

## Protect Our Farms to fight for farmers' rights in shire council election



By [Andrew Miller](#)

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Local landowner and farmer Lyndon Arnell, Tooborac, is part of the Protect our Farms group, lobbying councillors to take a closer look at proposed Significant Landscape Overlays. Picture by Andrew Miller

A Mitchell Shire agricultural lobby group says it'll be campaigning in the upcoming council elections, in a bid to preserve farmers' rights.

Protect Our Farms is made up of concerned landowners in the shire.

The group says it's deeply concerned by the shire's proposal to introduce Significant Landscape Overlays (SLOs), which members say will impose severe restrictions on agricultural landowners.

The proposed SLO's cover nearly 23,500 hectares of farming land, with some farmers believing they will impose additional permit requirements, and costs, on agricultural properties.

Protect Our Farms said it would fight against the proposal, including making it clear to voters where council candidates stood on the issue.

Local landowner and farmer Lyndon Arnell, Tooborac, said it was time to stand up for farmers' rights in the community.

"The proposed overlays will impose severe restrictions on farmers, adding burdensome bureaucracy and increasing costs," Mr Arnel said.

"Affected farmers will even need to get a permit to lop a branch of a native tree.

"This is part of a disturbing movement across Victoria and Australia to ban and restrict use of the land that can only cost us all dearly."

Protect Our Farms intends to survey candidates for the Mitchell Shire Council and rate them based on their support for farmers.

"Voters in the shire should know what's going on and where the candidates stand on this critical issue," Mr Arnell said.

"Council has been claiming there will be little impact, arguing that the new overlays don't prohibit agricultural land use.

"This could also have unintended consequences that impact the local economy and jobs, as well as the social fibre, the backbone, of our rural communities."

He said council had stated it wanted to preserve the 'views' of the land, but it was farmers who had been protecting the landscape for generations.

Pyalong farmer Therese Ryan said the overlays amounted to "complete over-reach" by council bureaucracy and were gross incursion on landowners' civil liberties.

"A weakened agricultural sector in Mitchell shire will ultimately affect every ratepayer," Ms Ryan said.

"The overlays will add to costs and deter investment in the shire.

"And what's more, council has relied on a report by an expert whose methodologies have been widely criticised in other Planning Panel hearings."

The proposed SLOs affect more than 300 properties and almost 10 per cent of the land in the Mitchell shire, with 94pc of the affected land zoned 'Farming'.

"By the Victorian government's own definition, Farming Zones are primarily concerned with keeping land in agricultural production and avoiding land uses that could limit future farming or constrain agricultural activities," Ms Ryan said.

In a Farming Zone, farming was supposed to be the dominant land use and all other land uses were subordinate to it.

Protect Our Farms would be circulating flyers and erecting billboards to inform voters of the council's actions and expected a protracted process.

"We will support candidates who are committed to protecting the agricultural character of Mitchell shire", Ms Ryan said.

"Council hasn't outlined a timeline for this process and it could go on for years, taking up consummate amounts of council's - and ratepayers' - time and money.

"We will fight this to the end."

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I'm a general reporter with Stock & Land, with a special interest in irrigation issues. I completed my cadetship, with the Age, in 1980. Over my career, I've worked for ABC radio news (Mt Isa, Qld) and at provincial and suburban newspapers.

