

Farm lobby attention on council candidates is 'unusual' says MAV head



By [Andrew Miller](#)

October 7 2024 - 3:21pm



| 1



Ad

The head of Victoria's peak local government body says it's unusual for a Mitchell Shire farm lobby group to take an active interest in local government elections.

Protect Our Farms, a Mitchell Shire lobby group, has called on voters to back pro-farming candidates in this month's council elections.

Protect Our Farms has analysed the credentials and views of all candidates and ranked them on a voting ticket, which it will distribute to ratepayers across the Shire.

Municipal Association of Victoria president David Clark, of Pyrenees Shire, said farm lobby groups did not often publicly back certain candidates.

"It's not a usual thing, in a local government sense - it's much more a state issue," he said.

He said most opposition was centred around projects run by state governments, such as the big battery, planned for Geelong.

"There are plenty of those 'project-y' things - if you look at those state projects, that's where we are headed," he said.

"Council elections used to be pretty basic, you picked a person who you believed was of good character and was involved with the community.

"Elections are much more complex now and it's much harder to decipher the qualities of the candidate but also the qualities of the messaging that's going on out there by groups that have a specific interest."

He said voters needed to be aware of what the groups were representing.

"The caveat is that voters need to understand what's behind the group and what the group's motivation is, rather than just take what they are saying at face value," he said.

Protect Our Farms secretary Rae Clark said voters now had a guide as to which candidates in their ward supported farming and the local economy.

"This is the first comprehensive analysis of local candidates' views on supporting agriculture in the history of the Mitchell Shire," she said.

"The rankings are not just for rural voters, but all voters across the shire who wish to support the local economy and who are concerned about flaws in governance, transparency and cost management."

Protect Our Farms has expressed deep concerns at the council's proposal to introduce Significant Landscape Overlays (SLOs) on parts of the shire that would impose severe restrictions on agricultural landowners.

"Agriculture contributes \$240 million a year to the Mitchell Shire, representing 10 per cent of the local economy," Ms Clark said.

"There are 400 agriculture businesses and about 400 families which would be affected by the SLOs.

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

She said the SLOs would also cost ratepayers dearly for little benefit.

"The shire has admitted spending \$100,000 on consultants so far – and that is without the hundreds of hours of staff time," she said.

"The cost of running the proposal through the planning panel process will likely be in the high six figures.

"It is the same council that has committed \$8 million to repairing a bridge that has been closed to vehicles and pedestrians for decades."

The Protect Our Farms rankings were based on a detailed analysis of each candidate, including responses to a survey, analysis of their statements to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) interviews, Council Watch responses and their performance at meet-the-candidate sessions.

Cr Clark said few councils had considered landscape overlays.

"They are a significant amount of work and you have to get a significant amount of community support to get them through, so there is a really strong and public process around them," he said.

"The fact it is proposed is actually a long way from it actually being put into place."

Pyrenees Shire had some "simple discussions" on SLOs..

"They have a whole range of connotations, which vary across both sides - if you protect your landscapes, potentially you can get some resources to help in a tourism sense, but what does it mean for development and agriculture?," he said.

He expected more such lobbying efforts, particularly around state government projects such as the giant battery, planned for Geelong.

But he said it was part of the democratic process.

"As I often say to people, democracy is not the best system, it is the least worst," he said.

Read More:

VFF presidential nominee downplays importance of constitutional change



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



Get more from Stock & Land

Our journalists work hard to provide local, up-to-date news to the community:

- 📧 Sign up for our [newsletters](#)
- 👤 Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- 💬 Have your say and [send a letter to the Editor](#)
- 📰 Find us on [Google News](#)

🔗 Share     



Andrew Miller
Journalist



FOLLOW

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.

 1 Comment