

Good Neighbour Policy

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 173
1 September 2021

Policy Statement

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seek Government recognition of the high level of stewardship occurring on Victorian farms through financial and in kind assistance to ecosystem services provided on farm.
2. Public Land Management standards will include assessments of potential risks to private land emanating from public land. This includes fire risk, prevalence of pest plant and animals including overly abundant wildlife, biosecurity risks and risk to life and property from vegetation on boundaries or unauthorised access onto private property.
3. The VFF seeks a commitment from the Victorian Government that Public Land Management standards shall be equivalent to those required of private landholders, including recurrent funding for management of identified risks.
4. The VFF seeks a commitment to recurrent funding of the management of pest plants and animals on public land, so as to reduce the risk of weed incursions from public to private land.
5. Differential standards based on tenure that lead to additional risks / costs to the private land holder should be removed. For instance safety considerations in relation to vegetation and property boundaries should apply equally to public and private landholders and fencing costs should be shared.
6. Private landholders should have the right to protect their assets, including being able to request appropriate risk reduction actions on crown land.

Consultation

7. VFF seeks a commitment from Government to ensure a VFF representative is included in the Stakeholder Reference Group for any Park Management plan or policy / statute review process where the park adjoins land actively farmed or where the policy or legislation has the potential to have an impact on farming.
8. The VFF seeks to ensure a representative is included in any emergency management processes, for example fuel reduction plans or flood mitigation strategies.

Crown land interface

9. The VFF seeks a commitment to the provision of appropriate buffers on Crown land boundary fence lines, to help with the overall management of fire, weeds and pests and in the maintenance of fencing. The width should allow for emergency access / staging within the crown land and minimise the likelihood of damage to private property.

Fencing and Safety

10. The VFF seeks a commitment to the Government accepting responsibility to contribute half the cost of constructing and replacing dividing fence lines between crown land and private property.
11. Where animals are using crown land to access private property and that access is leading to lost production the VFF seeks crown grants for the additional cost to construct exclusion fencing.
12. The VFF seeks a commitment for Government to consider risk to life and property in consideration of native vegetation applications and to accept the legal and financial consequences of management actions not being undertaken.
13. The VFF seeks a risk management program requiring inspection by a qualified arborist of any tree deemed a risk by an adjoining owner and a program to implement the appropriate risk management activities.

Fire and Emergency Management

14. The VFF seeks a commitment to conduct fuel reduction along all national park and state forest boundary areas at a minimum interval of once in every 10 years, and development of a community education program to explain the importance of reducing fuel loads and maintaining forest biodiversity into the future.
15. State Emergency Management Priorities include farm businesses in the definition of property however fire risk and management is based on a dwelling as a default for life and property. This leads to failure to consider impacts of fire on farms in preparedness, response and recovery. As a dwelling is not the only indicator for risk to life and property on farms the VFF seeks the use of State Emergency Management Priorities in all fire and emergency management strategies and actions prepared by Government agencies.
16. The VFF seeks a commitment to ensuring that the development and maintenance of fire access tracks on public land meets appropriate safety standards and bushfire response preparedness.
17. The VFF seeks amendments to Native Vegetation Regulations to ensure that vegetation along roads can be managed to ensure safe access and egress by the public and emergency services.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

VFF Pest Plant and Animal Policy Statement
VFF Right to Farm Policy Statement