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Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level 8
35 Spring Street
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Dear Sir/Madam,

**RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – DEATH AND INJURY ON VICTORIAN FARMS**

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee in relation to the abovementioned inquiry.

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) is the peak Automotive Employer Association in Victoria, representing over 4500 small and medium size businesses.

Within VACC's structure are the Farm Machinery Dealers Association (FMDA) and Motorcycle Industry Division (MID), which comprise the majority of Victorian businesses within their respective industries. As suppliers to the farming community they are widely dispersed throughout regional Victoria.

A key aim of the FMDA is to promote safety in the operation of tractors, implements, machinery and equipment sold and serviced. Similarly, an objective of MID is to promote the image of the industry through initiatives to promote road safety and safe operation of motorcycles and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).

VACC's comments on aspects of the Inquiry's terms of reference follow.

HazCheck Management System

Some time ago, FMDA and VACC recognised the need to address an industry-based code of practice in response to a lack of awareness amongst farm machinery dealers, to their duty of care, in the supply of used farm machinery and its intended end use.

Whilst we addressed customer needs and safe practices on the farm with the successful publication of the FMDA Safety Manual in 1997, we were mindful that an opportunity existed to develop a comprehensive hazard identification and risk control management system and training tool for our members. Out of this came "HazCheck".

HazCheck is an industry system developed by industry people for industry people.

The end result has been the production of a dynamic management tool designed to reduce the risk of injury to machinery operators and to reduce the risk of litigation arising from any injury subsequent to the sale of used farm machinery. This is provided that members undertake the recommended training and implement the procedures and controls associated with the HazCheck Management System.

HazCheck has recently been revised and has been both endorsed and promoted by the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

The Victorian FMDA member participation rate in HazCheck Management System training to date is very high, with system manuals and documentation having been sent to over 100 dealers. This demonstrates a responsible and proactive response by this industry to the likelihood of death and injury caused by unsafe and dangerous second hand farm machinery.

It is also interesting to note that HMS is a voluntary best practice guideline developed by industry to address a gap in available information and processes through Government Agencies. Farm Machinery Dealers in Victoria, through their participation in the HazCheck Management System, are taking a leading role in farm safety and injury prevention by applying safety controls to minimise risk.

VACC will forward full HazCheck Management System documentation to the Committee as soon as possible, and recommends that the Committee requests a demonstration, onsite, of the system.

Ballarat University Farm Safety Training

VACC supports the University of Ballarat's Farm Safety Information and Education Program and commends the Victorian Government for providing the University with a \$450,000 grant to assist in project development.

While development of the program is a positive step forward for farm safety, VACC would like to see further Government and industry support for the program, to ensure that it is promoted and delivered extensively, rather than becoming an expensive one-off exercise that fails to reach a significant proportion of the Victorian farming community.

Enforcement of Roll Over Protection Structures

VACC is concerned by regular member reports of non-compliance with Roll Over Protection Structure laws by farmers operating qualifying tractors. VACC calls for greater enforcement activity by WorkCover in order to raise the level of farming sector compliance with ROPS laws. Such initiatives would result in tangible safety benefits, as is demonstrated by the significant decline in casualties since enforcement of ROPS fitments.

Coronial Inquest into ATV deaths

The State Coroner is currently conducting an inquest into deaths associated with ATVs. VACC made a submission to the inquest, outlining its support for ATV safety initiatives.

In its submission VACC recommended that:

- VACC's established channel of communication with a large proportion of Victoria's ATV retailers and repairers may be of assistance in addressing ATV safety issues, in conjunction with other key stakeholders.
- VACC supports the introduction of practicable hazard and risk management systems or engineering solutions that would contribute to a reduction in ATV related casualties and deaths.
- VACC supports regular and strategic training of ATV dealers and their staff to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge and competencies to advise their customers on safety issues.
- VACC receives regular reports from its members about the incidence of mechanically unsafe ATVs. As mechanical and structural defects are identified when ATVs are serviced or repaired it is common for a customer to choose not to have some or all of the defects repaired and to continue operating the ATV.
- VACC advocates the introduction of compulsory ATV registrations and annual safety inspections as a method of reducing the incidence of unsafe ATVs.
- VACC also strongly endorses the introduction of compulsory recreational registrations for leisure use of ATVs on public land. Government does not formally recognise the vast number of ATVs now used recreationally and the risk that this poses for recreational riders and the general public. Preventative measures are required before casualties, resulting from ATV use on farms, becomes endemic.

Government Focus on Farm Safety Training

Anecdotal information from FMDA members indicates that the vast majority of machinery related injuries on Victorian farms are a result of operator error or a lack of supervision of children who gain access to dangerous machinery.

In order to reduce the occurrence of such injuries, there has to be a major cultural shift within the farming community, to a more safety conscious culture that has no tolerance for complacency.

It is VACC's view that the best way to achieve a cultural change is for a Government led focus on intensive and generic training programs, reinforced by regular farm safety awareness campaigns. This could perhaps be best achieved through vivid TAC type advertising campaigns.

Consultation and Communication

Consultation and communication are the key drivers of improvements in farm safety. VACC recommends:

- That the Government encourages the establishment of rural community based Occupational Health and Safety Focus Groups in order to identify and address farm safety issues, and to promote a safety culture;
- That the Government consults with farm machinery manufacturers and distributors to ensure cooperation in development of engineering designs to minimise the risks of injuries;
- On-going multi-media campaigns promoting farm safety; and
- Consultation with all stakeholders including industry associations (such as VACC and VFF), local government, community groups, and enforcement agencies (WorkCover).

VACC and FMDA, through promotion and development of the HazCheck Management System, will continue to take a leading role in the prevention of death and injury on Victorian farms. Our members regard farm safety as a high priority and willingly support initiatives introduced by industry.

Both VACC Farm Machinery Dealers and Motorcycle Dealers are willing to demonstrate their commitment to safety and we recommend that the Parliamentary Committee undertake visits to dealer locations for the purpose of being shown how safety is incorporated into their daily business and customer communications process.

VACC and our members would be willing to participate in any public hearings that the Committee proposes to hold.

Please feel free to call me on (03) 9829 1142 if you have any queries or require any further information.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Russell', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

DAVID RUSSELL
SENIOR MANAGER
GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS