



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

PROTECTING OUR FARMING FUTURE

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES
2023 - 2025



President's Message

The VFF is changing the way we advocate on behalf of Victorian farmers and our regional communities.

In a complex political environment with hundreds of voices competing for the decision maker's attention, it has never been more important to have a clear advocacy focus.

That's why the VFF is transitioning away from taking a purely reactive stance to issues, to having a proactive one. With a renewed focus on setting our advocacy priorities well in advance we can ensure that we not only respond to the challenges that arise but also shape the future of farming in our state.

Our advocacy priorities for the next two years have been selected after thorough consideration of both the threats to our industry and the opportunities for success.

It is imperative that we confront these challenges head-on with a united front—not just as farmers, but as industry, government and community combined.

These six key priorities are the cornerstone of our efforts:

- Getting the transition to renewable energy right.
- Fixing regional roads.
- Maintaining animal health and welfare.
- Protecting biosecurity and sustainability
- Standing up for Victorian irrigation communities.
- Making every farm safer.

We will collaborate with government and other stakeholders, engage in robust policy discussions, and leverage our collective strength to achieve our goals.

Together, we will chart a path forward that not only protects our farming future but also empowers it to flourish.



EMMA GERMANO
President



Victorian farmers advocacy priorities

1. Getting the transition to renewable energy right

Victorian farmers are getting everything but a fair go in the transition to renewable energy. Victoria has no real plan on how the power generated in regional Victoria will be distributed across the community.

The VFF is advocating for reform to the planning of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure to protect valuable agricultural land and to ensure the rights of Victorian farmers and their communities are protected.

2. Fixing regional roads

The deteriorating condition of regional road and rail infrastructure is driving up transport costs and putting regional lives at risk. The VFF is advocating for much needed investment to fix country roads and to free up freight networks.

3. Maintaining animal health and welfare

New animal welfare legislation is set to be introduced into the Victorian Parliament in 2024. This will fundamentally change the operating environment for Victorian livestock producers. The legislative change also opens up risks for ill-informed and unscientific changes to animal welfare regulations.

4. Protecting biosecurity and sustainability

With exotic diseases on Australia's doorstep there has never been a more important time to invest in our biosecurity measures. Biosecurity, traceability and the ability to manage weeds and pests are central to maintaining trust and reputation in Victorian produce. The VFF is advocating for investment in biosecurity systems, and for crown land managers to better look after the environment so additional costs are not placed on farmers.


5. Standing up for Victorian irrigation communities

The Murray Darling Basin Plan remains the biggest challenge facing farming communities in Northern Victoria and additional water recovery threatens hundreds of jobs in irrigated agriculture and food manufacturing. The VFF is advocating to ensure a balanced approach is taken to ensure farmers don't see more water being taken out of production.

6. Making every farm safer

Farms are among the most dangerous workplaces in Victoria. For over two decades the VFF has partnered with the Victorian Government in delivering farm safety awareness programs to help protect farmers, their families and employees. We will advocate for this important work to continue through the successful Making our Farms Safer program and on-farm safety



A large, dark silhouette of a high-voltage electricity pylon stands prominently in the center of the frame. It is a lattice-structured tower with multiple cross-arms supporting several power lines that stretch across the sky. The background is a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise, with a gradient from deep blue at the top to a warm orange and red near the horizon. In the far distance, a line of smaller, similar pylons is visible against the horizon. The overall mood is one of industrial scale against the elements of nature.

Getting the transition to renewable energy right

Delivering a better renewable energy deal for regional communities

The transition to renewable energy presents the greatest existential threat to Victoria's agricultural industries seen in decades with a Victorian Government report suggesting that to achieve net zero by 2050, up to 70% of the state's farmland would be required for renewable energy development.

The VFF believes the transition to renewable energy must be undertaken in harmony with agricultural production and that Victoria must not descend into a debate between the need to keep the lights on, or whether we should keep producing food.

Successive governments at all levels have failed to plan for this transition and its impacts on agricultural production. The VFF believes farm businesses and regional communities should not be forced to bear the cost of this failure to plan.

Renewable energy and transmission developments must be planned properly so they have minimal impact on farms. Proposed developments like the Western Renewables Link will have a detrimental impact on strategic agricultural land with top grade soils and access to water severely effected. Development in areas like this is totally inappropriate and will have repercussions for supply chains, manufacturing and food security and the cost of living.

The current regulatory framework has no safeguards around biosecurity, rehabilitation and fair compensation.

Victoria has surrendered its decision making responsibilities to the energy market operator AEMO and we are the only state to give AEMO power to choose transmission corridors.

Without the state setting the parameters for sensitive economic environmental or cultural areas to avoid, or standards for development, AEMO is bound to deliver the cheapest transmission option for customers.

Actions we are seeking

- Creation of a statewide strategic plan for renewable energy and transmission developments that protects strategic agricultural land use.
- Rescinding AEMO's corridor planning powers and a suspension of further development of the Western Renewables Link and VNI-West transmission projects.
- Ensuring that commercial consent of farmers is secured for all renewable energy and transmission developments and that fair compensation is provided where compulsory acquisition must occur.
- Reforming regulatory processes to ensure Environmental Effects Statements consider impacts on farm businesses.
- Ensuring that compensation frameworks take into account all costs to farm businesses including foregone productive losses.
- Extend and renew the Agriculture Energy Investment Plan to enable farmers to get the benefit of on-farm renewable energy.
- Support farmers to invest in on-farm renewable energy through a dedicated advisory service.



Fixing regional roads

Fixing Victoria's broken regional road network

The deteriorating condition of regional Victoria's ageing infrastructure is driving up transport costs and putting regional lives at risk. The VFF is seeking major commitment and action from the Victorian Government for greater investment in road asset maintenance and upgrades to priority freight routes.

Regional Victorians are travelling on dodgy and dangerous roads every day which is sadly reflected in the state's road toll. More than 50% of all road fatalities occur in regional Victoria, despite it being home to 24% of the state's population.

In addition to posing significant safety risk to regional communities, this impacts the productivity of Victorian farmers. The international competitiveness of Victoria's \$17.8 billion agriculture industry relies on the productivity and efficiency of our supply chain.

According to CSIRO TransIT modelling, total annual transport costs the agricultural industry \$5.8 billion each year, with supply chain costs often accounting for the single largest cost in agricultural production. This not only adds costs for farmers, but adds costs on the grocery bill at the checkout.

Many of the Victoria's bridges were built approximately 70 years ago and are nearing the end of their useful life. As a result, these bridges cannot accommodate the scale of modern freight vehicles, leading to increased costs for farmers that rely on freight transportation to get produce to market, and this has also impacted the state's overall economic competitiveness. Within Victoria, there are approximately 6,000 bridges, of which approximately 1000 have been identified as requiring upgrades.

Actions we are seeking

- Targeted arterial road maintenance to address the deteriorating state of regional roads.
- Reintroduction of the *Fixing Country Roads* program to provide funding grants for rural and regional councils to undertake local road projects beyond regular road maintenance.
- Increased resourcing for the Department of Transport and Planning's Heavy Vehicle Network Team to assist councils to increase heavy vehicle access.
- Review and simplify heavy vehicle regulations to reduce the compliance burden for farmers.
- Increased funding to fix pinch points on priority freight routes to increase access for high productivity freight routes and improve freight efficiency.
- Identify and fund bridge upgrades on key high volume freight routes with the objective of enabling significantly higher 'whole-of-route' freight capacity and limit capital requirements.
- Dedicated funding for local government to repair road networks damaged in the 2022 floods through a betterment approach.



Maintaining animal health and welfare

Delivering the best health and welfare standards for our animals whilst maintaining profitability

Victorian farmers have been at the forefront of ensuring the highest animal health and welfare outcomes are maintained.

The VFF has a proud track record of leadership in advocating for better animal welfare outcomes in line with requirements of our industry, our markets and our community.

We acknowledge the importance of evolving with the times and adopting best practices to continually improve animal welfare standards. We engage in collaborative efforts with government agencies, animal welfare organisations, and industry partners to achieve these objectives.

Good animal welfare is consistent with good farming because high quality agricultural products require healthy animals and excellence in animal care. Farmers are strong advocates of good animal health and welfare outcomes.

In 2024, the Victorian Government is set to bring new animal welfare legislation into the parliament that could fundamentally alter the operating environment for animal agriculture in the state.

The new legislation will alter existing codes of practice which livestock allow producers to maintain sound animal husbandry practices and ensure they are producing the best products for consumers.

It is critical to the productivity and profitability of our animal agricultural industries that this new legislative regime does not simply become the vehicle for the opponents of our livestock industries to achieve their aims.

Actions we are seeking

- Ensuring that new animal welfare legislation and regulations are based on objective science and industry agreed standards.
- Ensuring safeguards are legislated so that animal welfare standards apply differently for livestock, companion animals, pest animals and wildlife.
- Ensuring farmers are always involved in a collaborative approach in the development and implementation of animal welfare standards.
- Government support in educating communities about the science of animal welfare to address animal activism extremism.
- Enable producers to employ virtual-herding technologies on-farm to boost productivity and environmental stewardship.
- Maintaining egg producers' ability to utilise three production systems (barn, cage and free range) to ensure food security.

An aerial photograph of a wetland landscape. In the foreground and middle ground, there is a large, irregularly shaped pond or wetland area. The water is a mix of dark blue and green, with patches of bright green algae or aquatic plants floating on the surface. The pond is surrounded by dense, mature trees with green foliage. In the background, the landscape opens up into a flat, grassy field with scattered trees, and a small, rounded hill is visible on the horizon under a clear sky.

Protecting biosecurity and sustainability

Managing our environment sustainably and protecting industry from biosecurity threats

Farmers are at the forefront of managing and caring for our natural environment. We manage 50 per cent of Victoria's land – working to manage soils, waterways, pests and weeds, and to protect biodiversity. They do what they can with their own resources, but it's a job they do on behalf of all Victorians. Farmers work in partnership with community and government to provide these environmental services.

Whilst they are doing everything they can to hold up their end of the bargain, government on the other hand is consistently failing to fulfill its duties. This places an additional burden on farmers in dealing with pest, plants and animals, bushfires and biosecurity threats.

With exotic diseases on Australia's doorstep, we are facing the most insecure biosecurity environment in our history. Letting these diseases slip through our control has the potential to shutdown industry and export markets overnight – and that means losing thousands of regional jobs.

Biosecurity, traceability, and the ability to manage weeds and pests are central to maintaining trust in the clean green image of Victorian agriculture. With over 75 per cent of Australian farm products exported across the globe, our reputation must be protected. The constant threat of biosecurity incursions on our doorstep means government investment is desperately needed to protect the agriculture industry and the jobs and communities that it supports.

For example, if Foot and Mouth or Lumpy Skin Disease were to spread through Victoria, our beef cattle and dairy markets would be shut down over night. Cattle prices could drop by 80 per cent, and it would take more than a decade for prices to recover. Thousands of jobs in regional Victoria would be on the chopping block.

Actions we are seeking

- Ensuring adequate funding for biosecurity preparedness and response.
- Prioritising the management of endemic and established weeds and diseases that may impact Victorian agriculture.
- Ensuring public land managers comply with their duties under the Catchment and Land Protection Act and report on their compliance annually.
- Support the objectives of Landcare and secure funding for its programs.



Standing up for Victorian irrigation communities

Fighting for a Murray Darling Basin Plan that is fair for Victorian farmers, communities and our environment

In northern Victoria, the Murray Darling Basin Plan remains the biggest challenge facing farming communities and additional water recovery threatens hundreds of jobs in irrigated agriculture and food manufacturing.

Victoria has done all the heavy lifting in delivering the Basin Plan at a huge cost to industry, to our economic security, to jobs and to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Further water recovery will continue to cause socio-economic pain for very little environmental gain.

Independent Economic Research in 2022 found that the government purchase of 750GL would cost the Southern Basin \$900 million in agricultural production per year and tens of thousands of jobs, destroying the farms and small country towns that depend on them.

We also know that additional water recovered from Victoria can't physically be delivered down the rivers without causing flooding to farm properties and further damage to river banks—which just leads to harmful impacts on the rivers' ecology. The volume of summer transfers down the Goulburn River has tripled leading to steady high flows drowning vegetation established to stabilise the banks, bank slumping, erosion and tree collapse

Victoria must stand up for a fair Basin Plan that doesn't seek to hurt our communities any further.

Actions we are seeking

- Maintaining the Victorian Government's strong position standing up for northern Victorian irrigators and farming communities in response to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.
- Seek alternative methods to water buybacks through off-farm efficiency projects.
- Maintain protections in legislation that protect socio-economic outcomes.
- Stop recovery of the 450GL up-water target.
- Ensure that private property is not flooded without landowners' consent. The Commonwealth Government must take full responsibility for any third party impacts caused by environmental flooding.
- Extension of timelines to deliver Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism projects.
- Investment in achieving environmental outcomes for the Darling River and the Northern Basin which are the most environmentally stressed areas.



Making every farm safer

Supporting farmers and workers to maintain safe workplaces

Farms are among the most dangerous workplaces in Victoria. The agriculture industry employs about two per cent of the State's workforce but accounts for approximately 30 per cent of workplace deaths.

The industry also records a significant number of serious injuries. This, together with the considerable risks that farmers and agricultural workers are exposed to is why addressing farm workplace safety is a significant priority for industry and government.

For over two decades, the VFF has partnered with the Victorian Government in delivering farm safety awareness programs to help protect farmers, their families and employees in the workplace. The demand on this service continues to grow. Farmers are doing everything they can to create safe workplaces, but they require assistance.

The interface between farms and the public is also of serious concern for industry, particularly in respect to livestock on our roads. An example of government and industry partnering to overcome this challenge has been seen through the Cattle Underpass Scheme first implemented by the Bracks Government in 1999. Since then the scheme has enabled the farming community to take steps toward freeing Victorian roads from stock crossings, improving road safety and equipping farmers with the infrastructure to increase productivity.

The VFF is proud of its partnership with government to deliver critical infrastructure and services the farming community and seeks further government action to ensure safety remains its priority.

Actions we are seeking

- Provide ongoing support to farm businesses to manage safety risks with on-farm advice and education through the successful VFF Making our Farms Safer project.
- Deliver a substantial on-farm safety capital investment program to allow innovation and adoption of technologies safely.
- Support farmers with grants to invest in on-farm safety improvements particularly for livestock handling.
- Continue the successful Cattle Underpass Scheme to not only improve productivity, but to better protect farmers and regional road users.
- Invest in mental health and wellbeing services in regional communities and cultivate a culture safety through incentives for safer practices.





**Victorian
Farmers
Federation**

Farrer House
Level 3, 24 Collins Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000

P 1300 882 833
E info@vff.org.au
www.vff.org.au

The voice of Victorian agriculture.