



# **Agricultural Competitiveness**

**Golden Plains Shire Council - Submission**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Golden Plains Shire is a rural municipality which spans over 2,705 square kilometres in country Victoria. Agriculture is the largest industry sector in Golden Plains and accounts for more than 26% of jobs.

Council applauds the Commonwealth Government's commissioning of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper as an effort to improve the sustainability and profitability of agriculture for farmers and farming communities.

The Green Paper presents a well informed and broad perspective which bodes well for the policy decisions required to achieve the Government's stated objective. For the purpose of this response and towards the completion of the White Paper, Golden Plains Shire is focussing on a number of 'local' issues which, in principle, should still have relevance to Australia's broader farming community.

A large proportion of farm land in Golden Plains is relatively small farm holdings, established from the soldier settlement scheme, on rocky volcanic plains. Traditionally, extensive clearing of rock was required to achieve arable land across the plains which is evidenced by the many kilometres of remnant stonewall fencing and large rock piles still stacked in farm paddocks.

The viability, sustainability and profitability of farming in Golden Plains have required, and are likely to continue to require:

- Diversification and transition (i.e. grazing and cropping; extensive and intensive);
- Continuing clearing land of rock to increase arability and intensification;
- Increasing land holdings (either freehold or leasing) to achieve scale for extensive farming; and
- Establishing suitable conditions for more intensive farming.

The crux of Golden Plains' response to the Green Paper is based around the identified issue of *'Working with the States and Territories'*, in regard to regulation. The issue of *'Water and natural resource management'* will also receive comment.

Golden Plains Shire Council joins with the Commonwealth Government in the pursuit of improving the sustainability and profitability of agriculture, in all its forms for all Australian farmers.

## ISSUE - *'Working with the States and Territories'*

### **Support for the identified Green Paper policy ideas 4 and 5.**

#### *Context*

Current regulation around environment and native vegetation is too restrictive. Reduced and more flexible regulation is required to better consider farming conditions in a local, regional and national context. Golden Plains' example is that of relatively small land holdings acquired as soldier settlements on rocky volcanic plains in country Victoria. Second or third generational family succession has occurred and conditions and markets have changed substantially since these farms were created and this land needs to be farmed accordingly in order to stay viable, productive and profitable.

The livelihoods of the farming families and the economy of Golden Plains Shire depend on it.

Farmers in Golden Plains need to clear and remove volcanic rock from their farm land in order to continually improve their land's arability and farming operations. As sustainability and profitability are now intrinsically

linked to diversification (whether in response to climatic conditions, or changing markets, etc.), utilising relatively small scale land holdings to their potential is an imperative. Optimising the use of available farm land is critical.

Government policy and regulation should not penalise farmers for either not yet having cleared all their volcanic plains farm land (since soldier settlement) or for creating rock piles in paddocks in order to establish arable land. Currently, uncleared land (in-situ volcanic rock) in a paddock is most likely restricted/prohibited for disturbance by environment protection legislation, and created rock piles have had the same interpretation applied to their removal.

In this context, being able to continue to clear and remove volcanic rock from farm land in order to continue farming into the future should be supported. Increasing the arability of available farm land on rocky volcanic plains will remain a critical element for generational family succession, viability, productivity and profitability.

Deregulation which supports expanding and/or diversifying agriculture on farm land in response to dynamic conditions would be welcomed as a policy direction.

## **ISSUE - *'Water and natural resource management'***

### **Support for the identified Green Paper policy ideas 18 and 19.**

#### *Context*

Quality food production from intensive farming in the poultry sector, for example, requires potable water. While there is consideration given to a relative water price for irrigation supply and groundwater for agricultural purposes, there is no special consideration to pricing for potable water use for farming.

Chicken meat and egg production require the poultry to be constantly supplied with potable water which the farmer pays for at the same rate as the water from their kitchen tap for human consumption.

Golden Plains Shire is developing the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct through the expansion of intensive agriculture and complementary agri-business. A new potable water supply (approximately 26 km) is being installed throughout farm land in order to provide the most secure and highest quality water for food production, building on our existing strengths of intensive chicken meat and egg production.

Policy support for a relative potable water price in the context of intensive farming for food production would be a welcomed direction. At a federal level, this could be considered as either a subsidy or rebate.

## **CONCLUSION**

Golden Plains Shire's economy is dependent on a sustainable and competitive agricultural sector.

Council supports and commends the action of the Commonwealth Government to commission the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper and is buoyed by the broad input from stakeholders across the nation.

The outcome of the White Paper being to inform and influence policy which benefits and improves farming in all its forms for all Australian farmers is one that is eagerly anticipated.