

Vote to support farms, says group

On Monday, October 7, Protect Our Farms urged Mitchell Shire voters to support candidates who champion local agriculture in the upcoming council elections.

After a comprehensive assessment of all candidates' credentials and positions, Protect Our Farms has compiled a ranked voting guide for distribution to shire ratepayers.

The top three candidates recommended by Protect Our Farms for each ward are (in ballot order): Ned Jeffery, Bill Chisholm and John Dougall for the North Ward; Brett Owen, Bob Humm and Douglas Dyson for the Central Ward; and Bob Cornish, David Lowe and Ginni Kocher for the South Ward.

"Voters in the Mitchell Shire now have a guide as to which candidates in their ward really support farming and the local economy," Protect Our Farms secretary Rae Clark said.

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

"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 said it was deeply concerned by Mitchell Shire Council's proposal to introduce Significant Landscape Overlays 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.

"The SLOs will 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.

"The cost of running the proposal through the



Protect our Farms members (from left) Kate Clark, Rae Clark, Robyn Early and Lyndon Arnel attend a farmers rally in Canberra.

Photo: Supplied

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. Meanwhile, our roads budget suffers and the potholes grow."

The Protect Our Farms rankings are based on a detailed analysis of each candidate, including responses to a survey, analysis of their statements to the Victorian

Electoral Commission, interviews, their Council Watch responses and their performance at meet-the-candidate sessions.

Local landowner and farmer Lyndon Arnell said farmers were facing enough threats from international trading blocs and other national restrictions.

"This move by the level of government closest to the people is an own goal for local interests," he said.

"Food is one of the few future-proof industries, if farmers are given a fair go, and Mitchell Shire needs people who understand farming and its importance to our heritage and our economy.

"We have families who have farmed here for 150 years, and we do not want them to stop because of excessive bureaucracy."

According to Protect Our Farms, the council voted to move forward with introducing SLOs by one vote earlier this year.

Protect Our Farms will be distributing its how-to-vote guide widely, including through advertising, email, letterbox drops and via its website farmprotect.org/