

Media Release

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Solar energy guidelines must value food and fibre

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has today submitted a response to the Victorian Government's Draft Solar Energy Facilities Guidelines calling for protection of valuable agricultural land.

"Agriculture is one of the most valuable uses of our limited land resources, and the Government needs to recognise this in their guidelines for solar energy facilities," said Mr David Jochinke, Victorian Farmers Federation President.

"Unlike every other industry, there are no clear planning and building regulations for large scale solar infrastructure developments. This has created uncertainty and disputes as large developments spanning hundreds of hectares are rolled out without appropriate planning regulations or guidelines.

"These draft guidelines are a good start but are not sufficient to ensure agricultural land is protected," he said. "We need a state-wide, strategic plan for all renewable energy facilities that considers how these sites will impact high-value agricultural land, community infrastructure and services, and the flow-on effects to neighbouring properties.

"We want to maximise agricultural production and also see renewal energy grow, but to achieve this requires the provision of clear guidelines to ensure the two can coexist without conflict.

"We have seen recent examples of farmers and communities feeling threatened by applications for solar energy industrial facilities for which the value to the community is unclear and where these facilities would significantly impact the landscape.

"Our members are also concerned by potential unintended consequences for properties neighbouring solar facilities, which we believe requires further scientific investigation.

"The VFF recognises that there is huge opportunity for greater adoption of renewable energy technology on farms that exists in conjunction with farming. This includes solar panels on sheds, which do not interfere with existing production and allow farmers to decrease their input costs.

"The Andrews Government appears to have a strong focus on renewable energy. If this is to succeed, clear and fair planning guidelines must be implemented to recognise the importance of agriculture and meet community expectations," said Mr Jochinke.

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About the VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is dedicated to representing the interests of farmers and making a positive difference to their businesses and communities. We strive to create an environment for our members, our farmers, that enables profitable, safe, sustainable production to ensure an enduring social licence in a community that respects and values the sector.