



Protect Our Farms Support for an Agricultural Advisory Committee

Address to Mitchell Shire Council re petition.

For the benefit of the livestream and recording, I will read the body of the petition.

Petition to Mitchell Shire to establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee.

Purpose – to establish an agriculture and agribusiness advisory committee to provide strategic advice and improve understanding of food and fibre security, land use, climate impacts and other issues relating to agriculture and agribusiness across the shire.

Rationale – Farming communities need a “seat at the table” to provide input when governments and governing bodies are considering policies, practices and processes that impact directly or indirectly the sustainable livelihoods of farmers, farm related ancillary businesses and the rural and regional infrastructure they support.

Reasons – *Stewardship, productivity and viability of our farms is becoming increasingly important for food and fibre security.

*Water and other resources are in high demand, and it is important that farmers in peri-urban areas have a voice that is equally as compelling as that of urban growth and development.

*Farms and communities dependant on agribusiness, experience significant shifts in climatic and economic conditions. Protecting these communities and assets is important economically as it contributes to the mental health and wellbeing of those who live and work on the land.

*Farming communities have experienced the unintended consequences of small-town school and hospital closures and the impact of water trading disrupting the viability of farms with water rights – in some places viable farming land has been left dormant and unproductive.

*Ensuring the ongoing recognition of the importance of the “food bowl” close to markets and efficient transport corridors that protect the quality, green credentials and affordability of our food and fibre production.

This petition, initiated by Protect our Farms Inc. was in the public domain for approximately 5 to 6 weeks and has garnered 628 signatures.

Numerous businesses and sites hosted the petition across Seymour, Kilmore, Broadford, Pyalong, Tooborac, Tallarook, Wandong and Lancefield. The petition was signed in numerous agricultural related businesses, stock feed suppliers, two general stores, two pubs, a bakery, hardware, veterinary surgery, hunting supplies, a clothing and craft store, neighbourhood house, landcare meeting, farmers market, shearing sheds, CFA sheds, lunch outings, outside Sunday church, in homes and finally at the Seymour Expo. These 628 signatures represent farming families whose sole income is from farming, people whose business and employment are intrinsically linked to agriculture, those enjoying the rural lifestyle in the rural living zone, and many in small rural communities and towns, who all want to see farming protected and remain viable close to where they live.

The petition also gained signatures from residents outside of Mitchell Shire – many who work within the shire, visit and travel through the shire, all adding to the economy of the shire.

All recognise that agriculture and especially generational farming are vital to the ongoing strength and viability of small rural communities and larger towns.

In distributing the petition, there was genuine interest in how council would advance the petition and the future benefits to all of Mitchell Shire.

Agricultural returns can be volatile due to fluctuating commodity prices, seasonal impacts, higher cost inputs and higher financial borrowing costs. For many people with no connection to farming, agribusiness, or living in small rural communities it can be difficult to grasp the challenges of farming which are always present – whether it be a “good” year or one that throws up every challenge imaginable – drought, floods, fire, low returns, loss of markets, etc.

Similar committees already exist in some Victorian shires, and I urge Mitchell shire to embrace the opportunity these 628 signatures give – namely accept the knowledge and common sense which your farmers, agribusinesses and rural residents can offer for the betterment of the shire.