



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

The Hon. Tim Pallas MP
Treasurer
Level 4, 1 Treasury Place
EAST MELBOURNE, VIC 3002

10 March 2021

Dear Treasurer,

RE: VFF State Budget 2021-22 Submission

This year's VFF Budget Submission is focussed on growing Victorian agriculture and helping our state get back on track as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst we appreciate the strained economic environment that the Victorian Government is currently working under, the VFF believes the Government has a once in a generation opportunity to revive regional Victoria and help lead the state from its economic challenges.

Despite the challenges of bushfires, drought and COVID-19, agriculture has been one of the Victorian economy's standout performers. Our 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, underpinning our rural and regional communities.

Improving supply chain efficiency is critical for ensuring a prosperous and sustainable agriculture industry. The VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to make substantial investments in upgrading and maintaining regional road and rail freight networks to ensure our export industry can remain globally competitive. Farming communities are concerned that there is a backlog of regional infrastructure developments that needs to be addressed immediately. Failing to do so will hold our rural economies back from reaching their potential and compromise the safety of Victorians travelling on our country roads.

We also call on the Victorian Government to assist the local government sector to deliver the services and infrastructure farmers rely on. Local government faces a large task to maintain essential services, such as roads and bridges and emergency water supply. They also have a significantly smaller rate payer base to raise the necessary revenue. The VFF is concerned the

inequity between city and country will continue to increase without increased State Government support.

Additionally, we are seeking government programs that leverage farmers' own investments in growing and protecting their businesses whilst improving safety outcomes with the reintroduction of the *Cattle Underpass Scheme*, the *Quad Bike Safety Rebate Scheme*, the *On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme* and our newly proposed *On-farm Fire Suppression Grants*. As well as providing farm businesses the opportunity to grow, these programs also attract investment in rural communities.

The VFF is proud to present these positive solutions for the Government's consideration and we remain committed to working with the Government to achieve positive outcomes for farmers, our families and our communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Germano', written in a cursive style.

Emma Germano
VFF President

Victorian Farmers Federation

2021-22 STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION

March 2021

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Road and Rail Freight

Fixing Country Roads

- A minimum \$650 million over four years base level funding for rural road maintenance
- \$250 million for regional shires to assess bridges
- \$200 million over four years for the Fixing Country Roads Program (local government)

Murray Basin Rail

- Complete the Murray Basin Rail Project according to the 2015 business case
- \$25 million to upgrade the Maroona-Portland rail line

Regional Road Projects

- Funding to address key issues on the Calder Freeway including Inglewood Bypass and;
 - \$2 million to upgrade Loddon River Bridge, Bridgewater
 - \$2 million to upgrade Avoca Bridge, Charlton
- \$40 million upgrade Robinvale-Sea Lake Rd between Bannerton and Sea Lake
- \$2 million upgrade Dimboola Bridge, Western Highway
- \$4 million to allow B-double crossing on Western Highway intersections of Nhill-Jeparit Road and Nhill Netherby Road

Regional Freight Network Support

- \$100,00 for a report- review Victorian agricultural freight movements requirements
- \$150,000 per annum increase to include one additional FTE staff for VicRoads Heavy Vehicle network team to work with local councils on increasing heavy vehicle access

Agriculture

- \$10 million to match Commonwealth funding for On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme
- \$12.5 million additional funding to secure the Wild Dog Management Program
- \$3 million to reintroduce the Cattle Underpass Scheme
- \$3 million to reintroduce the Quad Bike Safety Rebate Scheme
- \$2 million for On-farm Fire Suppression Grants
- \$155,000 additional funding for Shearer Training

Energy

- \$155 million long term energy plan and safety upgrades
- \$5 million to establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee to oversee the preparation of a state-wide strategic plan for renewable energy

Environment

- \$40 million to tackle pest plants and animals

Local Government and Planning

- \$2.5 million funding for Local Government managed standpipes and emergency water points
- \$2.5 million to create Agricultural Referral Officers
- \$6 million for SMART planning and agriculture program
- \$5 million for dedicated hazard reduction along roadsides

ROAD & RAIL FREIGHT

Moving more with less will be central to ensuring a globally competitive and sustainable agricultural industry. Reliable and efficient road and rail freight networks are crucial to the productivity of Victoria's agricultural industry and the prosperity of regional communities. Victorian agriculture can only grow if farmers can move their produce efficiently.

According to CSIRO TranSIT modelling, total annual transport costs for Victorian agriculture is \$5.8 billion, with supply chains costs often being the single largest cost in agricultural production. High transport costs have a direct impact on the profitability of Victorian farmers, threaten the global competitiveness of Victorian agriculture and increase the price of food for Victorian families.

Infrastructure Victoria has found that freight volumes in regional Victoria are forecast to grow at an average rate of 1.5 per cent each year between 2014 and 2051. To cope with current and future expected demand, we require modern, fit for purpose freight networks and systems that facilitate the efficient and safe movement of agricultural produce to market.

Over the last two decades, people and freight travel on Victoria's major country roads has increased by 20% and growth is expected to continue. This has implications for network capacity and road maintenance. According to the RACV, on average, seven per cent of the regional road network across Victoria is in a 'distressed' condition. The 2017 Victorian Auditor-General's report supported these findings, concluding that the increasing proportion of the state road network is increasing the risks to public safety. It found that not enough funding is allocated to sustain the road network, and included government modelling, indicating that with the current funding levels, 50 per cent of the network would be in very poor condition within seven years.

Conversely, the benefits presented by regional rail freight are being hindered by factors including different rail gauges, axle load restrictions, permanent and temporary speed restrictions and maintenance backlogs. Lack of investment in Victoria's rail freight network is a substantial obstruction to further uptake of freight on rail. A poorly maintained network diminishes performance and reliability, reduces the life of the assets, and increases the risk of catastrophic failures. This leads to transport delays and higher costs, which are ultimately born by farm businesses. Uncertainty regarding the government's long-term commitment to regional rail freight will result in many farmers and their suppliers being forced to shift away from rail and onto road, making rail freight less viable into the future, and putting greater strain on a regional road network at breaking point, as well as increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Fixing Country Roads

In order to immediately address the decline in regional road conditions, **the VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to provide a minimum of \$650 million in the budget over the next four years for dedicated regional road asset maintenance.** This equates to base level funding of over \$160 million each year. The base level funding should be locked into the forward estimates to provide long term funding certainty allowing VicRoads to more efficiently plan for maintenance and to prioritise projects according to need. The VFF notes the RACV's claim made in 2016 that \$304 million funding is required each year, and even at that level, the funding would not slow down the deterioration of other roads. We strongly urge the government (once it locks in base level funding for regional road maintenance) to increase the road asset maintenance budget to keep up with system demands.

Along with this funding the VFF echoes Infrastructure Victoria's call for the Government to specify clear levels of service for each type of regional road and bridge within two years and to then fund an ongoing program to fund regional road and bridge maintenance and upgrades to meet these service levels.

The VFF is also seeking **\$200 million over the next four years in the Budget to reintroduce the *Fixing Country Roads Program* to provide dedicated funding to rural and regional councils to undertake local road restoration.**

The VFF is seeking **\$250 million of dedicated funding to assist rural and regional local government authorities in assessing and fixing bridges.** Many rural and regional local government authorities have imposed weight restrictions on bridges, as they cannot afford to assess their ageing bridge infrastructure. For example, most bridges in the Golden Plains Shire have 2 tonne weight restrictions which effectively prevent agricultural machinery and freight from moving as well as impeding access for CFA vehicles. Grants would assist regional local councils to assess bridges and increase access for heavy vehicles.

Murray Basin Rail

The VFF is seeking a commitment in the Budget to **complete the Murray Basin Rail Project according to the 2015 business case**, including the promised standardisation of the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines, 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.

Victorian farmers need a long-term vision for a unified, modern regional rail network. As long as we continue to operate on two separate rail gauges in Victoria, farmers and industry will suffer with an outdated, costly and inefficient network.

A fit-for-purpose rail freight network must provide an opportunity for competition amongst train providers, storage facilities, access to all ports and access to the national rail network. The international competitiveness of our \$1.5 billion Victorian grain industry relies on the productivity and

efficiency of our supply chain. The conversion of old broad gauge rail lines to standard lines is critical to the efficient transport of grain and other products from North West Victoria to our ports.

Failing to convert the Sea Lake and Manangatang rail lines to standard gauge effectively isolates these lines from the rest of the Victorian and interstate network, and undermines the efficiency gains of the entire network upgrade project.

For every year the Murray Basin Rail project is delayed, Victorian farmers lose \$12 million in additional freight costs. Project delays are forcing more trucks onto the roads, with the potential for 10,000 B-double trucks of grain using the roads each month in 2021 – further compounding the need for investment to fix country roads to ensure the safety of all road users.

Regional Road Projects

Funding to address key issues on the Calder Highway

The Calder Highway is a critical freight route for agricultural produce. The regions connected to the Calder Highway corridor generate nationally significant levels of exports of agricultural produce such as grains, fruits, nuts, fibre and livestock. Current restrictions on key infrastructure are restricting the efficiency of freight movements.

- **\$2 million to upgrade Loddon River Bridge, Bridgewater.** Currently there is a 71 tonne load limit for A-doubles. Class 2 network PBS A-double and road train A-doubles have conditionally approved access on the Calder for 85.5 tonnes however, they have to underload to 73 tonnes to cross the bridge.
- **\$2 million for upgrade Avoca Bridge, Charlton.** Currently there is a load limit of 74 tonnes for A-doubles on the Avoca Bridge in Charlton. Class 2 network PBS A-double and road train A-doubles have conditionally approved access on the Calder for 85.5 tonnes however, they have to underload to 73 tonnes to cross the Avoca Bridge.
- **Scoping works for the Inglewood Bypass.** The township of Inglewood is a notorious choke point on the Calder Highway. There is an increasing need to investigate the suitability of options for heavy vehicles to bypass the town.

\$40 million upgrade Robinvale-Sea Lake Rd between Bannerton and Sea Lake

Recent works on the Robinvale – Sea Lake Road topped up the shoulders with suitable material for light traffic to allow the speed limit to be reinstated. However this material is not pavement standard and any large vehicles will damage the road surface creating the large drop that existed previously and reinstatement of an 80kmh limit. Upgrading the road would allow it to carry PBS and road train A-doubles, improving cross-border road freight movements and reduce supply chain costs for the region's grain, horticulture and livestock industries. Currently trucks either have to travel from Robinvale through Hattah and Ouyen to get to Manangatang, or disconnect at Tooleybuc, bring one

trailer across to load before heading back to Tooleybuc, bring the second trailer across to load and then reconnect at Tooleybuc.

\$2 million upgrade Dimboola Bridge, Western Highway

The Western Highway is the second busiest national highway in Australia in terms of freight movements, with over five million tonnes annually. It provides the link between the eastern seaboard and South Australia and Western Australia. Currently the Dimboola bridge has a mass limit of 73 tonnes restricting access for high productivity freight vehicles on the bridge. The current restrictions are inhibiting the efficiency of freight movements on the Western Highway. Class 2 network PBS A-double and road train A-doubles have conditionally approved access on the Western Highway for 85 tonnes. However, they have to underload to 73 tonnes to cross the Dimboola Bridge.

\$4 million to allow B-double crossing on Western Highway intersections of Nhill-Jeparit Road and Nhill Netherby Road

Currently there is insufficient space between the Western Highway and the rail line for B-doubles to safely cross key intersections at Nhill Jeparit Road and Nhill Netherby Road needed for truck access for grain deliveries. Instead B-doubles are required to use a small local road past a school and kindergarten to access key silos, creating an unacceptable safety risk.

Regional Freight Network Support

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 associated with current Heavy Vehicle Network regulations** that are preventing the efficient movement of freight. The VFF is also seeking **\$200,000 to streamline & modernise current VicRoads infrastructure assessment process.**

AGRICULTURE

On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme

The VFF calls on the Victorian Government to commit **\$10 million in the budget to continue the *On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme*** to encourage investment in drought proofing stock and domestic water infrastructure. The program, jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, has been a popular program assisting farmers to prepare for and manage drought.

Renewal of the program will allow drought-affected livestock producers and horticulturalists with permanent plantings to receive rebates of up to 25 per cent of eligible costs - capped at \$25,000. Victorian farmers are waiting on the Victorian Government to match Commonwealth funding already provided in the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

The VFF believes the government must further enable farmers to connect to projects such as the Mitiamo, South West Loddon and East Grampians pipeline projects so they can take advantage of the program. With historic levels of public and private investment in stock and domestic water infrastructure across the state, there has never been a better time to incentivise farmers to invest in drought-proofing infrastructure.

With the current favourable seasonal conditions across much of Victoria, now is the time for farmers to prepare for future dry spells. The VFF supports programs that enable farmers to invest in infrastructure specifically for the purpose of drought preparedness and resilience in order to reduce the farming community's dependency on short-term government programs and assistance when drought occurs. The *On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme* allows farmers to put in pipelines, install troughs, enlarge dams and drill new bores. These are invaluable measures in helping to drought-proof farms.

Wild Dog Management Program

The VFF is seeking an **additional \$12.5 million four years to fund the *Victorian Wild Dog Management Program*** including investment in a Wild Dog Action Plan framework for Victoria, reestablishment of the dedicated Wild Dog Ministerial Advisory Committee and an emphasis on increasing aerial baiting programs to support on the ground control measures.

Wild dog predation on livestock, impact on native biodiversity and threats to public safety are of concern to the Victorian livestock industry and wider rural community. The economic impact of wild dogs on livestock production in Victorian is estimated to be \$13-\$18 million per year.

There is no clear long-term strategic plan for wild dog management in Victoria and there is no dedicated state committee to provide direct advice to the Minister on all matters relating to wild dog management.

The Victorian Government committed \$5.9million over four years in the 2020-2021 State Budget towards wild dog management. This funding is primarily for the development of a trap alert system

and the continuation of the wild dog and fox bounty. However, heavy wild dog predation is still occurring in some regions including the North East due to limited access to public lands for DELWP Wild Dog Controllers because of the rugged terrain.

In addition to the impact of wild dogs on the rural economy, the VFF is also concerned by their impact on community safety. Community members, including wild dog controllers, indicate an increase in the reports of 'non-farm' related incidents involving campers, bushwalkers, and dog walkers. These incidents include people feeling threatened for their safety by wild dogs, or even domestic dogs being attacked or killed by a wild dog.

Cattle Underpass Scheme

The VFF is seeking **\$3 million to reintroduce the successful *Cattle Underpass Scheme*** to improve safety for Victorian farmers and all road users, and to assist in the expansion of our livestock and dairy industries.

The Victorian Government originally instituted the Stock Over/Underpass Road Safety (SOURS) Program in August 2000. The long running scheme was renamed in 2012 as the Cattle Underpass Scheme and was successfully administered by the VFF on behalf of the Government. The last iteration of the scheme successfully ran between 2016 and 2019. The SOURS and CUPS schemes have helped to take thousands of cows off the state's roads, resulting in:

- Improved road safety;
- Improved 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.

Interest in the reintroduction of the scheme remains high with Victorian farmers. Demand particularly continues to be driven by the expansion of dairy farms. Victorian dairy herds have grown larger and become more productive, and in response many farmers have purchased additional land. This often results in an increasing need to move herds from one property to another, often across major roads. In turn, this creates road safety and amenity concerns. Separating cows from traffic through construction of a cattle over/underpass is the most effective solution to these concerns.

Under the program, eligible farm businesses will be able to apply for up to \$50,000 or 33 per cent of the cost of construction, helping to leverage private investment which in turn generates a substantial public benefit.

Shearer Training

The VFF is seeking **\$150,000 funding over two years to increase the number of government funded positions/students for the 22539VIC Course in Introductory Shearing** to alleviate labour shortages and animal welfare pressures.

The current allocation for 22539VIC Course in Introductory Shearing is capped at 100 students per annum however, this number is too low and does not allow for growth in shearer numbers to drive the industry forward. Covid-19 travel restrictions have placed increased pressure on the already present issue of labour shortages within the shearing industry. New entrants into the industry are crucial to prevent Victorian wool producers being in a vulnerable position leading to perverse outcomes for businesses and animal welfare.

Industry analysis and advice indicates that the number of funded positions should be at a minimum of 125 students annually. Given the workforce pressures exacerbated due to Covid-19, the industry requires this cap to be increased to up to 150 students/places for 2021 and 2022. The current demand for the entrant level course in 2021 is currently 147 places with training providers now in a position where they are turning away future shearers at the detriment of the industry.

This project seeks to provide funding certainty and confidence to both training providers and Victorian wool producers that quotas will be able to be set at a responsible level (of up to 150 places).

On-farm Fire Suppression Grants

The VFF is seeking **\$2 million funding to establish an *On-farm Fire Suppression Grants Scheme*** to enable farmers to buy new or upgraded firefighting equipment to rapidly suppress fire incidents and protect the community. Such a program will help recognise the importance of private units to Victoria's fire suppression regime and further enhance and grow the state's overall firefighting capability.

The VFF proposes that the Victorian Government make grants of up to \$5,000 available to farmers through Rural Finance to enable them to purchase equipment such as pumps, hoses, tanks, trailers, slip on and skid units, as well as decommissioned fire services vehicles. Funding would be conditional on a 50:50 basis. In this way, government and the farming community are better able to leverage their investment. It is recommended that grants be separated into two tiers with the majority of the pool of funds dedicated for grants up to the value of \$2,500 and a limited amount available for grants of up to \$5,000 for larger and more significant investments.

Farmers are crucial to Victoria's overall firefighting suppression regime. It was recognised in the Royal Commission into the disastrous 1939 Black Friday fires where Commissioner Stretton recommended that when a fire breaks out on private land "it should be made the duty of the landholder... to take immediate steps to check and suppress such fire". This recommendation is reflected today in Section 34 of the CFA Act, 1958. It has always been the custom and practice in Victoria that members of the community attend fires with their own equipment to protect their property and that of others.

Farmers are often best placed to rapidly respond to fires thereby controlling the fire's spread. As first responders, farmers reduce the risk of fires taking hold and can do so before emergency services units are despatched and on the scene. Particularly in areas of low population density such as in the state's North and West, farmers who are also members of their local CFA, are in the best position to lead the initial attack on the fire, especially when some may live up to 60 minutes away from their brigade appliance.

Quad Bike Rebate Scheme

The VFF is seeking \$3 million to reinstate the successful *Quad Bike Safety Rebate Scheme*. As part of our work on quad bike safety, the VFF administered the Victorian Government's \$6 million rebate scheme from 2016 to 2020. This scheme provided rebates for farmers to install roll over protection devices to existing quad bikes or they could use a rebate to buy a side-by-side vehicle.

The scheme offered rebates of or up to \$600 for the purchase of a rollover protection device for a quad bike or up to \$1200 for the purchase of a safer vehicle such as a side-by-side vehicle (SSV) or a small utility vehicle (SUV).

ENERGY

Long term energy plan and safety upgrades

The VFF is seeking **\$155 million 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.

The plan would incorporate:

- A pilot program to update Single Wire Earth Return (SWER) lines
- Upskilled electrical contractors to meet changing energy requirements.
- Regulation to ensure energy companies compensate agricultural users for losses stemming from unreliable electricity supply.

Renewable Energy Strategy

The VFF is seeking **\$5 million to establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee to oversee the preparation of a statewide strategic plan for renewable energy**, including community engagement.

The plan should consider issues relating to:

- Locations for renewable energy generation and transmission facilities where impact on agriculture should be minimised – such as of strategic agricultural land, irrigation areas, highly productive agricultural land;
- Impact on agricultural use including on commodities that require a threshold of productivity in a region;
- Impact on community and physical infrastructure and processors;
- Application buffer and setbacks required to mitigate off farm impacts;
- Areas requiring detailed environmental and agricultural Impact studies;
- Funding and responsibility for rehabilitation and restoration of sites and end of life (similar to the *Mineral Resources(Sustainable Development) Act*);
- Access (including easements on property and distance / type of transmission infrastructure to connect to main transmission line);
- Land access guidelines for transmission; and
- Community benefit, information and assistance

ENVIRONMENT

Tackling pest plants and animals

The VFF recommends **\$40 million be allocated over the next four years to public land managers to invest in pest plant and animal management.** Grants should be made available to Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) to work with farming communities to develop cross tenure management programs to reduce the impact of pest plants and animals to the economy and biodiversity.

The management of pest plants and animals on public land is in need of urgent investment to close the gap between the quality of species management on private and public land. Public authorities, particularly CMAs are not adequately funded to manage invasive and pest species on public land.

Farmers have obligations to manage these species on their land and, driven by interest in productivity and a willingness to protect the environment, they generally manage them to a much higher level than their public land neighbours. On public land there is an unacceptable willingness to allow pest plant and animal species to thrive free from intervention. This reality is in contravention of public land managers duties and needs to be addressed.

In addition the VFF recommends the Government undertake the following work to help plan for long term pest plant and animal management strategies:

- **\$500k to undertake a study to determine the cost of pest plants and animals** (including overly abundant wildlife to the Victorian economy) including the establishment of annual data collection and reporting requirements on all agencies (crown land act and biosecurity) to allow for this figure to be published annually and for each crown land manager to outline how they have met their CALP Act duties.
- **\$100k for the review of barriers to CMAs fulfilling their roles in co-ordinating integrated pest plant and animal management.**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & PLANNING

Support for Local Government run emergency water points

The VFF is seeking **\$2.5 million funding to make available grants of up to \$75,000 to upgrade local government managed Emergency Water Supply Points (EWSPs), bores and standpipes**. Under the proposed program, local government authorities would apply for funding to upgrade, repair or replace existing EWSPs. The program should not be made available to other managers of EWSPs such as urban and rural water corporations.

The Victorian Government's State Water Plan *Water for Victoria* makes clear the Victorian Government's commitment that it will "where necessary, work with emergency water supply point managers to upgrade and take ongoing responsibility for sites, consistent with roles and responsibilities". The VFF is aware of many local government authorities lacking the capacity to maintain EWSPs to an adequate standard for long-term community use. There is a great need for the Victorian Government to assist the rural and regional local government sector to upgrade and maintain EWSP sites.

The Victorian Government's current position towards EWSPs is to treat them as a drought relief service – that is to say government plans for them only to be used during drought and dry seasonal conditions. The Water Plan makes this view clear stating:

Some of these supply points have not been maintained between droughts and require costly refurbishment at the start of each new drought. Ongoing work is needed so that water carting supply points have a basic care and maintenance program or are mothballed so they can be cost-effectively recommissioned when the next drought occurs.

The VFF believes this position undermines the essential need for year-round access to EWSPs. Emergency water can be required at any time, not just during droughts, for example where on-farm stock water supply is contaminated or for bushfire preparation and response. EWSPs are essential for rural and regional communities where lack of access to an adequate water supply can be a common occurrence.

Ensuring planning systems support the growth of agriculture

The VFF is **seeking \$6 million for SMART planning and agriculture program** comprised of:

- \$3 million (over two years) to improve local government, planning and environment regulation and resourcing;
- \$750,000 for VPP process review/right to farm, including Green Wedge Zone and SPPF content;
- \$750,000 for streamlined native vegetation controls for agriculture – landscape scale;
- \$250,000 for Farm Zone practice notes;
- \$250,000 for audit of referral body conditions (FZ) and training;
- \$500,000 for translation of industry standards to be reflected in EPA standards;
- \$250,000 for a study to examine existing triggers in zones, overlays and particular provisions against SMART planning;

- \$150,000 solar farm planning provision; and
- \$100,000 to prepare guidance notes/ministerial directions outlining considerations before applying overlays on farming land and in the consideration of permit triggers in zones or particular provisions to minimise the regulatory burden on modernising existing use.

To achieve our goal as Australia's most sustainable farmers and profitable stewards of the land, we need a simplified and fair planning system, allowing farmers to choose the most appropriate farming system to grow their business and provide the food and fibre for all Victorians.

Planning should primarily focus on land use and development and let land management focused statutes address land management issues. We believe the planning system should not be used to restrict existing use rights without compensation. SMART Planning principles should be rigorously applied to existing and proposed planning provisions that restrict farming practices. Planning Scheme amendment processes must ensure that the social, economic and environmental impact of these controls are properly assessed.

Many of the changes in policy we are seeking relate to ensuring that the planning system supports the growth of agriculture. The Productivity Commission found that agriculture needs to comply with over 600 regulations. Pressure from interest groups to use the planning system to achieve land management or environmental outcomes (whether or not there is a land use or development change) leads not only to duplication of controls but conflict with achieving the outcomes of 'fit for purpose' regulation.

That is why we seek a 'first principles' approach to SMART Planning. There is a need to ensure existing as well as future planning controls are land use based and recognise existing land use and development (farming activities).

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.

Support for roadside hazard reduction

The VFF is seeking an additional **\$5 million to assist local government and VicRoads with roadside hazard reduction** to help prevent the spread of fire in rural and regional communities.

Farming communities are increasingly concerned by the lack of comprehensive and timely roadside slashing and maintenance, particularly with seasonal conditions promoting late spring and early summer vegetation growth. Local government needs more assistance with funding of this important service for community safety. Land across the state managed by VicRoads has been neglected with high grass along major highways and main roads. This lack of maintenance has also been compounded by lack of access to land due to the installation of roadside barriers.