



# GROWING OUR FUTURE

STATE BUDGET 2021-22 SUBMISSION

MARCH 2021

## OUR PLAN TO GROW AGRICULTURE AND HELP VICTORIA GET BACK ON TRACK

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.

Emma Germano  
VFF President



## 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.

### 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.

We are also seeking \$200 million over the next four years to reintroduce the Fixing Country Roads Program to provide dedicated funding to rural and regional councils to undertake local road restoration.

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

### Finish 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.

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.

### Regional Freight Network Support

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. \$150,000 is needed 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. We are also seeking \$200,000 to streamline and modernise current VicRoads infrastructure assessment process



## REGIONAL ROAD PROJECTS

VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to undertake these important road projects:

### Calder Highway

Funding to address key issues on the Calder Highway including Inglewood Bypass and;

- \$2 million to upgrade Loddon River Bridge, - Bridgewater
- \$2 million for upgrade Avoca Bridge - Charlton

### Mallee and Wimmera

- \$40 million upgrade Robinvale-Sea Lake Road 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

## 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.

### Wild Dog Management Program

Wild dogs cost Victoria's livestock industry an estimated \$13–18 million per year. The VFF is seeking \$12.5 million additional funding to continue Victoria's Wild Dog Management program.

### Shearer Training

\$150,000 is needed over two years to increase the number of government funded students for the Introductory Shearing course to ensure that a greater number of shearers are able to enter the workforce to alleviate labour shortages and animal welfare pressures.

### Quad Bike Safety Rebate Scheme

The VFF is seeking \$3 million to reinstate the lifesaving Quad Bike Safety Rebate Scheme.

### On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate

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.

### 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.

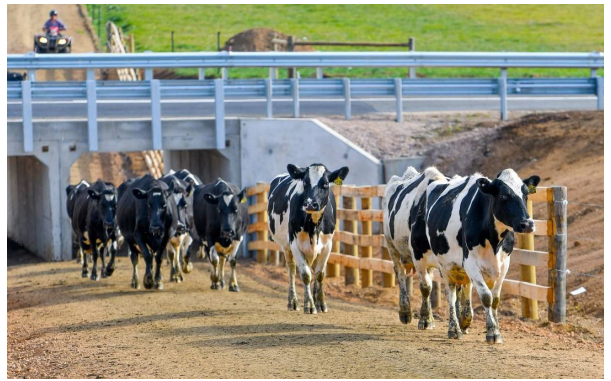
## ENERGY

### Long term energy plan

\$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.

### Renewable energy

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



## 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 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.



## 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.



### SMART Planning

The VFF is seeking \$6 million for SMART planning and agriculture program to improve local government, planning and environment regulation and resourcing.



### 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.



### 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.