

## Media Release

Monday 18 March 2019

### St Patrick's Day fires anniversary – why no progress?

On the 12 month anniversary of the devastating St Patrick's Day fires in south west Victoria, the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria (UDV) is calling for urgent action to be taken.

"Our farmers suffered, and continue to be reminded every day, of the devastating impacts of the St Patrick's Day fires," said Mr Paul Mumford, UDV President.

"Despite investigations, reviews, inquiries and a set of robust recommendations, I stand here today completely disappointed at the lack of progress and improvement. It is unacceptable.

"Our farmers continue to be 'on edge' every day the dry conditions prevail or when the wind picks up," he said. "Faulty powerlines are not acceptable. We demand action.

"We call on Energy Safety Victoria to fulfil its duty, and in the event the capacity of the regulator is not sufficient, than it must be given the power to hold energy companies to account.

"Energy Safe Victoria determined in its technical investigation that the Garvoc and Terang-Cobden fires were sparked by Powercor's poorly maintained power poles.

"Our farmers are calling on the energy provider, Powercor, to step up – twelve months is more than enough time to take action.

"I question if Powercor truly comprehends the impact it has had on our farmers' bottom line and their mental health. Does the company value its social licence?"

"The UDV is scheduled to meet with Energy Safety Victoria and we will be raising these issues. I also encourage the Victorian Energy Minister to visit the area, to step on-farm and see first-hand the risk and great anxiety that our dairy farmers face every day.

"Now is the time for action to be taken to protect our rural and regional communities. Fire is a truly devastating event and we must do everything we can to prevent such tragedy unfolding," he said.

On 17 March 2018, two fires in Garvoc and Terang-Cobden were sparked by degraded energy infrastructure in south west Victoria. Over two days a number of fires burnt thousands of hectares, killed over 2000 livestock, and damaged hundreds of farm businesses. The extent of the devastation triggered the Victorian Government to declare a state emergency.

ENDS

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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.