

File 17/04/07  
1 December 2003

Ms Kristen Murray  
Executive Officer  
Rural & Regional Services  
and Development Committee  
Level 8  
35 Spring Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Murray

**PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY – FATALITIES AND INJURIES ON VICTORIAN FARMS**

Thank you for your letter of 29 September 2003, requesting submissions from Council expressing our community's views on the above. The following information has been provided by Council's Drought Community Development Officer, Gwen Cooke who is based in Ouyen.

1. *The main causes of fatality and injury on Victorian farms and other primary industries compared to other jurisdictions.*

Fatigue; lack of education and training.

2. *The matter and type of these injuries compared to other industries and jurisdictions.*

Tractors, headers and other large farm equipment. Specific statistics for this municipality are not currently available.

3. *Current programs and initiatives designed to improve OH&S on Victorian farms.*

The Ouyen Farm Safety Expo is widely acknowledged as raising safety awareness on and around the farm and farming equipment for people of all ages. The Farm Safety Expo educates farming and non-farming children on living and playing safely on farms. It is anticipated that this education process will lead to less farming accidents in the Mallee region, a greater sense of safe farming practices and less economic and social disruption to farmers.

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Each year the Expo features a series of 30-minute, practical and interactive workshops focusing on various aspects of farm safety, involving around 20 presenter sessions on farm safety issues such as farm machinery, fires, guns, off-road motorbikes and dune buggies, all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), first aid, snakes, back care, farm animals, chemical safety and many more. The event targets approximately 450 children in Year 3 (8-9 years) and Year 8 (14-16 years) from schools within a 100km radius of Ouyen, with an evening session involving adults and children. Each student attends 5 sessions.

4. *Any impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety.*

The age of farmers, isolation of rural properties, financial costs and poor design of safety features on machines. There is often a lack of liaison between the user and manufacturer of farming equipment. Some safety equipment, (eg. switches) is not taken seriously by manufacturers. Manufacturers are covering safety requirements on their equipment but are not using durable, good quality features and are often using poor quality components in order to meet safety regulations.

5. *The financial and social cost of death and injury on Victorian farms.*

The impact of death and injury is felt right across communities. The social costs encountered by the family and the community, involve grief, isolation and the support needed after a farm accident, plus the economic cost to the community such as loss of participation in community activities and families leaving the district.

6. *The need for further strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Victorian farms, what form the strategy should take and whether they are best developed by government agencies, industry bodies, worker representatives or a combination of these.*

Industry bodies and worker representatives combine to develop a solution to injuries on and around heavy farm machinery. Off-site competency training or accreditation tests are a safety requirement of most industries. The difficulties for farmers to conduct these tests before employing casual labour during peak times is not manageable. It's not practicable because of isolation and lack of services to rurally isolated farming properties.

It's owner/operators who are being injured or killed. There is a need for a strategy to provide information on recognising and managing fatigue. With modern air conditioned equipment requiring less regular servicing, farmers are often 'on the header' for much longer periods and are often not aware of the extent of their fatigue.

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I trust this information will be valuable feedback for the Parliamentary Enquiry. A separate reply has been forwarded on the other topic of the enquiry – Decline of Country Football.

Yours sincerely

Original signed by  
MARTIN HAWSON

**MARTIN HAWSON**  
**GENERAL MANAGER COMMUNITY & CULTURE**

GC/mt