

## FARMERS FACE THREAT FROM COUNCIL SLOs

Farmers in the Mitchell Shire are facing restrictions, burdensome bureaucracy and increased costs due to Significant Landscape Overlays (SLOs) proposed by Mitchell Council.



Protect Our Farms is a local community group formed to support farmers in the Mitchell Shire who are concerned that the SLOs will negatively impact them and their farming operations.

### What is a Significant Landscape Overlay?

A *Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO)* is the planning tool used by Victorian councils for protecting and managing “significant landscapes”. Its stated purpose is to identify significant landscapes, and conserve and enhance their character. **i** *Overlays* differ from other planning provisions; while there is a Victoria-wide standard format, the provisions within an overlay are determined by each Council. **i**

“*Significant landscape*” **i** is defined very widely and includes aesthetic values (both visual and non-visual), historic, environmental, scientific, social, or other values, but doesn’t specifically consider agricultural land use.

### Which areas will be affected?

New SLOs are proposed over almost **10% of Mitchell Shire**. **i** The SLOs will cover 58,000 acres **i** of land and 400+ **i** properties at Tallarook, Tooborac and Pyalong. **94% of this land is zoned “farming”** – which is supposed to focus on “protecting and promoting farming and agriculture”. **i**

### What are the proposed new restrictions?

You can read the permit requirements proposed at section 3 of the draft SLOs. **i** Of key concern to farmers are **new permit requirements**:

- to remove lop or destroy **any** native vegetation (Council claims this doesn’t apply to cropping & grazing, but their statements directly contradict the draft SLO wording)
- for sheds >200m<sup>2</sup> (25% smaller than allowed in farming zones across Victoria)
- for sheds higher than 5m

The complexity of the SLOs is burdensome in itself – it is difficult to determine what is allowed or not allowed.

### What’s happened so far?

Council undertook a *Landscape Assessment Survey (LAS)*, **i** prepared by an independent expert which determined the areas of the proposed SLOs and the nature of the permit requirements. A primary concern is that the expert’s methodologies have been severely questioned by the Victorian Planning Panel. **i**

Council claimed it conducted ‘*consultation*’. **i** However, they downplayed and ignored the feedback of those directly affected by the proposals. Our report **i** on their ‘consultation’ provides an understanding of why Councillors themselves described the process as “flawed” and a “failure of communication”. **i**

Protect Our Farms launched to amplify the voices of those who will be directly impacted by the new SLOs.

On 19 August 2024 Council **voted 4-3 to endorse the LAS** and proceed with preparing documentation to implement the SLOs into the Mitchell Planning Scheme, albeit with several modifications **i** (in our view inadequate **i**) to address our concerns.

### What comes next?

The process to **amend the Mitchell Planning Scheme** will be lengthy and will include an Independent Review and Victoria Planning Panel hearing for any objections which are not resolved by Council.

Council has added extra steps including a “benchmarking study” and “impact assessment” **i** We are concerned that the process will take years, absorbing endless time and scarce resources.

This document has been prepared to provide an overview of the proposed SLOs. Links to supporting information are marked with **i**.

Questions are welcome: [fightback@farmprotect.org](mailto:fightback@farmprotect.org)