



Submission to the Treasurer: 2016-17 Victorian State Budget

**Date: February 2016**

## **The Victorian Farmers Federation**

Victoria is home to 25 per cent of the nation's farms. They attract neither government export subsidies nor tariff support. Despite farming on only three per cent of Australia's available agricultural land, Victorians produce 30 per cent of the nation's agricultural product. The VFF represents the interests of our state's dairy, livestock, grains, horticulture, flowers, chicken meat, pigs and egg producers.

The VFF consists of a nine person Board of Directors, with seven elected members and two appointed directors, a member representative General Council to set policy and eight commodity groups representing dairy, grains, livestock, horticulture, chicken meat, pigs, flowers and egg industries.

Farmers are elected by their peers to direct each of the commodity groups and are supported by Melbourne-based staff.

Each VFF member is represented locally by one of the 230 VFF branches across the state and through their commodity representatives at local, district, state and national levels. The VFF also represents farmers' views on hundreds of industry and government forums.

## **VFF welcomes Andrews Government's support**

The VFF has welcomed the Andrews Government's commitment to rural Victoria since coming to power.

Victorian farmers appreciate the efforts and access they have had to Premier Daniel Andrews and his team, in particular Treasurer Tim Pallas, Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford and Water Minister Lisa Neville.

One of the biggest issues on the government's agenda has been the sale of the Port of Melbourne lease, a process in which the VFF has actively engaged with the Treasurer to ensure farmers and agriculture's wider interests are protected.

The fact that a number of compromises have been reached on linking port rentals to efficiency gains and more stringent oversight has helped the VFF and its members gain greater confidence that the sale will keep the port and our supply chains competitive.

Beyond the Port the VFF has actively lobbied for an investment in the agricultural infrastructure that is vital to delivering competitively priced food and fibre to the port and along all our local and export supply chains. To this end, the VFF congratulates the Andrews Government on its commitment of more than \$600 million to rail and agricultural infrastructure in the past six months.

After more than a decade of lobbying the VFF was able to gain the Andrews Government's backing for the \$416 million standardisation and upgrade of the Mildura, Manangatang, Sea Lake and Murrayville lines.

This \$416m commitment came on top of the government's decision to establish a \$200m Agricultural Infrastructure and Jobs Fund, which will play a key role in boosting the Victoria's agricultural competitiveness as the nation's biggest food exporter.

The VFF appreciates the Treasurer's commitment to ensuring the fund supports vital investment in agricultural infrastructure to boost productivity, increase exports and reduce costs, so our farmers can stay competitive.

We are particularly keen to work with the government on the development of criteria for allocation of funding to projects.

Lastly I'd like to thank the Government for its most recent efforts in helping farmers and their communities through the latest drought. It has been great to have the Premier of the State stand beside us as we work to help our friends and communities through this tough time.

The VFF looks forward to continuing its strong working relationship with government and asks that you review and consider some of the key projects and funding initiatives outlined in our submission below.



**Peter Tuohey**  
**VFF President**

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>VFF Pre-Budget Submission Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Infrastructure Investment</b>	
	<b>3.1 Transport</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>3.2 Water</b>	<b>13</b>
	<b>3.3 Energy – On-farm</b>	<b>18</b>
	<b>3.4 Telecommunications</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Departmental Policies, Expenditure &amp; Service Delivery</b>	
	<b>4.1 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources</b>	<b>20</b>
	<b>4.2 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning</b>	<b>24</b>
	<b>4.3 Department of Treasury and Finance</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>4.4 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Drought Support</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>36</b>

## 1. Introduction

The Victorian Farmers Federation is pleased to provide this submission to the Victorian Government, outlining our views on appropriations for the 2016-17 Budget.

Innovation has been a cornerstone of development of the Victorian agricultural landscape. Our members are continually seeking new and different ways to operate their farm businesses and boost their productivity.

The Victorian Government plays a key role in growing agriculture's productivity, on-farm and beyond the farm gate.

Victorian agriculture requires the support and investment of the Victorian government to continue prosperous and profitable agriculture in our state – through providing opportunities for the uptake of technology on farms and in enhancing the markets which are available to producers.

Farmers are frontline environmentalists, with husbandry of the land central to the longevity of the operation of farming enterprises. Increasingly though, there are emerging pressures on farming businesses from the broader community that place unnecessary pressures on farm businesses operating in increasingly competitive environments -

Throughout the 2015 calendar year, the right to farm has been at the forefront of VFF activities, with some highly publicised cases gaining media interest.

Our submission has been structured around a desire for funding to be directed to infrastructure and projects which provide a solid basis for developing the capability for growth in our industry – in the short, medium and long term.

The VFF looks forward to discussing opportunities for the 2016-2017 Budget with the Victorian government.

**Victorian Farmers Federation**  
**Farrer House**  
**24 Collins Street**  
**Melbourne 3000**  
**p 1300 882 833 f 03 9207 5500**  
**e [vff@vff.org.au](mailto:vff@vff.org.au) w [www.vff.org.au](http://www.vff.org.au)**

**Contact: Peter Hunt**  
**Executive Manager Policy and Commodities**

## 2. VFF Pre-Budget Submission Summary

### Infrastructure

#### Transport

*\$416 million Murray Basin Project to upgrade and standardise the rail freight network*

*\$3 million to extend the Cattle Underpass Scheme (CUPS)*

*Upgrade the South Gippsland Highway to improve dairy and fodder freight efficiency*

*Upgrade to Thorpdale Trafalgar Road*

*Detailed scoping study for North-East Link*

*Continued support for road maintenance and upgrades*

*More funding for bridge strengthening works*

#### Water

##### **Irrigation projects:**

*\$20 million to complete Stage 1B wards the Macalister Irrigation District 2030 modernisation project.*

*A longer-term commitment of \$50 million is sought for Stage 2 of MID 2030*

*Eastern Irrigation Scheme – growth options*

*\$10 million to modernise the Werribee Irrigation District Modernisation.*

*Lindenow Valley Water Security Project*

*\$6 million to pipe recycled water 20kms from Yarra Valley's Lilydale treatment plant to Yarra Valley horticulturalists*

## **Stock & Domestic water projects**

**The VFF has identified the following key projects to secure farmers' stock & domestic water supplies:**

*\$18.6 million to build the Mitiamo Stock & Domestic pipeline.*

*Fund the extension of the Wimmera Mallee stock and domestic pipeline to properties west of Wedderburn*

*Extend the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline west and south of Horsham*

*Fund a feasibility study into the extraction of water from the Dilwyn aquifer*

## **Energy**

*\$9 million towards on-farm Energy Efficiency Grants over three years*

Additional resources be allocated to the VEET team to assist farmers gain access to the VEET scheme.

## **Telecommunications**

*\$40 million to address mobile black spots in rural farming communities*

## Departmental Policies, Expenditure & Service Delivery

### Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources

*Give DEDJTR the power and resources to act as the determining referral authority in regulating animal husbandry planning permits.*

*DEDJTR would need additional resourcing to undertake this role.*

*\$2.4m for the Next Generation Horticulture Industry Network (HIN)*

*\$8m to establish a hail-netting rebate*

*\$15m for new technologies take-up and R&D adoption*

*\$9m On-farm energy efficiency grant*

*\$3m to develop a Workforce of the Future for horticulture*

*\$6.3m for the Goulburn Valley Fruit Fly Area Wide Management*

*\$150,000 annually to fund an Animal Health and Biosecurity Intensive farming officer.*

### Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

*\$3 million over two years to improve Local Government, Planning and Environment Regulation and Resourcing*

*\$5 million for a pilot project to fund stewardship activities targeted at environmental outcomes on private*

*\$45 million over four years towards ongoing funding for voluntary riparian management works*

*\$20.8 million over four years to support rural council roadside weed and pest management programs*

*Ongoing commitments to wild dog and fox control, including bounties and baiting:*  
*- \$4 million over four years towards the \$10 Fox bounty*  
*- Invest in biannual aerial baiting.*  
*- Increasing investment in ground baiting.*

*Increased DELWP support to control kangaroos and streamline the issuance of Wildlife Control Permits*

*Engage landholders in roadside reductions in fire fuel loads and ensure planned burning resources are allocated fairly across the whole state.*

## **Department of Treasury and Finance**

*Increase the Young Farmer Finance Scheme to \$30 million annually*

*Funding to investigate and develop resources that highlight alternative ownership models and capital raising for young farmers.*

*Increase the Young Farmer Finance Scheme to \$30 million annually*

*Continue Primary Producer Registrations*

*Establish a rebate for Roll-Over Protection Systems on farm quad bikes*

*Double the payroll tax free threshold from \$550,000 to \$1.1 million*

*Increase WorkCover Remuneration Thresholds*

*Remove the automatic indexation of Government charges*

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development**

*Review current curriculum and work towards integrating agriculture into all primary and secondary school subjects*

*Inclusion of compulsory 'financial literacy' curriculum at a secondary school*

*Funding to centralise food and fibre teacher and student resources*

### 3. Infrastructure Investment

#### 3.1 Transport

##### ***\$416 million towards the Murray Basin Rail Project***

Last year's Budget allocated \$180 million to \$220 million towards the Murray Basin Rail project over the forward estimates, with \$30m of that funding due to be spent in 2015-16.

The VFF worked closely with the Treasurer Tim Pallas, Public Transport Minister Jacinta Allan and Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford to gain further commitments to the project. Once again the VFF appreciates Premier Daniel Andrews' commitment to fully back the \$416 million Murray Basin Rail Project, announced in August last year.

Upgrading and standardising the Mildura, Manangatang, Sea Lake and Murrayville lines will lift their capacity to carry heavier trains, meaning farmers can haul more grain, more efficiently and at a lower cost.

As it stands we still have a mix of broad and standard gauge rail freight lines in Victoria that creates blockages and bottle-necks that frustrate our ability to quickly and efficiently deliver grain to our ports. In contrast most of the rest of the eastern seaboard uses standard gauge lines.

Building a standard-gauge rail freight network would reduce the inefficiencies and cost of transporting freight within Victoria. Standardisation will allow rail operators to realise the benefits of running higher capacity standard gauge trains across not only Victoria, but also enable them to competitively and efficiently use standard gauge trains across states.

More grain on rail means less on roads, which in turn means reduced road maintenance costs for local government and rate payers.

##### ***\$3 million to extend the Cattle Underpass Scheme (CUPS)***

Successive government investments in this rebate scheme have led to farmers building 550 cattle underpasses across the state, first under the previous Bracks Labor Government's Stock Over/Underpass Road (SOURS) program and the former Coalition Government's Cattle Underpass Scheme (CUPS).

Farmers are offered a rebate of 33 per cent on the cost of constructing a cattle underpass, up to a maximum of \$50,000.

The CUPS and SOURS schemes have taken thousands of cows off the state's roads, resulting in: Improved road safety, workplace safety for farmers and their employees, improved farm efficiency and productivity and the removal of impediments to the expansion of dairy farms and growth of the industry.

### ***Upgrade South Gippsland Highway to improve dairy, fodder, and vegetable freight efficiency***

The South Gippsland Highway was left out of the State Government's 2013 Victorian Freight and Logistics Plan. South Gippsland Highway is a major freight route for agricultural produce, including dairy, fodder, and vegetables. Three major dairy processing plants are located along this route, generating hundreds of truck movements a week to and from Melbourne. The South Gippsland Highway is identified as a freight trend hotspot in the Gippsland Freight Infrastructure Master Plan, but remains in a state of disrepair.

### ***Upgrade to Thorpdale Trafalgar Road***

The Thorpdale Trafalgar Road is the major connecting road between Trafalgar on the Princes Highway and Leongatha on the South Gippsland Highway and carries a constant flow of heavy vehicles. The road is vital to the community and agricultural production in the region, yet is in extremely poor condition.

The road is predominantly used by B-double milk tankers, transporting milk to the three major milk factories in the area. This road is also used by numerous B-doubles to carry approximately 70,000 tonnes of potatoes and 9,000 tonnes of onions exported out of the Thorpdale area annually. Four school buses also require access to the road, each taking two trips per day.

Sections of road require bridging and have been of ongoing concern for over 40 years. The state of the road has been known to cause school buses to breach because the unevenness and the constantly changing surface of this section of the road.

### ***North East link***

Victoria's agricultural supply chain currently suffers poor connectivity between the North and South East/East of the State. Road freight between these two regions is effectively channelled through Melbourne because of a missing link in the road network – the North East Link.

The VFF has identified the North East Link as being a critical piece of new infrastructure to support increased agricultural production in Victoria. The North East Link, connecting the M80 Ring Road at Greensborough and the Eastern Freeway, would be expected to carry around 100,000 vehicles a day, providing quicker and easier access for freight operators. The Link would provide major benefits to horticulture producers and flower growers transporting fresh produce to the Melbourne wholesale market and improve the efficiency of feed transport for dairy, pork, and poultry farms east of Melbourne.

### *Continued support for road maintenance and upgrades*

In the 2015-2016 Victorian Budget, \$6.7 million was provided for priority road upgrades as a combination of asset and output initiatives (as part of budget paper three).

There are numerous local roads which require funding across the state, but many are placed on waiting lists as a matter of perceived priority against larger roads.

As is the case with the Thorpdale Trafalgar road mentioned above, there are a large number of users on rural roads, with pressure from local cars, various trucks and tankers, school buses. VicRoads needs to be provided with the continued capability to respond to the short and medium term road management and safety issues

### *Extend funding for bridge strengthening works*

The VFF appreciates that the State Government committed \$76 million over three years to strengthen bridges on key freight routes across the state to reduce travel time for heavy vehicles.

However more is needed as bridges age and as rural road freight operators use more B-Doubles.

Strengthening bridges allows greater mass limits, which in turn boosts road freight efficiency and reduces the number of trucks on the road.

The VFF is urging the Victorian Government to invest even more in bridge strengthening works to remove major constraints on our rural supply routes to market, especially for the dairy, grains and horticultural sectors.

## **3.2 Water**

### **Irrigation projects**

***\$20 million to complete Stage 1B wards the Macalister Irrigation District 2030 modernisation project.***

***A longer-term commitment of \$50 million is sought for Stage 2 of MID 2030***

The VFF welcomed last November's State Government's commitment of \$20 million to Stage 1B Macalister Irrigation District 2030 modernisation project and will be seeking a similar commitment from the Federal Government, towards the \$60 million cost of Stage 1B (Three way cost split -\$20 million State, \$20 million Federal, \$20 million SRW irrigators). Stage one includes replacing 85kms of old channels with 38km of pressurised pipes and 26km of automated channel, which will save 9,700ML of water for the district's dairy farmers and vegetable growers. Modernising the infrastructure will mean quicker and more efficient delivery of water to farms.

The VFF is also seeking a longer term commitment of \$50 million towards Stage 2 of the Macalister Irrigation District 2030 modernisation project.

The VFF is ultimately looking for long-term funding of \$190m to Stage 2 of the MID 2030 Modernisation, which has been costed at \$190 million. The VFF is seeking a contribution of \$50m from the State Government to this stage. Stage 2 will modernise outlets and channels, replace the Newry River Channel system and Avon floodplain systems with pipeline and create a wetland for nutrient management.

### ***Eastern Irrigation Scheme – growth options***

The VFF is calling on the government to fund a feasibility study into options to increase water supply to and extend the Eastern Irrigation Scheme in the Cranbourne-Clyde area on Melbourne's eastern fringe. The Eastern Irrigation Scheme is one of Australia's leading vegetable production areas, home to some of the country's top producers and exporting produce throughout Australia, Asia and the Middle East. The Eastern Irrigation Scheme is also an important contributor to Melbourne's food security and sufficiency. Currently, water availability is constraining growth within the current irrigation footprint of the scheme and the viability of a scheme extension.

A feasibility study should consider all options to increase water availability in the Eastern Irrigation scheme, including, use of waste water and aquifer recharge. A southern extension and eastern extension of the scheme should also be considered to increase the land available for irrigation. The availability of additional water and irrigable land would boost the local economy and provide additional jobs in the peri-urban Cardinia area where unemployment is high.

The predicted cost of a southern scheme extension is \$8 million whilst an eastern extension may cost \$15 - \$18 million. The owner of the scheme, Trility, has expressed a desire to explore options to expand the scheme including through a public-private partnership.

### ***\$10 million for the Werribee Irrigation District Modernisation***

The ageing and outdated water supply infrastructure in the Werribee Irrigation District is operating at 55-65% efficiency. Piping 40 kilometres of channel would save approximately 4,400ML. These water savings would help growers to become more drought resilient and improve the health of the Werribee River.

### ***Lindenow Valley Water Security Project***

The VFF supports funding for a feasibility study of the Lindenow Valley Water Security Project. The Victorian Government conducted a \$1 million investigation of potential options to improve water reliability on the Mitchell River. This investigation identified the preferred location at Stony Creek for a 17 GL dam providing approximately 10,500ML yield per annum.

This water infrastructure project would improve water security for agricultural, urban, industrial and environmental water users. This improved security will secure 1,000 jobs in the agricultural industry and create up to 150 additional jobs.

**\$6 million to pipe recycled water 20kms from Yarra Valley's Lilydale treatment plant to Yarra Valley horticulturalists**

The VFF is calling for funding to utilise available waste water from Yarra Valley Water's Lilydale waste water treatment plant for productive use. The construction of a 20km pipeline from the Lilydale treatment plant up the Yarra Valley would increase the available water for use by Yarra Valley horticulturalists.

Construction of the pipeline would initially make available 700ML of water, with opportunity for future increases if connected to other treatment plants. The provision of this Class B recycled water would provide opportunity for the Yarra Valley horticultural industry to grow.

The construction of this pipeline requires a \$6 million investment. This is a value for money project that returns recycled water to productive use, boosts Yarra Valley horticultural production, and delivers downstream benefits to the local economy.

### **Stock & Domestic Water Projects**

Long-term climate change has led to severe stock and domestic water shortages in many parts of the state. These regions need long-term and innovative solutions to secure their water supplies. These solutions may vary from pipelines and community bores to reforms that create incentives encouraging those farmers with secure access to groundwater to trade and supply neighbours.

We will need different solutions in different regions, but as it stands many farmers are unable to run their properties at full productive capacity, due to a lack of stock water.

The VFF is calling on the state to support the development of a long-term stock and domestic water strategy, which builds the capacity of rural communities to not only survive drought, but retain the productive carrying capacity of their land.

***The VFF has identified the following key projects to secure farmers' stock & domestic water supplies:***

***\$18.6 million to build the Mitiamo Stock & Domestic pipeline***

The VFF is seeking State Government support to build a stock & domestic water pipeline to more than 150 properties across 80,300 hectares. The delivery of a secure water supply to the region would create opportunities for the expansion and intensification of agricultural enterprises across the region, in particular chicken meat and pig production, which would deliver further job opportunities, on-farm and along the local supply chain.

The first stage of the project requires an initial investment of \$1.2 million into a detailed business case, covering design, landholder cost and uptake. The pipeline is expected to deliver 1400 megalitres of water savings, which would count towards Victoria's water recovery target under the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

***Extend the Wimmera Mallee stock and domestic pipeline to properties west of Wedderburn***

Farmers in the Wedderburn region are currently spending \$300 a week to cart water to their livestock and domestic use, a practice they've been forced to carry out for the past two to three spring and summer seasons. There is potential to pipe west from the Waranga Channel and east from the Wimmera Mallee pipeline. This project would ensure that rural communities have reliable access to water for basic needs.

The State Government has moved to try and offer some support to farmers in the region, via its \$27 million package to support Victorian communities dealing with ongoing dry conditions. Part of the funding has gone towards the South West Loddon Rural Water Supply project, whereby 40km of pipelines and installation of three pumps at Woosang, Korong Vale and Wychitella. This first stage of the project will provide landholders with access to stock and domestic water they will still need to cart to their properties. The proposed later stages of the project would provide landholders the opportunity to be connected to the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline system directly

The business case for the project is due in March this year.

Planning for this project is currently being overseen by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water.

**Extend the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline west and south of Horsham**

The VFF is calling on the government to fund a feasibility study into the extension of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline to the west Wimmera region. The west Wimmera regions stock & domestic water supplies, previously considered drought tolerant, have been expended by recent dry conditions. The extension of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline system west and south of Horsham would provide a secure water supply for stock & domestic purposes and urban use. Water security is integral to continued investment in the west Wimmera regions agricultural industry. This proposed extension would provide this security.

**Fund a feasibility study into the extraction of water from the Dilwyn aquifer**

The VFF is calling on government to fund a feasibility study into the extraction of groundwater from the Dilwyn aquifer in Southern Victoria to secure stock & domestic water supplies for the agricultural industry. Persistent dry conditions have exhausted stock & domestic water supplies in many parts of southern and south-west Victoria. Current water

sources are currently not deemed secure enough to guarantee supply. Access to the Dilwyn aquifer would provide long-term water security to the regions agricultural industry.

The Dilwyn aquifer lies at a varying depth of between 100m and 1000m below sea level. The cost of drilling an access bore to the aquifer differs on required depth however estimates in the Simpson area, at 300m below sea level, are \$1 million.

### 3.3 Energy

#### On-farm infrastructure

***\$9 million for on farm energy efficiency infrastructure – phased over three years***

The VFF is calling on the Government to co-invest \$9 million over 3 years in on-farm energy efficiency infrastructure.

Regional Victoria is faced with increasingly higher costs for essentials such as electricity. Targeted investment in on-farm infrastructure is an excellent way to boost regional business efficiency and to grow food and fibre production.

The grants, which would require a 50% co-contribution from the farm business, would be of particular benefit to the dairy, horticulture and chicken farming operations, all highly productive and energy intensive industries. Each of these commodities is dedicated to increasing food production and farm profitability.

A co-funding package based on the old *Smarter Resources Smarter Businesses* program that is tailored to suit farm businesses would be the ideal way to assist farms to double the food and fibre production in Victoria by 2030.

The rising cost of electricity is crippling many farm businesses. Regional areas are faced with a disproportionately high cost for electricity. Significant opportunities exist for on-farm cost and emissions reduction through increasing energy efficiency. However, upfront capital costs and payback periods longer than five years are major barriers to farmers investing in energy efficient equipment.

#### Victorian Energy Efficiency Target

***Additional resources be allocated to the VEET team to assist farmers gain access to the VEET scheme***

Farmers have struggled to gain access to the VEET scheme in the past, due to the diversity of pumps, fans, refrigeration and other equipment used in agriculture. Deeming of equipment under the old scheme was virtually impossible, due to manufacturers unwillingness to gather the requisite technical information for a relatively small market.

The move towards project based assessment (before and after energy savings) was geared to the larger scale manufacturing sector and thus inaccessible to farmers.

The VFF notes the VEET, under the direction of Energy & Resources Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, has recognised that farmers need to gain access to the scheme and are working to assist the VFF develop a hybrid model that may give dairy, pig, chicken meat, egg and horticultural industries access to the VEET scheme. However it is clear that the VEET team needs greater resourcing to assist farmers gain access to this scheme.

The VFF is seeking additional resources be allocated to the VEET team to assist farmers gain access to the VEET scheme.

### 3.4 Telecommunications

<b>\$40 million to address mobile black spots in rural farming communities</b>
--

Farmers and support services are reliant on mobile communications for the day-to-day operation of their businesses. However, many parts of rural Victoria suffer from poor to non-existent mobile coverage which hampers communication and productivity. The lack of mobile coverage in farming communities is also a major safety issue in the case of on-farm accidents and during natural disasters such as bushfires. Given the major economic contribution of agriculture to Victoria, addressing connectivity issues for farm businesses in rural areas must be made a priority.

## 4. Departmental Policies, Expenditure & Services

### 4.1 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Infrastructure

#### Supporting the Right to Farm

***Give DEDJTR the power and resources to act as the determining referral authority in regulating animal husbandry planning permits.***

**DEDJTR would need additional resourcing to undertake this role.**

The VFF believes the agricultural division of DEDJTR should have a determining referral authority capacity for the permit required animal husbandry land uses to provide the specialised expertise on agricultural practices and limiting environmental and amenity impacts. This is particularly relevant as the Department has an important role in developing the guidelines.

The permit triggers can be strengthened by explicitly stating the animal husbandry uses, such as broiler, egg production, cattle feedlot and piggeries, that do require a planning permit. The permit application process would be defined under existing codes or via clearly defined guidelines developed for each land use. Further, agricultural specialists with the Department of Agriculture should be the determining referral authority to ascertain compliance with guidelines. This reduces resource burden on local councils and EPA who don't have specialist agricultural industry environmental management solutions.

DEDJTR would need additional resourcing to undertake this role as a determining referral authority.

#### Strengthen DEDJTR's biosecurity capacity

The VFF has been concerned that the biosecurity capacity of the Victorian Government has been declining over time.

Now more than ever is there a need to ensure that there are strong biosecurity rules in place, that there are adequate resources in place to educate producers and the community as well as policing.

***\$2.4 million for the Next Generation Horticulture Industry Network (HIN)***

VFF Horticulture, in conjunction with other horticultural industries, is seeking \$2.4 million over three years for a Next Generation Horticulture Industry Network.

The Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) is a network of 21 national and state temperate horticultural industry organisations established by DEDJTR in 2008. The member organisations work directly with 16,000 horticultural producers and land managers *via* their existing extensive networks.

The purpose of the HIN is to enable cross-horticultural industry collaboration; improve horticultural industry capability; accelerate practice change; and provide an efficient and effective link between horticultural industries and the Department (DEDJTR). The diverse range of horticultural industry organisations operate under a range of different governance arrangements, independent of each other, and in some cases they are quite small and lack critical mass. The ability to draw together Industry Development Officers/CEOs from these individual industries enables the industries to form a critical mass, giving them the ability to solve common issues efficiently and effectively.

Participating industries have indicated that the HIN promotes industry collaboration. The HIN network overcomes isolation on problem solving, enabling sharing of resources, mentoring within the industry and provides an avenue for regular and effective interaction between industry and government. The shared skill base can attract the brightest to horticulture further enhancing the industry as a 'go to and can do industry'.

The current HIN program is funded by the Victorian State Government (DEDJTR) until June 2016.

The objective of the Next Gen HIN is to improve the long-term productivity, profitability and exports of temperate horticulture through:

- accelerating the adoption of research, best management practices and innovations,
- increasing the capability of industry development officers,
- attracting professionals into the vibrant horticultural sector,
- increasing the capability of young industry leaders,
- filling the gap where industries do not have industry development officers,
- facilitating cross-industry collaboration and sharing of R,D & E, and,
- providing an efficient and effective link between the horticultural industries and the government

The HIN provides the knowledge to growers of what technologies are on the horizon and how adopting these technologies and R&D outcomes can benefit horticultural businesses.

<b><i>\$8 million for hail netting rebate</i></b>
---

VFF Horticulture is seeking a state government rebate scheme of \$8m over three years for weather and pest mitigation options. This rebate could consist of:

- a) \$10,000 per hectare for netting and igloos with at least 50 per cent matching investment from growers; or
- b) 50 per cent rebate on the purchase of a weather warning station or other option up to \$20,000 per business.

This will establish a competitive environment for Victorian growers, provide regional economic benefits and meet the state's objective of a profitable horticultural sector. It will also help to reduce the need for government assistance in times when unforeseen disasters such as hail storms arise.

***\$15 million for new technologies take-up and R&D adoption***

Governments, universities, industry and other stakeholders have invested heavily in developing research and development solutions and new technologies that can assist horticultural businesses to manage pests, increase yields and provide a crop that meets consumer demands.

Through the Horticulture Industry Network, industry conferences and other avenues growers are learning and adopting the benefits delivered by these R&D investments.

VFF Horticulture believes it is essential for industry to take up R&D outcomes and new technologies in order to remain viable and in order to meet increased demand for Victorian produce both domestically and internationally.

This grant will allow businesses to co-invest at least 50 per cent on any initiative that has a clear vision for growth, to meet export demand and provide continued regional employment opportunities.

Initiatives could include robotics to identify pest incursions, technology that can assess the nutrient levels in soils, accessing root stocks for new varieties that meet consumer needs and assistance with infrastructure costs for new production types.

***\$3 million to develop a Workforce of the Future for horticulture***

VFF Horticulture is seeking \$3 million over three years to help meet the short and medium term skilled workforce needs and to develop a horticulture industry workforce development plan through engagement with industry and supply chain stakeholders.

A key issue for the industry is a general shortage of skilled labour and many businesses have described the “middle managers” as a serious gap for the future. This has impact on a business’ ability to efficiently and effectively meet the demands of new markets and invest in the adoption of new on-farm technologies. More generally, the industry is not seen as ‘attractive’ to young people and those from other sectors (e.g. mining) are not aware of the opportunities within horticulture.

Whilst there are numerous reports that describe the capability needs of the industry and there are no shortage of training programs to up-skill staff, there continues to be a disconnect between industry workforce needs and the provision of training.

Industry is proposing:

1. To meet short & medium term skilled workforce needs:
  - a) Internships for the horticultural industry (\$1 million over 3 years) – a coordinated approach that encourage partnerships between horticulture businesses, the VET sector and universities.
  - b) Horticulture Industry-Ready Graduate program (\$1.2 million over 3 years) – a coordinated approach to provide new graduates experience and skills to participate

in horticultural businesses, including mentorship of both the graduate and the host business.

2. Create a horticulture growing industry workforce development plan (\$80,000) – a strategy and action plan describing what the next generation horticulture growing business and their value chain partners look like, their aspirations and drivers. Engage with businesses to help growers and value partners to coalesce around common challenges and opportunities and create a vision for meeting them. Understanding the employer and employee capabilities needed to successfully attract and retain staff. Build on the successful approaches used by other agricultural sectors (eg dairy industry).

***\$6.3 million for the Goulburn Valley Fruit Fly Area Wide Management***

The Goulburn Valley Fruit Fly Taskforce, made up of state and local government, industry, water authorities and commercial businesses, has developed a business case that outlines the need for government investment in area wide fruit fly management in the Goulburn Valley. The document, already provided to government, outlines the investment needed over three years to manage fruit fly incursions in the townships and provide co-ordinated community support in the Goulburn Valley.

The funds would also include the need for two officers to implement area wide management of fruit fly including data collection over the three years. This data would be used to maintain and improve domestic and international trade through phytosanitary controls acceptable to our trading partners.

The importance of continued trade from this region cannot be understated as the Goulburn Valley accounts for 28 per cent of the national apple crop, 90 per cent pear crop and 43 per cent of the national apricot crop. The Goulburn Valley also produces 90 percent of the national deciduous processing fruit. Both fresh and canning varieties support 2,700 jobs and provide growers with export opportunities directly or through processed fruit exports.

***\$150,000 to fund an Animal Health and Biosecurity Intensive farming officer. (Project proposal included in appendix)***

The VFF Intensive Farming Group, seeks \$150,000 to employ an Intensive Farming Officer (Animal Health and Biosecurity), to be located within the VFF.

Victoria's intensive agricultural industry, including chicken meat, eggs and pigs, requires an effective and informative communication avenue to provide support to both individual producers and producer groups. Fostering awareness of animal health and biosecurity issues and improvement through collaboration among Victorian and national intensive farming networks is key to this position.

Current disease management techniques differ between individual producers causing a failure to coordinate strategies across and between the intensive industries. This failure has contributed to substantial losses in these industries with an increase of the incidents of disease over the last 18 months. New outbreaks are currently being advised every week. Of even greater concern is the potential for a lack of coordination and limited information sharing to hinder containment efforts if a major disease outbreak were to occur.

The recent influx of smaller commercial producers and the expansion of the free range sector, present new challenges in biosecurity for all of the intensive industries. Providing educational opportunities and a point of contact for these farmers will assist in mitigating future risk of major outbreaks.

The intensives officer would be responsible for

1. Providing educational workshops for all producers.
2. Developing and distributing related industry materials including VFF online resources to the farming community.
3. Be a point of contact for any animal health and biosecurity questions.

<p><b><i>\$2 million for co-contribution funding opportunities with industry driven research and extension groups</i></b></p>
---

The Birchip Cropping Group has been running a pilot project over three years, with dollar for dollar contributions shared between the State Government and the Birchip Cropping Group. Funds are matched on the basis of memberships paid to BCG.

There is merit in an ongoing contribution to such a model and the broader availability of the program to other industry and commodity grower groups. The VFF recommends a funding pool of \$2 million be made available over four years, for industry and grower research and development and extension organisations to have an opportunity to bid into extension support.

Such a model support the ongoing viability of grower research and development groups, ensures that productivity and profitability gains are made within the agricultural community and offers a strong network for industry led education.

## 4.2 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

<p><b><i>\$3 million over two years to improve Local Government, Planning and Environment Regulation and Resourcing</i></b></p>
---

The level of planning and environmental regulation impacting agriculture is forever gaining complexity. The administrative burden associated with regulatory compliance for farming businesses is significant.

Not all planning and environmental requirements are the responsibility of local government. There are separate Commonwealth and State laws that need to be complied with separately. There is a resourcing challenge for local government particularly in rural areas, where obtaining comprehensive and timely advice on legislative obligations is not always possible.

As a consequence, due diligence is particularly challenging and compliance breaches occur where there is a lack of understanding or knowledge of legislation at the different levels of government.

There is inconsistency between councils given the presence of local planning scheme overlays and the discretionary judgement that is required in planning decisions.

*The VFF is seeking \$3 million over two years to:*

- Improve applicants' access to low cost planning support to assist navigating the planning process, for example promote the use of pre-lodgement private certification to support applicants address relevant planning issues prior to lodgement of planning application.
- Support council establishment of rural advisory committees to provide engagement with the farming community to inform decisions over roadside management, bushfire and emergency response support, economic development and provide input into rural planning policy development.

Facilitate agricultural production by:

- Removing planning scheme overlays controls that are outdated or duplicate other regulations. For example there are environmental overlays in Western Victoria that duplicate Commonwealth requirements on threatened species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Strengthening provisions in Farming Zone to encourage agricultural production. Require uses be "in conjunction" with agriculture.

### ***The benefit from the investment***

1. Improved agricultural productivity and economic growth.
2. Cost savings by reducing need for public resources dedicated to resolving issues associated with outdated or unwarranted regulation.

## **Biodiversity and Native Vegetation**

**\$5 million for a pilot project to fund stewardship activities targeted at environmental outcomes on private land**

There is forever increasing regulatory burden resulting from Commonwealth and state biodiversity legislation and native vegetation permitted clearing regulations. Improving biodiversity on private land, including setting aside land for conservation or revegetation of cleared land, has a public benefit. The cost of contributing to improved biodiversity needs to be shared and not unfairly burden agricultural producers.

There are many examples of farmers' revegetating to improve the condition of the land and contribute to biodiversity outcomes. Joint projects between farmers', Landcare and catchment management authorities have many success stories and should be promoted.

Farmers often feel that the regulatory system associated with native vegetation removal is ineffective in enhancing biodiversity. It's an unworkable system that focuses on avoiding any loss that may be required for agricultural production and simultaneously not recognising voluntary private efforts to protect or gain better vegetation outcomes.

The VFF is seeking to promote leadership and voluntary action to improve biodiversity in Victoria by establishing a \$5 million pilot project to fund stewardship activities targeted at environmental outcomes on private land

The VFF is also seeking to work with government to create a more efficient and effective regulatory system for protection of biodiversity by:

- Developing whole-of-government Biodiversity Strategy that achieves synergies between bushfire fuel load reduction, riparian management, weed and pest control and supports industry to achieve biodiversity outcomes.
- Reviewing planning scheme overlays to reduce administrative cost burden on rural councils and farmers.
- Improving education of compliance obligations under Commonwealth, state and local law.

***The benefit from the investment***

1. A more sensible approach to native vegetation clearance, improved incentives for adding to stock of native vegetation across Victoria by encouraging revegetation rather than prohibiting vegetation loss.
2. A fair regulatory approach that aims for net community benefit in balancing biodiversity objectives with the needs of Victorian businesses.
3. Efficient use of investment by looking for synergies across native vegetation regulation, biodiversity outcomes, weed and pest control, riparian management, and fuel load reduction for bushfire protection.

## Riparian management

***\$45 million over four years towards ongoing funding for voluntary riparian management works***

The VFF supports a voluntary approach to riparian fencing and management by farmers. There are substantial costs for private landholders associated with fencing out stock from riparian areas. These costs include establishing off-stream watering, maintaining riparian fencing in flood prone areas, and increased efforts required to manage pests and weeds. If the State Government wishes to achieve environmental outcomes on riparian land it is crucial that landholders are involved in the process. Farmers are best placed to manage pests and weeds on riparian land, but there must be adequate incentives to do so.

The VFF is seeking \$45 million over four years towards ongoing funding for voluntary riparian management works

The benefit from the investment

1. Improved management of riparian land can result in public benefits such as improved ecosystem function and, if fencing is extensive, improved drinking water quality.

## Roadside weeds and pests management control

***\$20.8 million over four years to support rural council roadside weed and pest management programs***

Roadsides are key corridors for the spread of invasive plants and animals. The management of invasive species on roadsides is critical to maintaining agricultural productivity and the ecological function of roadsides. The Catchment and Land Protection Act was amended in 2013 to clarify that the responsibility for management of rabbits and most weeds on municipal roadside sits with councils.

Eligible councils currently have access of up to \$75,000 per year ending June 2017. The VFF has received feedback from a number of councils that the funding to date has been unsatisfactory. There is still a need for rural councils to improve management of roadsides for boundary fencing, weed and pest control and bushfire management. The VFF supports continuous improvement in the way roadsides are managed, and that partnerships are established with adjoining landowners to ensure effective control of invasive species.

*The VFF is seeking \$20.8 million over four years to support rural council roadside weed and pest management programs*

***The benefit from the investment***

1. Provide support for councils to fulfil obligations in relation to weed and pest control.
2. The benefits of control of invasive species have economic and environmental gains for the broader Victorian community.

## Wild Dog and Fox Control

### ***Ongoing commitments to wild dog and fox control, including bounties and baiting:***

- ***\$4 million over four years towards the \$10 Fox bounty***
- ***Invest in biannual aerial baiting.***
- ***Increasing investment in ground baiting.***

### ***The problem***

Wild dog attacks have a devastating effect on agriculture through stock loss and injured animals. Invertebrate pest management also has major environmental benefits, since foxes and wild dogs prey on and compete with native animals.

It is crucial that current efforts to control foxes and wild dogs are maintained as there have been significant achievements in reducing attacks in some parts of the state. As the State Government is currently evaluating the role of the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee and program, there is the opportunity to look for synergies with other pest animal programs.

### ***The ask – dollars or action***

- On-going commitment to the \$10 Fox bounty
- Invest in biannual aerial baiting
- Increasing investment in ground baiting
- Consider where fox baits doses can be increased to also target Wild Dogs
- Continue support for community action on Wild Dog control including cross government agency support for managing pest animals on public land
- Appoint the Victorian Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee for another term post evaluation as it provides an important link between local community action, State Government policy and the National Wild Dog Action Plan project
- Support manufactures of 1080 to take up mobile onsite injection to increase the local availability of fresh meat baits, and facilitate increased participation in community baiting programs

### ***The benefit from the investment***

1. Maintaining control of Wild Dog attacks and continuing success of existing program.
2. Establishing a multifaceted and community supported approach to controlling wild dogs.

## Wildlife Control Permits

### ***Increased DELWP support to control kangaroos and streamline the issuign of Wildlife Control Permits***

Over the past year, farmers in the west and north of the state have increasingly reported significant crop damage resulting from increased kangaroo populations. It is estimated that a kangaroo consumes feed equivalent to 0.65 of a sheep and that the cost for a farmer in a drier year is significant.

Farmers need support from Government in advice and permission to understand and manage kangaroos. Given the public benefit associated with effective control of a pest animal, the VFF calls on the Government to provide more support for the agricultural sector in tackling this problem.

***The VFF is seeking to:***

- Improve collaboration between public and private land managers in controlling kangaroo numbers. For example, consider sharing investment in Kangaroo fencing on farm land adjoining public parks where kangaroo numbers are a problem.
- Reduce red tape burden associated with Wildlife Control Permits, for example, extending the duration of the permit, cost and expanding quota allowed will reduce administrative burden on farmers needing to reapply.

***The benefit from the investment***

1. There are public benefits associated with improved kangaroo control when numbers are having a significant impact on agricultural production. The effects on crops during a drought are particularly difficult for a farmer to manage.
2. There are environmental and road safety gains with effective management of kangaroo numbers. There are economic and sustainability gains by supporting commercial opportunities for kangaroo meat and hides.

**Planned burning**

***Engage landholders in roadside reductions in fire fuel loads and ensure planned burning resources are allocated fairly across the whole state.***

The Government's recently announced planned burning program requires significant support to ensure its effectiveness. The move to a risk reduction performance target of 70 per cent residual bushfire risk across all land tenures must take into account the investment required across Victoria to achieve this result.

In rural areas, farmers often lack emergency services that built up areas benefit from and therefore there is a significant reliance on the rural landholder to manage risks to their own enterprise.

If investment in bushfire reduction focuses on high bushfire risk and highly populated areas, then remote areas such as the Mallee may be neglected. The Bronzewing and Stewarton fires of 2014, in relatively low population density areas, demonstrated that impacts on individual agricultural producers can be significant.

**The VFF is asking DELWP to:**

- Consider an engagement model to utilise farmers as a resource in reducing fuel loads on adjoining public land. There are opportunities for better collaboration between public managers and farmers. For example, for fuel load reduction on roadsides, local government and VicRoads could engage landholders under simple agreements to assist in fuel load reduction.

- Ensure that there is a fair distribution of investment in emergency resources and prescribed burning across the state to achieve required bushfire target in all regions rather than a state average.

***The benefit from the investment***

1. Engaging capable landholders in fuel load reduction can reduce the resource burden on public land managers and provides an efficient and effective means of tackling bushfire risk.
2. Ensuring improved social equality outcomes for all Victorians by ensuring remote communities are provided the support they need for adequate bushfire protection.

### 4.3 Department of Treasury and Finance

#### ***Increase the Young Farmer Finance Scheme to \$30 million annually***

The Young Farmer Finance scheme, currently administered by Rural Finance, offers a concessional interest rate of 1-2 per cent with repayment periods of 5 to 18 years, depending on the asset being purchased or leasing proposal. The loan scheme budget is currently \$25 million per year (the State Government contributing \$22.5 million, and Bendigo Bank contributing \$2.5 million).

This funding is consistently committed to young farmers, with the annual budget restricting the allocation of loans. In most cases young farmers only receive a portion of the desired loan amount at a concessional rate, with the remaining at a commercial rate. In order to reflect the level of demand, the VFF asks that the total annual loan budget for the Young Farmer Finance Scheme be increased to \$30 million per year.

#### ***Funding to investigate and develop resources that highlight alternative ownership models and capital raising for young farmers***

Due to the extremely high levels of capital required to buy farm land, the VFF believes that there are significant farm business opportunities in alternative business ownership models. Many young people are deterred from entering the industry due to the high establishment costs. The VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to promote new farm business, by funding an investigation into alternative business ownership models that may provide simpler pathways for new entrants and business expansion opportunities.

The findings from this research should be used to develop accessible resources that can be used to increase knowledge of young farmers, and incorporated into Financial Literacy workshops.

#### ***Broadening young-farmer access to the stamp duty exemption, to include those listed in trusts***

Currently young farmers buying their first farmland property in Victoria are entitled to a duty exemption upon satisfying certain eligibility criteria. Under the current regulations, young farmers are disqualified from this exemption if they have previously been a beneficiary of a trust.

It is common practice for farmland to be purchased in a trust structure, and many young farmers will be listed in their family trust, thus disqualifying them from the duty exemption and consequently constrains skilled young farmers from establishing their own farm business. The VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to rethink this policy, so that the exemption may be more accessible and provide for more young farmers to invest in their own farm business.

### ***Continue Primary Producer Registrations***

It is extremely important to the farming community that the primary producer vehicle registration continue. Farm-based heavy vehicles are generally used much less than commercial vehicles and are seasonal therefore creating little road damage.

Primary producer registrations (PPRs) enhance local productivity by allowing farmers to license the optimal number of vehicles for their peak freight times. Agricultural production is time sensitive and efficient transport at peak times is crucial.

A survey recently undertaken by the VFF showed 79 per cent of farm based heavy vehicles travel less than 10,000 km per annum. Furthermore, 57% of farm based heavy vehicles travel less than 5,000 km per year. Despite the low annual mileage these vehicles provide a very valuable service for agricultural businesses. Removal of the PPR will lead to reduced freight capacity, sacrificing quality and/or production levels.

### ***Establish a rebate for Roll-Over Protection Systems on farm quad bikes***

The VFF is calling on the State Government to support a rebate on fitting roll-over protection devices (ROPS) to quad bikes.

Worksafe has announced it is moving to 'effectively' mandate the fitting of ROPS on quad bikes, which cost approximately \$700, depending on the type of device. Cost is a significant barrier to many farmers installing ROPS, given many operate several quad bikes on their properties.

The VFF's call for a rebate follows Worksafe Victoria's announcement that it deemed ROPS devices "an appropriate means of reducing risks when quad bikes are used in the workplace".

Worksafe is developing a risk assessment tool that requires farmers to fit a ROPS or find an alternative safer vehicle if there is a risk of roll-over. Given roll-over is a risk that most farmers would identify the need to fit a ROPS effectively becomes mandatory.

The VFF will be negotiating with Worksafe on how they develop this new assessment tool, what they deem to be an 'appropriate' ROPS.

Previous governments, Labor and Coalition, have been supportive of farm safety campaigns to minimise deaths and injuries on farm. Most notably, the 1997-98 ROPS rebate campaign for farm tractors, has saved two farmers annually, according to an evaluation of the scheme by Monash University Accident Research Centre.

The VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to mount a similar rebate and publicity campaign for ROPS on quad bikes.

In 2015 the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety reported 15 quad bike deaths, plus an almost unquantifiable number of injuries.

*Double the payroll tax free threshold from \$550,000 to \$1.1 million*

Victoria has the lowest payroll tax free threshold in Australia. This means smaller employers are subject to taxation costs that are not imposed on the same sized businesses in other states. This has a significant impact on agricultural employers, and particularly horticulture businesses that are more labour intensive. Victoria's horticulture industry is in direct competition with Queensland, however Victoria's payroll tax free threshold of \$550,000 is only half that of Queensland, which has a threshold of \$1.1m. For agriculture and horticulture to remain competitive in Victoria the payroll tax free threshold should be brought into line with Queensland, and increased to \$1.1m.

*Increase WorkCover remuneration thresholds*

The system of determining WorkCover premiums is based on a percentage of Total rateable remuneration. The thresholds for determining the level of insurance have not changed since the mid-1990s, whereas wage rates have increased substantially. This has a disproportionate impact on industries with a high industry rate, such as sheep farming.

For sheep farmers the cost of employing shearers has increased by 75 per cent since 1997, while the thresholds for determining Work Cover premiums remain unchanged. The State Government should review and update the thresholds for workers compensation taking into account increases to wage rates.

*Remove the automatic indexation of Government charges*

It is State Government policy that rises in its taxes and charges are linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The VFF urges the State Government to replace this automatic indexation with a system that allows taxpayers to scrutinise and demand the government justify these increases to ensure government accountability. Further, the VFF wishes to highlight that previous federal governments have reversed their policies on some automatic CPI increases.

Competitive pressures force private enterprise to increase productivity and reduce the costs of production as they cannot automatically apply a CPI rise to their prices. It is reasonable to expect the Government sector to subject to the same drivers for productivity.

Taxes and charges applied on an *ad valorem* basis increase over time as the price of goods or incomes rise. These rises should not be magnified by any increase in the rate of the tax or charge. If taxes and charges are to be linked to CPI it should be on the basis of CPI minus a percentage, in order to drive increases in productivity.

Allowing Governments to increase taxes and charges in line with CPI is not conducive to obtaining a more efficient Government sector. The private sector has reduced costs, increased productivity and improved services without the privilege of being able to automatically increase prices. The Government sector should be under the same pressures.

## 4.4 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

### **Growing the next generation of food and fibre professionals**

Education is an important tool to improve the perceived image of agriculture, understanding Australia's food and fibre system and the wealth of opportunity in the industry. To capitalise on the opportunities presented by Australia's access to Asian markets, and mitigate the challenges posed by a changing climate and growing population, producers and agribusiness professionals need to be able to innovate, harness new technologies and find new yield efficiency. The increasingly complex nature of modern agriculture requires a highly trained workforce and continuing to attract skilled people into agricultural careers will be paramount for success.

#### ***Review current curriculum and work towards integrating agriculture into all primary and secondary school subjects***

The VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to ensure schools at both a primary and secondary level are incorporating agriculture into all facets of learning. Due to the industry being multidimensional, practical examples of the industry can be incorporated into every subject.

#### ***Inclusion of compulsory 'financial literacy' curriculum at a secondary school***

The VFF believes there would be significant benefit in ensuring that every Victorian school graduate has basic financial literacy skills, such as how to prepare a budget, file for an ABN, complete a tax return and understand basic accrual accounting. This would not only benefit agriculture students, who would then be better positioned to manage their farm business, but also more broadly ensure that all Victorians possess a basic level of financial competency.

#### ***Funding to centralise food and fibre teacher and student resources***

There were a significant number of resources collated during the Food and Fibre Careers Project, in addition to many other classroom resources that industry bodies develop. The VFF is asking the Victorian Government to commit to centralising these resources through an online portal that would allow all teachers, careers advisors and students to simply navigate and gain access to the wealth of information and learning tools currently available.

## 5. Drought Support

An ongoing commitment to drought support is crucial to Victorian farmers and the VFF has appreciated the State Government's efforts during 2015-16 to assist farmers and their communities with a range of initiatives.

These include:

- \$600,00 towards the \$2000 Stock Containment Grant
- \$1 million to employ drought affected farmers and farm workers on environmental projects
- \$1.5 million for a Drought Extension Program to help farmers make necessary on-farm decisions such as de-stocking, animal health and welfare, feed budgeting, land management, irrigation and water use efficiency
- \$220,000 to deliver Mental Health First Aid training across the ten identified drought affected local council areas and implement local community engagement and support measures
- \$270,000 for additional Rural Financial Counsellors
- \$300,000 from the State Schools Relief program to provide families in drought affected communities with uniforms, shoes and other school items.
- \$960,000 to support kindergarten participation in drought affected communities
- \$5.8 million from the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to ensure kids in drought affected regions don't miss out on these important educational experiences

**The VFF will continue to work with the Government on delivering support to drought affected farmers and their communities**

## Appendix A

### VFF Intensive Farmers Officers (Animal Health and Biosecurity)

<b>Proposal for funding from the State Government Budget 2016/2017</b>	
Project name	VFF Intensive Farmers Officers (Animal Health and Biosecurity)
Project leader and organisation	Victorian Farmers Federation Intensive Farming Group
Aim	<p>To deliver key animal health and biosecurity messages to all Victorian chicken meat, eggs and pigs producers with a focus on endemic and exotic diseases that impact animal welfare, farm profitability and Victoria's biosecurity status.</p> <p>Current disease management techniques differ between individual producers causing a failure to coordinate strategies across and between the intensive industries. This failure has contributed to substantial losses in these industries with an increase of the incidents of disease over the last 18 months. New outbreaks are currently being advised every week. Of even greater concern is the potential for a lack of coordination and limited information sharing to hinder containment efforts if a major disease outbreak were to occur.</p> <p>The recent influx of smaller commercial producers and the expansion of the free range sector, present new challenges in biosecurity for all of the intensive industries. Providing educational opportunities and a point of contact for these farmers will assist in mitigating future risk of major outbreaks.</p>
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide educational workshops for all producers.</li> <li>2. Develop and/or distribute related industry materials including VFF online resources to the farming community.</li> <li>3. Be a point of contact for any animal health and biosecurity questions.</li> </ol>
Background and description of project	<p>Victoria's intensive industries require an effective and informative communication avenue to provide support to individuals and producer groups in relation to animal welfare and biosecurity measures. The role of the farming Officer would be to help foster awareness and improvement through collaboration among Victorian and national intensive farming networks.</p> <p>With the purpose of assisting producers' awareness, knowledge and management of diseases and farm biosecurity the farming officer will undertake workshops which will include, but is not limited to, the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biosecurity e.g. general principles, quality assurance, disease management programs</li> <li>• Exotic and Emergency diseases e.g. Avian influenza</li> <li>• Reproductive diseases</li> <li>• Metabolic diseases</li> <li>• Emerging diseases</li> <li>• Transport procedures</li> </ul> <p>Workshops will be designed to cater for smaller farmers, those new to farming intensives as well as to upgrade the skills of larger and more established farmers.</p> <p>Sessions will alternate between practical on-property workshops and theory seminar-style workshops with a range of speakers including both government and private veterinarians, farming officers, industry specialists and leading producers.</p>

	<p>Outcomes from these events will include an increased level of confidence in the identification, management and prevention of diseases as well as a greater understanding of biosecurity and its importance to the Victorian and Australian agricultural industry</p> <p>In addition to the delivery of educational workshops, the program will also disseminate key animal health messages via;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traditional media including Stock &amp; Land, Weekly Times, Local News, media releases, VFF and industry publications</li> <li>• social media including Twitter and Facebook</li> <li>• the development of animal health factsheets (available online and at events)</li> <li>• the distribution of farm gate biosecurity signs.</li> <li>• providing an active presence at field days, VFF events, other industry events and meetings including guest speaking roles e.g. VFF branch meetings, Industry conferences,</li> </ul> <p>The farming officer will also act as a primary point of contact for animal health and biosecurity questions for all of the intensive industry producers.</p> <p>The VFF is best placed to provide an effective service in Victoria, as we have both a high levels of producers as members and strong contacts across these industries. In addition the VFF has had success with a similar role focused on the livestock industry.</p> <p>The Intensive Farming Group has already supported greater action in biosecurity and animal welfare through providing quality assurance training to chicken meat and egg producers and by funding a lead veterinarian to investigate.</p>
Project deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment of one full-time staff member</li> <li>• Continue to deliver animal health and biosecurity messages to Victorian intensive farming producers via publications, events and individual contact.</li> <li>• Provide two progress reports a year to the government.</li> <li>• Provide four progress reports a year to VFF intensive farming Councils.</li> </ul>
Project duration (include commencement date)	Commencing 1st July 2016 until 30th June 2017 (1 year).
Total budget for duration of project	\$150,000 annually