Scott Planning makes the usual acknowledgements, and gives thanks to local environmental groups, there is negligible mention of farming/farmers and no mention of livestock except in the proposed Schedule to clause 42-03 namely Livestock Yard Fencing. Livestock are integral to the landscape of the farming zone and its continued profitability.

Farmers have a deep love and respect for their land and livestock, which we often find hard to put into words. Please never doubt our passion and endeavour.

If I may quote Dorothea Mackellar –

“I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror –  
The wide brown land for me!”

Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Kind regards



High Camp, Pyalong.