

Opinion

We welcome your opinion on issues affecting our community.

Letters can be emailed to news@ncreview.com.au, posted to or handed to our reception at 3/87 Sydney Street, Kilmore, VIC, 3764

Letters must include first and last names, township and/or business title. Letters must be kept to a maximum of 300 words, unless approved by the Editor prior to submission. All letters to the editor are considered the personal opinions of the listed author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions, values, or beliefs of the township(s) or business(es) that they are associated with. Townships and business titles are included for credibility purposes only, unless otherwise stated.

Letters

Councillors

Dear Editor,

Why are there so many old retired people standing for council elections? Is it for the notoriety? Something to do in retirement? We don't need these out of touch people. They are in the autumn of their lives. We need young vibrant women and men who are able to face and feel the battle coming. These people are living the battle, not lived it.

Kevin Mulrone
71 years old

The Seymour We Want

Dear Editor,

Well done The Seymour We Want for hosting the North Ward candidates forum for the coming council elections. Six candidates is a healthy predicament. That they all live on acreage is of interest. Invariably, the Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) issue arose. This may be the reason for a couple of candidates standing ... but it highlighted for me the emotion more than the understanding of the issue, and the statutory roles of council in this age. There are many overlays in planning. When planning permits are needed, one addresses these. No big deal really, and the SLO doesn't dictate how to farm. Good farmers will have no issue with it day-to-day. And the whole community will benefit from a greater level of protection of our hilly backdrop to Mitchell Shire. This wasn't a referendum on farmers as it seemed at times, but a comment, 'Farmers know best how to manage the land,' must be challenged. This is an absurd statement, like saying all builders are good builders. It's simplistic and just not true. And the statement unnecessarily marginalised people who don't live on large acres but are passionate about smart land management and biodiversity, and about the deeper health of country. Landcare groups, environment groups, 'twitchers', dedicated council staff, and nature lovers were all marginalised in that comment. Sure, it wasn't intended, but it highlights the broader range of community listening skills, rather than axes to grind—critical for future councillors. Loud, confident candidates who have good business skills may be an asset in council at times. But in my experience, it is the measured person able to listen and pursue issues raised by everyday people, farmers, and townsfolk alike, within a bigger picture of council in 2024, that the community will be best served from. The days of council doing 'roads, rates, and rubbish,' are long gone. Today's councillor must be a listener, and have the time and acumen to clearly think deep-

er in decision making, and contribute to the community with council staff as assets, not the pariah. And we do have some good staff within our council.

Peter Lockyer
Tallaroook

Vote wisely

Dear Editor,

I strongly believe all Mitchell Shire Council (MSC) voters should be aware of the relevant events that have occurred over the past 18-months that greatly affect all ratepayers and the future of our shire that myself and others agree is an absolute disgrace and in decline. Following months of advising two of our councillors of appalling council performance that they also agreed was of concern, I was granted an opportunity, limited to 15 minutes, to provide an overview of my complaints in council chambers on May 8, 2023. When the 15 minutes was up, I was politely requested to leave, but was told I could provide a copy of my briefing notes to all councillors for their consideration after my departure. My briefing notes were just a guide for me to present an overview of each issue I had listed, so I emailed our councillors requesting their approval for me to address these issues in full. Regrettably, this request was ignored and I did not receive any acknowledgement from our councillors regarding the remainder of the issues I had listed. I then contacted the Victorian Ombudsman (VO). The VO's representative reviewed the documentation and advised me they would contact MSC and give them 30 days to respond. In expected arrogant fashion the VO's request was ignored, so after 33 days of silence, the VO insisted on a response. Following receipt of that response, the VO advised me that they realised I would not be satisfied with the response, but their powers were limited, and I should contact IBAC or implement legal action. As a constituent of Member for Euroa Annabelle Cleeland, I sought her assistance in an effort to reach a satisfactory resolution, who forwarded that matter onto the Minister for Local Government Melissa Horne on my behalf. I received a letter from Ms Horne advising me that I had followed correct procedure by contacting the VO, but she was unaware of the other issues that had been ignored by our councillors that concerned her. I then requested Ms Horne's intervention, advising her that countless MSC ratepayers were in agreement that another four years of this appalling performance would be disastrous for our shire, and that she had the authority to terminate council and appoint a qualified administrator. This has been done in other shires to the grateful applaud of ratepayers. Ms Horne

stated that although she was concerned and disappointed in the performance of MSC, I should contact the Local Government Inspectorate (LGI), which I did on June 9, 2024. After five weeks had passed with no contact from the LGI, I reported back to Ms Horne. I was then advised by her office that the matter had been referred to the Victorian Attorney General Minister Jaclyn Symes. On behalf of Ms Symes, I then received correspondence from Deputy Secretary, Integrity, Regulation and Legal Service of the Department of Justice and Community Safety Toby Hemming, who also advised me to contact the LGI and if no response, report that to the VO. On September 17, 2024, I spoke to the VO's representative and provided an overview of the past several months, then submitted all the correspondence they requested. I was then advised that they would contact the LGI to advise them they must respond to me. As I type this letter, October 7, 2024, I am still waiting to be contacted from LGI to discuss and submit my evidence. Councillors have a responsibility to ensure our shire does not continue on the current decline and represent the ratepayers who elect them to office. All nine elected must be focused on achieving this and be familiar with their ward or should not stand for election and take ratepayers' money. Under legislation, elected councillors cannot interfere with council daily operations, but our councillors are the employer of council senior management who are responsible for all daily operations. Vote wisely.

Rupert Hussey

Pro-farming candidates

Dear Editor,

It's clear that we must back pro-farming candidates in the upcoming Mitchell Shire elections. We are deeply concerned that council is increasing the burden on farmers, with plans to introduce new regulations and more bureaucracy. Agriculture contributes \$240 million a year to the Mitchell Shire, representing 10 per cent of the local economy. And plans that could reduce this would affect us all. Our group, Protect Our Farms, has analysed the credentials and views of all candidates and picked those we think will support farmers and the local economy, as well as improve governance and provide better value for our rates. The top three candidates recommended by Protect Our Farms for each ward are (in ballot order): North Ward's Ned Jeffery, Bill Chisholm, and John Dougall, Central Ward's Brett Owen, Bob Humm, and Douglas Dyson and South Ward's Bob Cornish, David Lowe, and Ginni Kocher. These candi-

dates 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. We are deeply concerned by Mitchell Shire's proposal to introduce Significant Landscape Overlays (SLOs) on parts of the shire that would impose severe restrictions on agricultural landowners. There are 400 agriculture businesses and about 400 families which would be affected by the SLOs. Farmers are facing enough threats from international trading blocks and other national restrictions. This move by the level of government closest to the people is an own goal for local interests. Food is one of the few future-proof industries, if farmers are given a fair go, and Mitchell Shire needs people who understand farming. We have families who have farmed here for 150 years, and we do not want them to stop because of excessive bureaucracy. The shire has admitted spending \$100,000 on consultants so far for the SLOs—and that is without the hundreds of hours of staff time. 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. Meanwhile, our road budget suffers and the potholes grow. Protect Our Farms urges voters to back those candidates who will truly care for the shire, its land, and prosperity.

Lyndon Arnel
Tooborac

All talk, no action

Dear Editor,

I see my old haunt Kilmore still suffers under the Labor Party just like Victoria. I have been reading some of the statements from future council candidates here in Traralgon and the Mitchell Shire. I read a lot about 'inclusion' and 'sustainability', and candidates living in the area who are going to talk to residents about issues in the area. Aren't we all included in Australia, and don't the local candidates know what is going on in their area already? I see Cr Clark is running again for the Central Ward. Any chance he could forget about the dilapidated bridge in Seymour and focus on the bypass that was promised by Labor back in 2014? Perhaps he may even attend the occasional KADRRA meeting. Speaking of all talk, no action, I see Rob Mitchell is coming out with his annual waffle about the Watson Street interchange. How will the State Government construct the on/off ramps when Victoria is deep in debt to the tune of six times that was left behind by the Cain/

Kirner Government? Labor has many policies but could Rob tell the voters when will his Labor Party adopt 'Honesty' as a policy?

Brian Mawhinney
Traralgon

Response to 'Pro farming candidates'

Dear Editor,

Mitchell Shire Council engaged strongly and regularly in the development of the Landscape Assessment Study (LAS). This feedback has helped to refine the extent of the proposed Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) which is now fewer than 400 affected properties. It is important to understand that the proposed SLO will not prohibit the removal of native vegetation regrowth, which is critical for fire safety, grazing, and cropping. This has been clear throughout the development of the work and has been reiterated on many occasions. Agricultural land uses are allowed as of right under the Farming Zone and will not trigger a planning permit under the proposed SLO. Council's resolution from Monday, August 19 seeks to further reduce any impacts on existing farms by inserting permit exemptions and decision guidelines where it is demonstrated the buildings and works are directly related to an agricultural activity occurring on the site. The August 19 resolution also requires further benchmarking against existing SLOs from other rural council planning schemes to inform buildings and works permit triggers. It is also important to note that an impact assessment of the proposed permits and application process will be undertaken. This will assess identified impacts on the environment, farming, and agricultural practices with consideration to increased cost implications associated with the SLO. Now that the LAS has been endorsed by council, a Planning Scheme Amendment process will be undertaken to implement the proposed SLO into the Mitchell Planning Scheme. This process involves formal notification to affected landowners under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the ability for anyone to make a submission, and a review of submissions by the Independent Planning Panel. Progressing to a Planning Panel will require a future council resolution after the Planning Scheme Amendment has been exhibited and submissions considered. While there would be a cost incurred to council in proceeding to a Planning Panel, it will not reach the amount suggested in Mr Arnel's letter. We look forward to engaging with the community during this process.

Brett Luxford
Mitchell Shire Chief Executive

Response to 'Vote wisely'

Dear Editor,

Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges Mr Hussey's concerns and appreciates his engagement on the matter of heavy vehicles parking in built-up areas. Council has previously met with Mr Hussey to discuss these concerns in detail and continues to take them seriously. As per the Road Safety Road Rules 2017, heavy vehicles are permitted to park in built-up areas for a maximum of one hour. Council's compliance officers actively monitor these areas, marking vehicles and taking enforcement action where appropriate if the one hour limit is exceeded. Council has allocated significant resources to patrol and address illegal heavy vehicle parking across the municipality. While we strive to respond promptly to all reports, it is important to note that limited resources, incidents occurring outside of regular hours, and the need to address higher-priority issues may affect our ability to respond immediately in every instance. To further enhance monitoring and enforcement, council works closely with Victoria Police and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to ensure that parking regulations are enforced, and we are also proactively identifying areas for future heavy vehicle parking solutions. In regards to Mr Hussey's claims about his treatment during the council meeting, council confirms that he was provided with an opportunity, in line with council's policies and procedures, to present his concerns during the designated 15-minute public submission period. This time limit is consistently applied to all individuals presenting at council meetings to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all community members to voice their concerns. Mr Hussey was also given the opportunity to submit additional briefing notes for councillors' consideration following his presentation, a practice that aligns with council's standard procedure for handling public submissions. Council remains committed to ensuring safety and compliance throughout the shire and will continue to address concerns about heavy vehicle parking within the constraints of available resources. For the community's convenience, non-urgent issues can be reported via the 'Report It tool' on council's website. Urgent concerns should be directed to council immediately by calling 5734 6200.

Brett Luxford
Mitchell Shire Chief Executive