

# Inquiry into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

To Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee,  
Level 8, 35 Spring Street, Melbourne Vic 3000

**Submission prepared by Andrew Sullivan, Manager of the  
Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre, University of Ballarat**

## Farm fatalities and injuries

The WorkSafe fatalities statistics in Victoria regarding deaths on farms to my knowledge do not include: -

- Drownings unless there are other contributing factors such as machinery
- Intentional deaths
- Vehicle accident deaths when travelling to and from the farm or sections of the farm
- Farm recreational deaths
- Farm household deaths
- Deaths from occupational diseases (chemicals, zoonoses etc)

But do include; -

- Deaths associated with working on hobby farms
- Deaths of bystanders.

The main causes of deaths are well publicised, tractor run over, rollover, PTO, etc but Coroners reports about the actual cause are not widely publicly available.

## **Recommendations:**

**Publication of fatality statistics on farms should indicate what is included and excluded from the data.**

**Coroner's reports on farm fatalities should be more widely publicised.**

**Statistics from other states should also be readily available.**

Farm injury statistics are less accurate and quoting them can be misleading and open to misinterpretation in either playing the "problem" down or second guessing the real extent of farm injuries.

As farming involves a high proportion of self-employed and family members, claims data and hospital admissions data do not pick up all farm injuries.

## **Recommendations:**

**A strategy for collecting accurate farm injury data should be developed that removes the burden on hospital staff and doctors.**

**Incentives or strategies need to be provided to ensure that information is volunteered from farm injury victims.**

Only with accurate injury data can we then develop strategies for injury prevention.

There are no easy solutions to farm fatalities and injuries. The tractor ROPS (Rollover Protective Structure) campaign was successful and could be used as a model for some other well-researched engineering solutions.

Currently WorkSafe Victoria are providing subsidies for solutions. Solutions should be well researched into their application, practicality, suitability, durability and effectiveness.

Once proven a promotional strategy that has the support of all stakeholders could be developed.

Many farm safety initiatives seem to involve single issues driven by single entities and don't seem to involve a collaborative approach.

There is potential for confusion as to the functions of Farmsafe Victoria and the Farm Safe Alliance as both reside within the one organisation. The Farm Safe Alliance is unique in that it represents the views and experiences of a significant number of organisations all with the intent of reducing the number of fatalities and injuries on farms.

### **Recommendation:**

**The Farmsafe Alliance could have its own identity, incorporated, with its own charter, funding and location and not aligned to any one stakeholder.**

This may enable a more bipartisan approach to farm safety and focus on a broader range of issues rather than those that effect individual stakeholders.

WorkSafe Victoria has conducted some specific farm intervention programs, most recently ROPS and Hazardous Substances. These involve inspectors whose role it is to ensure compliance with the OH&S Act and specific regulations.

Some WorkSafe inspectors can fail to provide advice on how to address particular issues and this can lead to frustration on behalf of the farmer, in that he has been told he has a problem but not how to fix it.

## **Recommendation:**

**WorkSafe inspectors should have a more educative role in relation to farm safety.**

Other means of addressing this educative role could include a team of fully funded farm safety advisors, regionally located providing education, advice and information on farm safety. These people should have a sound knowledge of farming practices, a health and safety qualification, be able to communicate with farmers and their employees and have established networks in their region.

The Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre (University of Ballarat) has been funded to develop and trial a practical on farm one day farm safety workshop (based on Managing Farm Safety) focusing on the particular hazards and solutions for a particular farm sector (dairy, horticulture, sheep beef etc).

This trial has to date been well received and should be integrated into existing farmer extension programs such as Bestwool, Target 10, Top Crop etc.

The focus of the workshop is on the range of hazards on a farm, the range of solutions (controls) – both short term and long term and those suitable to the size and complexity of the farm.

A similar program is conducted in New Zealand supported by the New Zealand Farmers Federation (NZFF) and the Accident Compensation Corporation with participation of some 7,000 farmers.

This New Zealand program is at no cost to the farmer and is supported by incentives to participate.

The program is conducted regionally and supported by a polytechnic (TAFE College). The New Zealand program should be investigated to determine its merits and effectiveness in reducing fatalities and injuries on farms.

### **Recommendation:**

**Participation in farm safety workshops could be at no cost to the farmer and be integrated into existing extension type programs.**

WorkSafe has also funded the Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre to develop health and safety guidance material for the dairy, fruit, vegetable and beef sectors that will be used as part of the training.

### **Recommendation:**

**Guidance material that provides achievable, practical, affordable advice on reducing the risk of injuries and fatalities on farms and meeting compliance should continue to be developed without the need for further formal codes of practice.**

The Shearing Shed Health and Safety book produced by WorkSafe provides practical guidance and is a benchmark.

### **Recommendation:**

**General codes of practice, if developed, should include easy to read and understanding of farming applications.**

## **Further Strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Victorian farms.**

- **Development of a clear evidence based research program for farm safety including causes of fatalities and injuries and the development and evaluation of solutions**
- **Counselling support for farming families and self employed who suffer from the impact of a death or serious injury but are not covered by workers compensation**
- **Compulsory practical workplace health and safety training in schools in preparation for work for all year 10 students.**

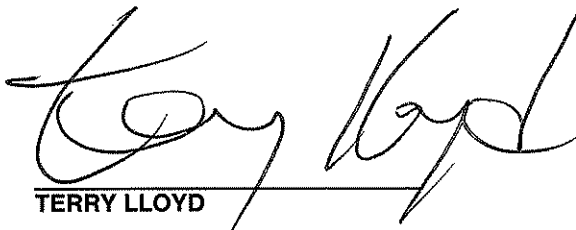


**ANDREW SULLIVAN**

Manager, Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre

University of Ballarat

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**TERRY LLOYD**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Vocational & Further Education)

University of Ballarat

8<sup>th</sup> December, 2003