

Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper Submission - IP522

Kate Sharkey

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## Introduction

In 2012 a small band of young, progressive primary producers on the outskirts of Melbourne came to the realisation that if they didn't stand up and fight for their livelihoods there was little chance no one else would.

As a result, The Rural Advisory Committee (Section 86, Committee) was passed at Moorabool Shire Council in 2013 and this small group of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation farmers set about saving an industry that delivered in excess of \$130 million into their local economy.

The Moorabool Shire is classed as a semi-rural shire on the western outskirts of the Melbourne CBD. The area is renowned for its agriculture diversity with fruit and vegetable orchards, malting barley, prime lambs, potatoes, cattle, dairy and viticulture.

With such a vibrant agricultural sector so close to a capital city it has boundless opportunities not only for the farming sector to prosper but the entire community. However, peri urban shires such as Moorabool are a complex one. Only intervention at State and Federal level will ensure agriculture in such important geographical locations such as Moorabool can reach their full potential.

## Issues

- **Council been run predominantly by urban Councillors and staff** who have little understanding on the business of farming.
- **Urban population growth** has given rise to more services and programs in demand in turn placing more pressure on rate revenue
- **Primary producers are now in a minority group** and are continually outnumbered on serious issues
- Local Government is been faced with cost shifting from State. Council is then under pressure not to cut services, so as a result, Council keep placing a higher rate burden on the community. **With current rating and land valuation methodology primary producers are been placed in a highly inequitable position that is forcing farmers into situations where council rates are as high as 20% of their overheads.**
- **Foreign investment** has caused a major shift in land values. Land values are five times the value of agriculture land in the broad ace dry land cropping/grazing areas of the region.

## Submission to the White Paper

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- Peri Urban farming areas are also under constant threat of **State and Federal overlays** leaving primary producers in an uncertain position of knowing if their prime asset been land will always remain that way.
- **Peri Urban farm land also has potential access to recycled water and biosolids** due to low transport costs, geographical location and other factors. However, the issue of uncertainty continues for primary producers as government and other players seem to get in the way of progress
- **Land Conservation carried out by primary producers** has always played an important part of their overall land management practice. However, primary producers are then often placed in a position of loss of production, still required to pay high rates on the land they can't use and are not compensated for any of it.

### Short term solutions

**Rate Reform at State level** to ensure greater equity and fairness for all primary producers and especially those in high land value areas

Assistance for peri urban shires in particular to establish **Rural Advisory Committee (S86)** to ensure the primary producers can have a voice and be given the opportunity to participate in the decision making process that effects their industry within the region.

**Labelling laws** have to be a priority if ever the primary producer has a hope of remaining competitive in a free market. Advertising by large supermarket chains should be more greatly scrutinized to ensure consumers are not continually mislead

**National advertising campaign** - Improve the perception of the rural sector as a whole. Barriers and stereotypes need to be seriously broken down if Australia ever hopes for a unified nation that respects all sectors of the community

**State farmer lobby groups** need more support to ensure they gain traction on all state and national matters of importance to the agricultural sector.

**All levels of government and particularly Federal** need to place a much higher value on the true cost of Agriculture to Australia. It's said agriculture is **one of the five pillars of the economy**. Since the last election producers have not heard about it since.

### Medium to long term solutions

**Australian School Curriculum** - Mandatory education in food & fibre production including the history of Australian farming to assist in creating a greater awareness and respect for food and fibre in the next generation of Australian consumers.