Local small farmers concerned by draft livestock proposals

By JAMIE KRONBORG

AN Australian farming and food organisation believes the proposed draft livestock planning standards issued by the Victorian government this week are not addressing change to the industry.

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance — which represents about 250 small-scale farmers across Victoria — launched a petition to stop the changes and protect the livelihood of small farmers who have been affected by issues such as the spread of disease and pests.

Chair of the Alliance, Pascale Cafferty, said the government in Victoria had failed to adequately consult on the proposed standards, which are due to be finalised in November.

"The proposed changes will have a significant impact on our ability to produce food sustainably and locally, and put us on a path to achieving a more resilient and resilient food system," she said.

November 14

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"The draft guidelines don't appear to offer any relief for small-scale commercial farmers, nor home growers of fruits and vegetables, and yet they make it easier than ever to sell our produce at farmers markets or to local consumers," Ms Cafferty said.

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Farm plan changes worry

FARM plan changes worry...
Come and talk to us, urge irrigators

BY ANDREW MILLER

IRRIGATORS have urged new Victorian opposition water spokesman Euroa MP Steph Ryan to get out on the road as soon as she can to help her come to terms with what one said was "a massive portfolio." Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Water council chairman Richard Anderson said he was surprised at what appeared to be a sudden change, with former spokesman Peter Walsh taking over the new Decentralisation portfolio.

"I always thought it was that close to Walshy's heart that he would keep it as long as he was in politics," Mr Anderson said. "People would ask, 'why now?' because water is a big portfolio." Mr Anderson said the Murray Darling Basin Plan was the key area Ms Ryan needed to address. "She needs to bring herself up to speed with what we are," he said. "We need to keep positive pathways and lines of communication open, in terms of what's good for Victoria, so we can have those frank talks about what we think is right and wrong.

Loddon Valley irrigator Ken Panton agreed the change caught him by surprise. "Water and agriculture were two of the plush jobs for the deputy leader and opposition deputy leader and to be throwing that over, to a newcomer, seems to me that Mr Walsh is trying to avoid the mess he left, when they went back against opposition," Mr Panton said.

He said he wasn't "holding his breath" for the National Party to deliver on resolving some of the issues facing the sector. "All politicians toe the line, they all pat the same puppies, they all run with the mantra that the Basin Plan has been agreed to by everybody and it has to be delivered on time and on budget."

Central Goulburn Water Services Committee (WSC) chairman Peter Hacon said he'd like to see Ms Ryan meet with irrigators. "The biggest threat is water leaving the area, not only for irrigators, but also for Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW)," Mr Hacon said. "Grassroots advice has not been listened to - they've run into trouble in the past because they didn't listen to us." He said water was a "massive portfolio - it's virtually impossible to learn about it, straight up. If she listens to the usual crew, she is going to end up with the usual problem; she needs to broaden her horizons."

VFF Goulburn Branch water representative Bill McChlampa said Ms Ryan's appointment was "a surprise move by the Nats." "Mr Walsh has been welded to the water portfolio in government and in opposition for decades and it is hard to accept that he would let it go without some pressing imperative," he said. The branch was looking forward to visiting Ms Ryan about some of the ongoing issues, facing irrigators in the north-west. That included the election of irrigators to the board of Lower Murray Water, a move he said was promised by Mr Walsh, when he was in opposition.

"The changes to the carry over rules, following the review, have burnt local irrigators, and these new rules need to be overhauled," Mr McChlampa said.

He said he was concerned Ms Ryan's initial comments indicated a "populist" approach to water policy, "more so than the rigorous and informed approach that would be required should she become the next water minister."

He said it would be a shame if Ms Ryan persisted in going down the easy road of pointing the finger at water reform and the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP) as being the downfall of the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District (GMID) and the dairy industry.

"It's in everybody's interests that economic realities aren't pushed to the side, like they are by present state and Federal incumbents. There are other irrigators than dairy farmers and other districts than the GMID. Ms Ryan must take that on board."

Upper Goulburn River Catchment Association spokeswoman Jan Beer, Yea, said Ms Ryan must stand up and state the 450GL could not be recovered, or delivered to South Australia, without massive social and economic impacts. "To transfer another 450GL out of the GMID and Southern Connected system will destroy these areas entirely. The current Water mislaiser, Lisa Neville, knows and understands this only too well," Ms Beer said.

"Nor can that water be delivered - it is technically unachievable and as the spring 2016 floods showed would create millions of dollars damage all down the river systems."
Water and politics good mix for Ryan

THE first new Victorian coalition Water spokesman in government or opposition - for about 15 years now and I think he'd need a very compelling reason to give it up," Ms Ryan said. "He does realise he has a lot of work to do in the Decentralisation portfolio, which has been newly created.

Ms Ryan said the sector grew up on an irrigated dairy farm, so understood the importance of how water was managed, in northern Victoria.

"The politics of water was the reason I got into parliament in the first place." She said her key challenge was getting out and talking to irrigators. "I have worked in the water space but my head hasn’t been fully there - I want to get out and hear what people have to tell me;"

Ms Ryan said Victoria needed to continue making the case around the socio-economic impacts of losing the 450 Gigalitres (GL) of upwater. "I don’t think the Southern Basin, and northern Victoria, can afford to lose more water," she said. "The impact of that is devastating, not just on the social fabric of the community, but also those irrigators who remain with a bigger cost burden of running the system.

"I will be very focussed on that and making sure the Victorian government is arguing that case and interests of Victorian irrigators are defended, as the Basin Plan progresses."

Ms Ryan said she was aware of balancing competing demands, from irrigators across Victoria. "Thankfully I only have to balance the needs of Victoria. Someone once told me that if you make everybody a little bit unhappy you have generally achieved the right balance. If someone is really happy and someone is very unhappy, then typically speaking the balance is wrong."

- ANDREW MILLER
Fee-gouging fears over land registry

Janelle Small
Senior Press

Fee for basic real estate transactions could skyrocket if the state government goes ahead with plans to lease the land titles registry, an expert has warned.

The Andrews government is considering a proposal to lease out land titles services to a private company to generate a revenue stream and reduce the cost of running the registry.

But former state attorney-general Rob Hullands, a private citizens' advocacy group, has warned the state could lose millions.

“Without careful regulation, the model could run amok,” he said.

His concerns were echoed by Professor George Williams, the University of Melbourne’s professor of public law.

“Without effective regulation, the government could be captured by the private sector,” he said.

The government is considering a range of options, including leasing the registry to a private company, to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

But Hullands said the proposal was “a recipe for disaster” and would lead to increased costs for property owners.

“The government should not proceed with this plan without careful analysis and consultation with industry experts,” he said.

The government is expected to make a decision on the future of the land titles registry later this year.

END
The Victorian Government is overhauling Victoria's agricultural planning rules with a suite of proposed reforms that strike the balance between delivering for farmers and meeting community expectations.

The proposed changes will simplify planning requirements for animal based farming and will improve the consistency of how the rules are applied. The reforms aim to make the land use planning process clearer for farmers, councils and the community.

This work delivers on key actions under Planning for Sustainable Animal Industries, the Victorian Government's response to the 2016 Animal Industries Advisory Committee report.

A two month consultation period begins today seeking feedback on proposed new land use terms and definitions, graduated planning controls and guidance to help improve the quality of planning applications and permit conditions.

The reforms have been developed with significant input from a reference group comprising key industry sectors, local government and community members.

The changes include new land use terms and definitions that will reduce regulation for farmers with grazing animals and small-scale pig and poultry farms that are low risk.

Benefits for farmers include greater certainty due to clearer land use definitions and planning controls, more flexibility to supplementary feed their livestock without the need for a planning permit, and permit exemptions for small scale pig and poultry producers.

Further opportunities to simplify planning requirements for low risk farming will be explored in 2018 and 2019 as part of the ongoing Planning for Sustainable Animal Industries initiative.

To facilitate feedback during the consultation period, several information sessions will be held across the state and public responses can be submitted until **Tuesday 14 November 2017**

To find out more about the planning reforms, including the timing and location of information sessions, go to [agriculture.vic.gov.au/planning-animal-industries](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/planning-animal-industries)