



Victorian  
Farmers  
Federation

# **VICTORIAN FARMERS FEDERATION**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

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# President's Message

**Hello Members, on behalf of the VFF Board of Directors, I am pleased to present my report for the 2020/21 financial year.**

Once again, it has been another challenging year for many in what will surely be remembered as an extraordinary period in our 43-year history.

Some incredibly amazing work has been undertaken throughout the past 12 months that allows us to navigate the headwinds we face and position our industry and organisation for success.

The lingering impacts of the pandemic have continued to affect almost every facet of what we do and how we work. It feels like an incredibly difficult time to be in business, with challenges that we never envisaged; vaccine mandates, isolation, shortages of key inputs, the never-ending challenge of freight and logistics, and I could go on. Despite these challenges and obstacles, we've remained steadfast in our primary role to keep Australia and the world fed.

We have kept our Country nourished and operating in the toughest of times. Whatever is thrown at us, we prevail. It really gives me a sense of pride and responsibility to be part of such a rewarding industry. It does also concern me however; that our success as an industry is making it difficult for us to advocate for sensible solutions. There is simply no fear in this State that the community might go hungry. Despite shortages of food on shelves, the Government's response throughout the year was clearly not perfect, in most instances far from it.

Case in point: we recently partnered with Food and Fibre Gippsland and Fruit Growers Victoria to help distribute over 56,000 Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) to farmers and rural Victorians in every corner of the State. We went to this extraordinary length because the Government hadn't secured RATs for our industry, which in my mind is beyond ludicrous.

In many ways, the initiative encapsulated the many challenges, obstacles and ultimately the can-do spirit that has been on display throughout the pandemic. Despite many frustrating delays, weeks of uncertainty and being at the mercy of our under-pressure supply chains, we got there in the end. It highlights our incredibly important role as the peak organisation for Victorian farmers and our core values.



As much as our recent times have been dominated by the pandemic, our organisation has remained agile to be able to continue to complete our essential role.

Our staff have been sporadically working from home and in the office during the number of lockdowns and health directions throughout the year and this has been managed relatively well given the circumstances.

Our policy response included numerous submissions, ongoing representation on recovery and review taskforces as well as positioning our policy response and stance for both the upcoming Victorian and Federal Elections that will be contested later this year in 2022.

We also presented our Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 that was developed by Member feedback that clearly demonstrated that the VFF needs to be a uniting voice for Victorian farmers to represent and support our Members.

Our mission is now clear and the VFF is now structured in a new, modern way that best enables us to deliver on our promises. It allows us to always represent, protect and progress Victorian farmers' interests.

To do this to the best of our ability, our focus for the next few years will be to foster a connected and



engaged farming community, use our resources responsibly, proactively advocate for Victorian farmers and continue to evolve and modernise the organisation.

It gives us a clear, dynamic plan that is underpinned by accountability to our Members and to each other and defines our way forward. It's exciting to have a roadmap for success clearly defined and I can't wait to bring all Victorian farmers along on the journey as we put the Strategic Plan into action.

Financially speaking, the VFF remains in a very sound financial position. Net assets at 30 September 2021 were \$38.4 million, and despite the Federation's operations resulting in a deficit of \$305k, this is healthier than the budget deficit estimated at the start of the financial year of \$755k and an improvement on the previous year's deficit. It demonstrates that we are heading in the right direction.

We must continue to be vigilant and financially responsible in these uncertain times. We must question the use of our assets and never take them for granted. It remains critical that we focus on further reducing our losses to ensure in the future we can fund our own operations and our nest egg should be used for growth platforms, strategic investment and the betterment of our farming community.

As we continue our economic recovery and we hopefully exit the pandemic in the near future, we will always prioritise our primary purpose, to be an effective voice for our Members, our industry and our community.

As always, I thank you for your enormous efforts and belief in what we do, and I invite you to read this Report further and ask any questions that you may have in our upcoming Annual General Meeting.

Happy farming,

**Emma Germano**

President  
Victorian Farmers Federation



# CEO's Message

**Facing obstacles and difficulties isn't unusual for Victorian farmers or for the VFF. As an organisation that advocates for Victorian farmers there is never a shortage of issues as we work to get a fair go for farmers.**

Add the ongoing COVID-19 curveballs, a new President and a new CEO to 'business as usual', and it has been a big year for the VFF.

Since commencing in mid-February 2021, my focus has been on clarifying and reinvigorating the team culture, developing a clear future plan and an organisational structure to support that plan.

In 2020, the VFF undertook a series of surveys of current staff and members, lapsed members, farmers who had never been VFF members and other key stakeholders. The feedback highlighted opportunities for growth and improvement. Some of the words used to describe us included siloed, outdated, reactive and unprofessional.

By focussing on how we would like to be described in future surveys we refined our values and behaviours and are using these to evaluate our performance. We aim to be:

- **United**  
One voice, one team one dream
- **Effective**  
Delivering on a clear strategy, clear goals and outcomes and communicating them
- **Professional**  
Treat others with respect, accountable, calm, skilled, honest, competent, positive, authentic, dedicated
- **Connected**  
Collaborate across the organization, in touch with our members, their issues and needs, strong, clear networks with relevant external organisations
- **Innovative**  
Adaptable, modern, applying ideas across commodities, teams and members

From this base and with the Board-approved Strategic Plan completed (see P9), we have developed a detailed Annual Operating Plan (AOP) that runs until 30 September 2022.




The AOP sets clear measures and projects to achieve those targets, with everything aimed at building towards our four key success indicators:

- We are financially supported by at least 5000 Victorian farmers by 2026;
- Our operating budget is in surplus by 2024;
- We achieve at least 50% of Policy Council's key objectives each and every year;
- Victorian farmers describe us as accountable, transparent, inclusive and effective.

To implement these plans, a new organisational structure was required. By strengthening Policy, Governance and Promotions and Communications, we now have greater capacity to do the most important jobs of advocating for Victorian farmers, improving communications and strengthening alternative revenue streams, delivering partnerships that our members value and improving our internal business processes.

We also consolidated our Farmer Engagement team, bringing our regional team and our commodity teams closer together to sharpen our attention on delivering for, and growing membership. This goes to the heart of being a united team.





We also heard the questions from Victorian farmers about the value of being a member and supporting the VFF.

We have started a regular 'What Have We Done For You Lately?' report that highlights our advocacy efforts and our wins and wherever possible, we are trying to put a financial value to those wins. It's an imperfect science, but by thinking about how what we do is of value to Victorian farmers, it motivates us and helps us demonstrate the value of the VFF.

Fundamentally we exist for one reason – to be the voice of Victorian agriculture, protecting and progressing farmers' interests.

I look forward to updating you throughout the year on our progress and am grateful for the opportunity to work with you and the passionate, dedicated and committed staff of the VFF.

Thank you,



**Jane Lovell**

CEO

Victorian Farmers Federation





# Vision

A secure farming future –  
for Victoria and for  
generations to come.





# Mission

We are the voice of Victorian agriculture: we protect and progress farmers' interests.





# 2021-2026 Strategic Plan Overview

## PILLAR 1

### ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURE

*(engaged, diverse people and culture)*

- A stronger more engaged farmer community
- Attract and retain young diverse farmers
- Provide support and representation for farmers in need
- Connect with the non-farming community
- Attract, develop and retain passionate and effective staff

## PILLAR 2

### FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

*(effective use of financial resources)*

- Establish corporate industry partnerships delivering member benefits
- Consolidate the service offering for our members
- Maximise investment portfolio
- Deliver valuable and impactful projects that add value to farmers

## PILLAR 3

### ADVOCACY

*(one advocacy voice for all Victorian farmers)*

- Ensure resourcing reflects our strategic objectives
- Streamline and digitise policy and advocacy
- Initiate core campaigns
- Stronger industry stakeholder relationships become modern and progressive in our advocacy strategies

## PILLAR 4

### GOVERNANCE

*(modern and agile corporate governance)*

- Increasing transparency and accountability
- Establish and communicate core values and ethics
- Diverse and professional Board, Committees and Councils
- Deliver outstanding customer service
- Establish best practice risk and governance culture and behaviours



# 2020/21 Financial Year Review

## Financial Overview

The result for the financial year ending 30 September 2021 was a surplus of \$1,353K. The key driver of this being a recovery in the value of the Federation's share portfolio and the budgeted surplus of \$361k from the Federation's share of the sale of NFF House in Canberra.

The Federation's operational budget performed better than expected by \$405K. While still resulting in a deficit of \$305k, this is significantly better than the FY 20 result of a \$445k deficit.

The impacts of COVID-19 continued throughout the financial year, with the cancellation of the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show and a number of VFF conferences and events.

Rent relief provided to tenants, and the inability to fill vacancies following the end of a number of leases, saw a decline of \$364 in the annual rental revenue from \$1,807k in FY20 to \$1,443k in FY21.

Partially offsetting this, Government COVID stimulus in the forms of State government land tax relief, and the final stages of the Federal Government measures, provided income of \$280k.

There was a modest increase in debt levels of \$173k to fund ongoing improvement works to Farrer House. However Net Assets attributed to members increased from \$37.1m to \$38.5m.

## Revenue

Membership revenue and subscriptions for FY21 of \$3,647k was similar to the previous year of \$3,685k. Sponsorship and partnership revenue (Commercial revenue) of \$986k was \$405k below the prior year due to many events not taking place.

Retention and growth of our membership base is a key pillar of our strategic plan. We have invested in a new CRM system over the last 2 years to assist in achieving this goal.

Income from projects of \$2 million is down on the previous year following the winding down of a number of projects commenced in previous years.

## Expenses

Employee costs have remained relatively stable compared to the prior year. A re-structure of the organisation resulted in a small number of redundancies. Staffing costs following the restructure are similar to those of the previous structure.

Overall, expenditure in relation to the core operations of the federation were approximately \$500k lower than the previous year, with the major reduction attributable to fewer events in FY21. This offsets the decline in Sponsorship and Partnerships (Commercial revenue) highlighted earlier.

## Projects

Projects operate on a cost recovery basis. They provide positive services for Victorian farmers, a positive image for the Federation and assist in our marketing and positioning strategies with industry and government.

Income from projects in FY21 was \$2.1 million, compared to \$5.6 million in FY20 and \$2.6 million in FY19. FY20 stood out due to the significant activity relating to the fodder drive and quad bikes.

In FY21 a significant amount of expenditure related to the development and delivery of the Making Our Farms Safer (MOFS) project.

Active projects during FY21 included:

- Making Our Farms Safer
- Educating Kids about Agriculture
- Stock Sense
- Farm Machinery Improvement Grant
- Cattle Underpass Scheme (CUPS)
- Developing Community Understanding of Agriculture

Projects operate on a cost recovery basis. They provide a very positive image of the federation throughout regional Victoria and assist in our marketing and positioning strategies with Industry and Government.

## Investment Income

The Federation's investments include the managed share and investment portfolio and Farrer House.

The managed share and investment portfolio has contributed a very stable income over recent years, including in FY21 with a net income of \$272k in dividends and interest. This provides a valuable source of income to support the on-going activities of the federation.

Farrer House experienced a significant fall in rental income during FY21. Rental income was \$364k lower than FY20. While some tenants chose not to renew their end-of-term leases,



others signed on to multi-year tenancies at higher rates than pre-pandemic and some future new tenants have been found for vacated space.

The operating costs of Farrer House remain consistent with previous years.

Current financial year looking far more promising, with 75% now filled. A number of recent leases have been attracted and secured by the Federation staff, resulting in greater financial returns to the Federation.

### **Fair value movement in financial assets**

The market valuation of the share and investment portfolio has returned to positive growth in FY21 following the collapse of these markets in the previous year with the onset of COVID-19. After a decline in the valuation of the investment portfolio over the course of FY20 of \$281k, this has turned around significantly to produce a positive gain over the FY21 year of \$1,661k.

### **Building Valuation**

In line with standard processes, a valuation of Farrer House took place in FY21. For consistency, the same valuation firm was used as valued the property in FY18. Their valuation was \$47.4 million, a significant increase on the previous valuation in of \$35 million. The Board adopted the auditor's recommendation not to reflect the increased valuation in the balance sheet due to the inherent uncertainty in COVID times.

### **Balance Sheet**

The Federation continues to remain in a solid financial position. Net assets at 30 September 2021 were \$38.4 million, compared to \$37.1 million 12 months earlier.

Borrowings have increased by \$173k mainly to continue necessary upgrades of Farrer House.

### **Budget for FY22**

In September 2021, the Board approved a budget for 2022 with a projected deficit of \$34k, which includes a modest growth in the valuation of the share and investment portfolio of \$600k. The five year Strategic Plan has a focus on attracting new members and commercial partners to under-pin our ongoing operations.

### **Andrew Dix**

Director/Chair of Finance & Audit Committee  
Victorian Farmers Federation





# VFF Group of Companies

## Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities Statement of financial position as at 30 September 2021

	2021 \$	2020 \$
<b>Assets</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	470,074	485,803
Trade and other receivables	454,702	604,746
Other financial assets	10,517,779	9,814,278
Other current assets	46,846	95,783
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>11,489,401</b>	<b>11,000,610</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Other financial assets	-	516,180
Investment properties	30,886,969	30,288,555
Property, plant and equipment	6,106,399	6,583,633
Right-of-use assets	233,649	400,863
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>37,227,017</b>	<b>37,789,231</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>48,716,418</b>	<b>48,789,841</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	1,101,960	1,297,008
Contract liabilities	2,138,329	3,164,069
Borrowings	6,105,222	5,932,356
Lease liabilities	120,355	152,346
Provisions	232,888	462,081
Other current liabilities	367,004	367,004
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>10,065,758</b>	<b>11,374,864</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Lease liabilities	118,111	252,753
Provisions	67,743	50,677
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>185,854</b>	<b>303,430</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>10,251,612</b>	<b>11,678,294</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>38,464,806</b>	<b>37,111,547</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	13,412,202	13,412,202
Retained surpluses	25,052,604	23,699,345
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>38,464,806</b>	<b>37,111,547</b>

This is an extract from the full VFF Financial Report that can be viewed at the VFF website (see P15).

**Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities**  
**Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income**  
**For the year ended 30 September 2021**

	2021 \$	2020 \$
<b>Revenue</b>	6,707,317	10,416,768
<b>Other Income</b>	2,493,988	2,745,029
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee expenses	(3,897,995)	(3,834,812)
Other expenses	(4,672,826)	(4,650,203)
Short-term and low-value lease expense	(5,335)	(12,000)
Grant Rebates paid	(116,976 )	(4,329,900)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(447,731)	(321,792)
Finance costs	(111,168)	(132,371)
Advertising	(200,024)	(64,560)
Net gains / (impairment losses) on financial assets	-	(194,221)
Auditors remuneration	(54,700)	(67,100)
<b>Operating deficit before revaluation of financial assets</b>	<b>(305,450)</b>	<b>(445,162)</b>
Net fair value gain / (loss) on revaluation of financial assets	1,660,812	(280,996)
<b>Surplus / (deficit) before income tax expense</b>	<b>1,355,362</b>	<b>(726,158)</b>
Income tax expense	(2,103)	(248)
<b>Surplus / (deficit) after income tax expense for the year</b>	<b>1,353,259</b>	<b>(726,406)</b>
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the year</b>	<b>1,353,259</b>	<b>(726,406)</b>

This is an extract from the full VFF Financial Report that can be viewed at the VFF website (see P15).



## Independent Auditor's Report

### To the Members of Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities

#### Report on the audit of the financial report

##### Opinion

We have audited the financial report of Victorian Farmers Federation (the Company) and its controlled entities (the Group), which comprises the consolidated statement of financial position as at 30 September 2021, the consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, consolidated statement of changes in equity and consolidated statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the consolidated financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the Directors' declaration.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of the Group is in accordance with the *Corporations Act 2001*, including:

- a giving a true and fair view of the Group's financial position as at 30 September 2021 and of its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- b complying with Australian Accounting Standards – Reduced Disclosure Requirements and the *Corporations Regulations 2001*.

##### Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Group in accordance with the *Corporations Act 2001* and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including Independence Standards)* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

#### Information other than the financial report and auditor's report thereon

The Directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Group's annual report for the year ended 30 September 2021, but does not include the financial report and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the financial report does not cover the other information and accordingly we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

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In connection with our audit of the financial report, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial report or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

#### **Responsibilities of the Directors' for the financial report**

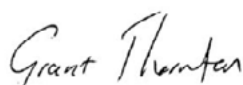
The Directors of the Company are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards – Reduced Disclosure Requirements and the *Corporations Act 2001*. The Directors' responsibility also includes such internal control as the Directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the Directors are responsible for assessing the Group's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Directors either intend to liquidate the Group or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

#### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial report**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board website at: [http://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors\\_responsibilities/ar3.pdf](http://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors_responsibilities/ar3.pdf). This description forms part of our auditor's report.



Grant Thornton Audit Pty Ltd  
Chartered Accountants



A J Pititto  
Partner – Audit & Assurance

Melbourne, 15 December 2021

Click to view the [2021 VFF Financial Report](https://www.vff.org.au/2022/01/30/2022-vff-annual-general-meeting) online, or head to:  
[www.vff.org.au/2022/01/30/2022-vff-annual-general-meeting](https://www.vff.org.au/2022/01/30/2022-vff-annual-general-meeting)



# Project Report

The VFF administers a range of projects that provide benefits to Victorian farmers and rural and regional communities. Projects run by the VFF are funded by both private organisations and government and cover a range of important topics including fire recovery, farm safety, mental health, employment, biosecurity and education.

## **Cattle Underpass Scheme**

The VFF has administered fifty-two Cattle Underpass rebates since the inception of the project. The VFF is currently in discussions with the Department for an extension of time to allow for the eight outstanding cattle underpass projects to be completed.

## **Educating Kids About Agriculture – Victorian School Kids to Farms**

This project is a Commonwealth funded initiative that the VFF is delivering in partnership with the Primary Industry Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA). The expected outcome of the project is to provide students with a hands-on, practical experience which provides a greater understanding of the role of agriculture and the breadth of career opportunities available in the agricultural sector.

## **Making our Farms Safer**

As part of the Victoria's Smarter, Safer Farms program and election commitment, the Victorian Government has provided funding under the Making our Farms Safer initiative to enable the VFF to assist farmers in making their workplaces safer. The VFF offers a range of farm safety services which are available for all Victorian farmers.

## **Developing Community Understanding of Agriculture (*extended*)**

Phase one (social research report) was completed by Kantar. Phase two (communications campaign) has been delivered by Cox Inall.

## **StockSense**

Funded by the Cattle Compensation Fund and the Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund Stock Sense helps producers adopt animal health and production practices that maintain and improve animal welfare and Victoria's biosecurity status. Stock Sense achieves this by administering webinars, workshops, and supply chain training sessions as well as developing fact sheets, social media content and newsletters. Stock Sense also has a focus on engaging peri urban landholders and increasing their awareness in relation to their obligations on animal health, welfare and biosecurity.

## **Emergency Fodder Distribution Agreement**

In the event of a 'notified emergency' the VFF will provide a liaison point for Victorian farming communities during the notified emergency to ensure their access to Emergency Fodder, in order to minimise the effects of the emergency on affected livestock as set out in the Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan. The VFF will coordinate the supply transportation and distribution of fodder during an emergency.

# Stakeholder, Policy and Advocacy

## Farm Business and Regional Development Committee

2021 was a year of action and progress for the VFF Policy Council and Policy Team. Transmission infrastructure, managing entry to farms, labour shortages, local government rates, heavy vehicle access, climate change and animal welfare were just some of the dominant policy issues. More than 28 government processes were responded to with formal submissions including a number of appearances before Parliamentary Inquiries and many more informal consultative processes.

In September 2021 Policy Council established three new policy committees (Farming Systems, Infrastructure and Transport, and Workforce and Social Infrastructure) joining Environment, Planning and Climate Change (previously Land Management), Farm Business and Water Council. The new committees also instigated some growth in the Policy Team with changes to roles in addition to new people and new skills joining the Policy Team. Ultimately this has strengthened the service offering the Policy Team can offer members and the organisation.

In 2021 the VFF Policy Council reviewed and adopted a number of new policy statements important to our advocacy efforts including: Drought, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, Local Government Rates and Responsibilities, Climate Change, Managing Entry to Farms, Good Neighbour, Pest Plants and Animals Management, Food Relief and Tax. These can all be viewed on the VFF website.

A Policy and Advocacy Plan was adopted by the Policy Council in November, setting objectives for the committees, key relationships for the organisation to consolidate, strengthen and grow and also covering operational matters for the Policy Team.

In 2022 a key objective of the Policy Team will be to run visible and effective campaigns for the federal and Victorian elections, encouraging participation amongst the membership through local events and activities.

### Environment, Planning and Climate Change

The VFF has continued its strong advocacy on the key issues of managing entry to farm (including camping on licensed frontages), renewable energy and transmission development, climate adaption and mitigation, cultural heritage and creep in environmental regulations. Achievements we are proud of included the Victorian Government's blocking of the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mine in Gippsland where the VFF supported our members and the farming community to demonstrate the \$100m per annum impact the mine would have on agricultural production. The VFF has also worked to support our members impacted by transmission proposals including the Western Victorian Transmission Network Project and the Marinus Link and the Victorian Government's policy to allow camping on licenced river frontages.





Key submission in 2021 included the Review into Victoria's Wildlife Act, the Fingerboards Mineral Sand Mine Environment Effects Statement Independent Advisory Committee, Protecting Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline, Gariwerd (Grampians) Management Plan and the Victorian Government's Adaption Action Plans. The Victorian Government continues to progress a busy agenda in this policy space, stretching the capacity of organisation such as the VFF.

The work of the EPCC Committee and staff continues to be central to the VFF's mission to protect and progress farmers' interests. On matters of environment and planning the VFF is usually the only voice representing farmers, often the only voice representing landholders and sometimes the only voice representing regional Victoria. As we look forward the importance of this work will only continue with ongoing urban and energy development, an increasing focus on emissions reduction and changing community expectations.

### Farm Business

The Farm Business Committee continues to advocate strongly in the areas of local government rates, taxation, energy, telecommunications and farm crime.

In 2021 the VFF wrote to all local government councils setting out our expectations for their rating strategies with 17 councils setting their farm rates below the rate cap. Working with members at a local level, the VFF successfully staved off a proposed farm rate hike in Glenelg Shire. In addition, the VFF has represented its

members in response to unfair rate increases in the local government areas of Northern Grampians, Horsham, Golden Plains, Mitchell and Wellington.

The VFF also mounted a campaign against the Windfall Gains Tax, winning some concessions from the Government to help protect farm businesses, however ultimately the Victorian Parliament approved the introduction of the tax which will have a negative impact on rural and regional housing availability.

Looking forward, the Farm Business Committee has made farm crime a priority issue for VFF advocacy and is working to help improve the response of Victoria Police to stock theft and general farm crime.

### Farming Systems

In farming systems, the VFF has been active in the development of a new animal welfare act for Victoria, monitoring and informing changes to ag vet chem regulations and advocating on reform to strengthen our biosecurity systems and both the federal and state level.

The newly formed Farming Systems Committee is made up of members from across the commodity groups, across Victoria and from different farming systems including mixed farming, grazing and intensive animal industries, broadacre and organic operations.

### Infrastructure and Transport

The VFF continues to successfully advance members interest in the infrastructure and transport policy area. 2021 saw the expansion of heavy vehicle access across the state, advocacy



of supply chain challenges (including leadership regarding Ad Blue shortages), for investment in Victoria's road and rail freight network and improved port regulation.

The VFF advocacy was instrumental in the expansion of Victoria's heavy vehicle network including the road train network into the Wimmera, b-double access in Hindmarsh Shire and negotiation of an alternate detour during the Murchison rail crossing closure.

Supply chain challenges have continued to plague agriculture and the VFF has been highlighting issues in the supply and availability of inputs including machinery parts, fuels and lubricants, fertiliser and pallets. The VFF lead successful calls for a federal taskforce to address the Ad Blue shortage and have submitted to the Victorian Government to commit \$30 million to encourage domestic manufacturing of key inputs.

### Water Council

Water Council continues to lead advocacy on issues associated with the Murray Darling Basin Plan and state water policy. The VFF continues to work with the Victorian Government to inform water reform including in water markets transparency, groundwater and the Aboriginal Water Program.

Key recent submissions have included the Central and Gippsland Regional Sustainable Water Strategy and the NSW Upper House Inquiry into Floodplain Harvesting. In April the VFF presented to the Senate Committee on the Murray Darling Basin Plan in Shepparton, calling for removal of the 450GL up-water target and legislating no more buybacks.

With a federal and state election in 2022, and approaching the review date of the Basin Plan in 2024, Water Council's role representing Victorian water users and irrigators will continue to be as important as ever.

### Workforce and Social Infrastructure

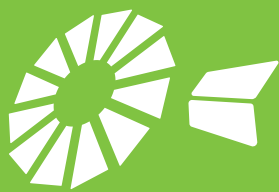
Labour shortages, labour pathways in agriculture and covid-19 workforce restrictions and requirements was a focus of the VFF in 2021. This required the VFF to communicate industry needs to Government while also communicating business obligations to members. In many cases the VFF needed to communicate policy we did not agree with to members to ensure they were aware of their legal obligations.

A significant breakthrough in 2021 was the Federal Government's legislation of an ag visa in October. There is however still a way to go in the implementation on the visa and onboarding of partnering ASEAN countries.

The VFF participated in the Victorian Governments review Agricultural Training, putting forward our ideas on how the Tafe and training system could be improved to attract more young people into careers in agriculture.







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**The voice of Victorian agriculture.**