



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

SUBMISSION

Expert Panel's Review of Victoria's Building System

19 May 2021

OUR POSITION

Victorian farms are critical to regional economies and our food security.

For many years regulatory reviews about the functioning of building and planning systems have primarily focused on “urban development”.

The Building System is not something the majority of farmers regularly interact with. However it is a system that they interact with when investing in the expansion of production systems – hay sheds, machinery sheds, cool stores, dairies and worker accommodation are just some of the interactions farmers will have with the ‘building’ system.

For farmers, it is vital that the building system recognises the realities of building on farm and operating a building on farm. Structures may be isolated, unique in size, construction or use, serviced or non-serviced and construction may be a lengthy or difficult process due to availability of labour, consultants and materials. There are also unique safety considerations on farm that amplify the importance of compliance.

Deregulation of the building system has not always delivered a continuation of service. Until the mid-1990s all councils had a Municipal Building Surveyor who was also responsible for issuing building permits and undertaking inspections in that Municipal area. In addition, the Shire / City Engineer was required to have qualifications in Building Surveying.

This provided a situation where there was a technical resource available who understood the type of development occurring in the area – for a more practical approach to a flat structure of building class – so that emergency exit signage was not required for a shed with 2.5 open sides.

Critical inspections could be booked in without a delay in building process and several hours travel cost as Council provided that service locally.

The current system has seen many Councils have a “MBS’ contracted for as little as one day a month and purely in relation to ‘essential services’. Many areas do not have a Registered Building Surveying firm nearby. The deregulation has not provided more competition in rural and remote areas and has increased the cost of permits due to the distances travelled – including for inspections. The ‘distance’ also increases ‘wait times’ for inspections causing significant delays in construction.

The loss of ‘local knowledge’ and cost effective service provision is impacting on rural areas and compliance. Permits are often issued and many inspections ‘signed off on’ without detailed checking. This is reducing the quality assurance systems.

The ‘class’ system also needs review in relation to requirements for a ‘machinery’ shed with large openings versus a factory of the same size.

Loss of building departments in regional areas has led to a reduction in training and employment opportunities for regional Victorians in regional Victoria. Not only has the availability of trained Building Surveyors decreased over the past decades, but the number of practitioners in regional Victoria has reduced.

VFF urges the Panel to look at the pre and post regulation availability of services in regional Victoria and propose solutions to ensure delivery of a professional, affordable and accessible building system for all Victorians.

Emma Germano

President

Victorian Farmers Federation

The Victorian Farmers Federation

Victoria's agricultural production accounts for over \$13 billion of Victoria's economy and over 25 per cent of the State's exports per annum. Victoria's farmers produce high quality food and fibre, produced to high standards of safety, with little taxpayer support, and to some of the strictest environmental and highest animal welfare controls in the world.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) represents a farming community which creates a profitable, sustainable and socially responsible agriculture sector connecting with consumers.

We have a proud history representing Victoria's farm businesses since 1979 – primarily family farms that produce the eggs, grain, fruit and vegetables, meat, and milk that help to feed Victoria's six million people, and the bigger global community, every day.

The VFF consists of commodity groups: dairy (United Dairyfarmers of Victoria), grains, horticulture (including Flowers Victoria), intensives (chicken meat, eggs and pigs), and livestock – and expert committees representing; water, land management, agricultural and veterinarian chemicals, farm business and rural development, and workplace relations.

Our purpose is to make Victorian farmer's lives better; enhancing Victoria's future.

Our mission is to ensure a community of farmers creating a profitable, sustainable and socially responsible agricultural industry connecting with all Victorians.



Our place in Victoria

What we do



- Victoria's **20,775 farms** cover **10.6 million** hectares
- We are **24.2%** of Australian farmers
- **91%** family operated, with only **2%** foreign owned



- We employ **87,800** people mostly in regional areas
- **\$4739** of food consumed each year by every Australian
- As a net exporter we have long term food surity



- Our annual production is **\$13.16 billion**, **3.5%** of Victoria's economy
- **27.8%** of Victoria's exports are agricultural product valued at **\$11.9 billion**

How we do it



-  Farmers invest **\$80 million** in R&D
-  Every R&D **\$1** converts to **\$12** in farmer generated impact
-  **2.7%** productivity growth through innovative efficiency gains
-  Farmers receive less than **1.5%** in government support



-  **63%** reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 1996-2016
-  Water consumption reduced by **7%** from 2014-2015
-  Land conservation has increased to **18%** of total land mass.
-  Farmers spend **\$20,000** annually on feral animals and pest weeds



-  **3.5 million** beef cattle
-  **140 million** chickens
-  **1.1 million** dairy cows producing **6.186 billion** litres of milk
-  **65,992** sows
-  **13.1 million** breeding ewes and a fleece clip of **66,100 tonnes**
-  **6.5 million** tonnes of grain
-  **\$2.35 billion** in horticultural production