

STATE BUDGET 2020-21

SUBMISSION

FEBRUARY 2020



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

DELIVERING FOR AGRICULTURE | STANDING UP FOR REGIONAL VICTORIA

OUR VISION FOR AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Victorian farmers contribute over \$13.16 billion to Victoria's economy, representing 27.8% of the state's exports valued at \$11.9 billion. Over 87,000 Victorians are employed in the state's agricultural industries that underpins our rural and regional communities.

In order to continue operating and growing in a dynamic global environment, Victorian farmers need the continued support of their government by making sure farm businesses and rural communities get a fair go.

As the voice for Victoria's farming community the VFF seeks a competitive and unrestricted economic environment in which agriculture can compete on equal terms with other sectors and countries.

We need guaranteed energy supply, fit-for-purpose roads, reliable telecommunications, fair planning controls and support to combat the emerging threats to agriculture like biosecurity risks.

Fundamentally, we need a state budget that supports and promotes viable and responsible agricultural production - not get in its way. That includes a budget that responsibly manages our state's finances and does not seek to introduce to new taxes and charges that will hamper regional Victoria and agriculture's productivity.

It is also important that the 2020-21 State Budget takes the necessary steps to support communities impacted in the recent Gippsland and Upper Murray bushfires.

The VFF is grateful to all levels of government for the assistance and support that has been provided to those communities, however, the road to recovery is long and continued investment and care is needed to ensure that farming communities are not forgotten.

We will keep a close eye on the bushfire recovery on the ground in these communities and advocate strongly on behalf of impacted farmers. We will also continue to be a strong voice for our emergency services, particularly our CFA, advocating for the resources and equipment our volunteers need to keep our communities and themselves safe.

The VFF platform is determined by our members - farmers living and working amongst Victoria's rural and regional communities. They are passionate about the food and fibre they produce and they are passionate about living in healthy communities.

This submission outlines the programs and projects in addition to the core business of government that our members believe will assist to deliver for Victorian agriculture and our regional communities now and into the future.



David Jochinke
President



2020-21 STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES

The VFF has four major priorities that must be funded in this year's State Budget to help Victorian agriculture remain competitive and to benefit our rural and regional communities.

FIX COUNTRY ROADS

The VFF is seeking \$500 million over the next four years in the Budget to continue the Fixing Country Roads Program which provides dedicated funding to rural and regional councils to undertake local road restoration.

We are also seeking base level funding of \$160 million each year dedicated to repairing Victoria's decaying regional road network.

Additionally, the VFF are also seeking a further \$250 million of dedicated funding to assist councils in assessing and fixing bridges.



FINISH MURRAY BASIN RAIL

We are seeking a commitment in the Budget to complete the Murray Basin Rail Project according to the 2015 business case, including the promised increases in Tonne Axle Load capacity and train speeds.

We are also seeking \$25 million to upgrade the Maroona-Portland rail line and deliver the Port Rail Shuttle project to remove trucks from Melbourne Roads. For every year the Murray Basin Rail project is delayed, Victorian farmers lose \$12 million in additional freight costs.



BETTER COMMUNICATIONS

Poor connectivity in regional areas is holding farm businesses back whilst also posing a safety risk to all in the community who rely on the internet during emergencies. The VFF is seeking an additional \$50 million to help target mobile phone blackspots in rural and regional Victoria.



BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

The VFF support the call for a \$14.5 million increase in funding to replace the state's ageing fleet of tankers and pumpers. We also support an increase to the CFA's capital works budget to help construct new fire stations.

We are also seeking \$350,000 dedicated funding to improve the interaction between Victoria's emergency services and the agricultural sector through improved map data, embedding agriculture in the emergency management manual and training emergency managers in how to better assist farmers during and after emergencies.

We also support increased funding to expand Victoria's fuel reduction program including \$5 million for dedicated hazard reduction along roadsides.



AGRICULTURE

Cattle Underpass Scheme

The VFF is seeking \$3 million to continue the Cattle Underpass Scheme improving the safety for all rural road users by taking animals off the road.

Q Fever Awareness

The VFF is seeking \$1 million for Agriculture Victoria to run a dedicated community awareness program about the risks of Q fever, support for rural health professionals, preventative measures and research into a new, much-needed Q fever vaccine.

Feral Pig Control Program

The VFF is seeking \$6 million to fund a dedicated program to control and eradicate feral pigs in response to the global threat of African Swine Fever.

Wild Dog Management Program

Wild dogs cost Victoria's livestock industry an estimated \$13-18 million per year. The VFF is seeking \$17 million to continue Victoria's Wild Dog Management program.

Chicken Care Program

The VFF is seeking \$80,000 to continue research and training into controlling environmental impacts of broiler farms. Since the program began there has been an 89% reduction in environmental complaints in Victoria related to Chicken Meat farms.

Young Agribusiness Professionals

The VFF is seeking \$400,000 funding to establish a three year program to reinvigorate its Young Agribusiness Professionals Program to enhance networking between young people who are working in or are interested in agriculture.



ENERGY

Agriculture Energy Investment Plan

The VFF supports the continuation of the Victorian Government's Agriculture Energy Investment Plan beyond its March 2020 deadline to ensure farmers can take advantage of the benefits of on-farm renewable energy.

Long term energy plan and safety upgrades

\$155 million is needed to develop a long-term energy plan including upgrades to support energy transmission capacity in regional areas and to upskill electrical contractors to provide advice and to service farms.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

VFF Workplace Safety program

The VFF is seeking continued support of its ongoing partnership with the Victorian Government to deliver on-farm safety assessment, advice and support for farmers to make sure all agricultural workers always return home safe.

PLANNING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Emergency Local Government Rate Relief

Farmers impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires need to be supported through rate relief to assist with their recovery and rebuilding of their businesses.

Right to Farm

The VFF is seeking \$3 million over two years to enable system changes to reduce regulatory overlap in the planning system and to ensure farming zones facilitate, rather than hinder productive agricultural uses.

Agricultural Referral Officers

The VFF is seeking \$2.5 million to establish dedicated officer who will advise state and local governments regarding the impacts and opportunities from government programs and regulations on agriculture.



WATER

Resourcing Catchment Management Authorities

The VFF believes Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) should be better funded to implement integrated cross tenure pest plant and animal management frameworks.

Hinterland Environmental Watering Project

The VFF is seeking \$500,000 in funds and in-kind support to match Commonwealth funding to conduct a feasibility study to provide water for high value horticultural use on the Mornington Peninsula from the South Eastern Outfall.

TRANSPORT

Priority Road Projects

The VFF is seeking a combined \$35 million for the following road upgrades:

- Calder Bypass - Inglewood
- Robinvale-Sea Lake Road
- Yarriambiack Bridge, Borug Highway - Warracknabeal
- Avoca Bridge - Charlton

Agricultural Freight Movement Review

The VFF is seeking \$100,000 to allow VicRoads to undertake a review to highlight where infrastructure is needed to better suit current and future freight movements.

Increasing Heavy Vehicle Access

The VFF is seeking \$150,000 to increase resourcing for VicRoads' Heavy Vehicle Network to address red tape issues with current regulations that are preventing the efficient movement of freight.