

5th December, 2003

The Committee Members,
Rural and Regional Services
and Development Committee,
Level 8,
35 Spring Street,
MELBOURNE, VIC. 3000.

Dear Sirs,

INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSE OF FATALITY AND INJURY ON VICTORIAN FARMS

Thank-you for the opportunity to prepare a submission to the very important parliamentary inquiry into Farm Safety on Victorian farms.

We trust that our comments and suggestions are worthwhile and relevant.

If you require any additional information we would be most pleased to provide further details.

Yours faithfully,

Jill Tucker
Co-ordinator
Wellington Farm Safety Action Group

5TH December, 2003

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSE OF FATALITY AND INJURY ON VICTORIAN FARMS BY THE RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT.

The Wellington Farm Safety Action Group (WFSAG) requests the support of the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee in seeking funding to establish:

- An increase from one day to five days per week (full-time) in the salaried position of the Victorian regional farm safety officers (four officers currently salaried one day per week each).
- A realistic and on-going budget (travel, accommodation, administration costs etc) which will allow the regional farm safety officers to introduce established programs to all areas of their region.
- Give to consideration to some financial assistance being made available to any farm safety action group willing to implement current or new strategies.

WFSAG would ask this committee to acknowledge the importance of safety on farms to farmers, their families and the community and to recommend that the strategies and programs that can reduce the incidence of death and injury be met with realistic funding.

WFSAG was established in 1996 and is committed to reducing the incidence of deaths and injury on farms. The WFSAG has a diverse volunteer membership (see attached) and has developed significant credibility in the local community – the Wellington Shire on project based funding.

Projects and programs undertaken since 1997 (see attached).

WFSAG has been acknowledged for its endeavour by being awarded the John Dawson Perpetual Trophy for the most active farm safety action group.

As of 2001 Jill Tucker, Co-ordinator of the WFSAG was one of four regional farm safety co-ordinators appointed by the Victorian Farmsafe Alliance which is financially supported by salary of one day per week.

The Gippsland region (see attached map) is to be covered by a one day per week salary.

The geographic area is too extensive to be realistically reached with the one day per week salaried position (with limited resources) of the regional Farmsafe Alliance co-ordinator.

The volunteer participation in WFSAG is valuable but impractical nor sustainable if meaningful programs are to be delivered in a manner, which is not considered “Mickey-mouse.” Credible, structured organization which is obviously supported by Worksafe, AWU, VFF, CWA, local government, and farmers etc is more likely to be heeded / attended / acknowledged etc.

Points of 1,2 and 5 on the terms of reference – significant data and research can be accessed through the work of Dr Lesley Day, Monash University Accident Research Centre. The excellent work conducted by Dr Lesley Day and others strongly indicates the necessity to implement strategies and projects to reduce the incidence of injury and deaths on farms.

3. Current programs and initiatives designed to improve occupational health and safety on Victorian farms are in fact very worthwhile – eg to name a few – Safe Tractor Access Platforms (STAPS), Shearing Shed Safety Switches, manual handling, Managing Farm Safety courses, hazardous substances campaign etc, however they are limited in their effectiveness and uptake by farmers due to the lack of funding for the delivery of such programs.

Whose role is it to implement effective programs? Where is the funding to be sourced for these roles? How to make the connection between the project and the farmer? This needs to be facilitated or co-ordinated on an ongoing, sustainable basis.

The WFSAG has endeavored with its limited budget, to deliver, promote and raise awareness of the current projects and initiatives.

With realistic funding WFSAG is well placed and sufficiently experienced to broaden the coverage of the programs and initiatives in the Gippsland region.

4. Any impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety.

- Regional farm safety action groups require full-time and ongoing funding for salaries, travel and administration resources to take on the responsibility of connecting farmers to the current projects and initiatives and continue to promote and raise awareness of safe practices on the farm.
- WFASAG has significant networks within the farming community, however it is hindered (by lack of funding) to utilize its ability to have a greater impact. The current one day per week salaried funding received by the farmsafe co-ordinator prevents improvement being sustained.
- The stop start nature of funding (salaried position and projects) impedes the sustaining improvement being made in farm safety. The farm safety action groups need **ongoing** funding to keep the farm safety message **ongoing**.
- The low level of involvement and promotion of farm safety to farmers by the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.
- If we don't know the cause of the injuries, then how can we address the problems? Are the accidents accurately recorded?
 - Lack of data relating to injuries not recorded as farm injuries by some hospitals. (refer Monash University Accident Research Centre F.I.R.M study (Farm Injury Risk Among Men)
 - Lack of data relating to minor injuries (near misses) not requiring hospitalization
 - Statistics do not include "family farm" nor "hobby farm" accidents that are not "WorkCover" claims.
- Insufficient personnel at the "grass roots" level talking to farmers – eg. Four WorkSafe staff (Group Leader / Two principle field officers / One field officers) for Manufacturing and Agriculture for the large region of Gippsland.
- Farmers are reluctant to be "regulated" – they are accustomed to being left to their own devices.
- Some farmers often initially see farm safety as costly. Their first reaction to farm safety is "what is this going to cost me?"

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. In particular the committee should consider the creation of further codes of practice or education and training programs.

The need for further strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and death on farms is endorsed by the WFSAG. Many of the strategies, programs and projects already in place could be developed and enhanced with the injection of increased funding and innovative promotion of the farm safety message.

The creation of further codes of practice needs to take into consideration that many farmers feel they are “over regulated” and resent the intrusion of government authorities on their farm practices.

The code of practice, which is founded on sound research, consultation with farmers and presented with minimal extra burdens for farmers, is more likely to be accepted without protest. Codes of practice introduced with well trialled educative methods and perhaps financial incentives / subsidies, as with ROPS and more recently STAPS, will have greater chance of implementation.

Education is an essential strategy in reducing incidence of death and injury on farms. The WFSAG has run a successful farm safety project for Primary Schools since 1997. Some 1,200 students (grades 5 & 6) from 34 primary schools in the Wellington Shire have participated in the project every second year. The project has been praised by teachers, parents, CWA, WorkSafe and the AWU – all of whom agree the message of safety on the farm needs to be learnt as early as possible.

The secondary school curriculum is an area where farm safety is often over looked in curriculums – except in some agriculture / horticulture classes. The “Future Farmers” program developed in New South Wales is a worthwhile example of the material, which can be developed and incorporated into secondary education. This is an area which requires addressing in Victoria and would need funding to develop a program which would be endorsed and accepted by schools / teachers and DET.

Tertiary education – OH & S is often an optional component of many of the TAFE and university courses. WorkSafe K.I.D.S are currently working with university students developing some aspects of farm safety.

Agriculture / Horticulture students undertake limited theoretical and practical studies in OH & S and much of this curriculum material is inconsistent.

Education of the farming community should not be considered as being restricted to the traditionally primary, secondary and tertiary avenues of learning but must be encouraged and offered through courses, DPI and DSE workshops, projects and training in as many modes as possible.

Rather than have agricultural OH & S as a separate module, the relevant information should be integrated into current DPI and DSE programs, such as Target 10, Beefcheque, Bestwool etc.

WFSAG has developed partnerships with WorkSafe, AWU, TAFE, CWA, VFF, local businesses and organizations (see attached list) to offer a range of learning / training strategies to farmers in Gippsland.

These strategies have been successful because they are:-

- Community orientated and driven
- Well organized
- Widely publicized
- Supported and endorsed by the relevant organizations
- User friendly – “no big stick” approach
- Delivered in local venues where participation feels comfortable

Whilst government agencies and industry bodies are best placed to develop codes of practice it is the “grass roots” organizations such as local FSAGs, which should be invited to contribute to the development of these codes of practice and subsequent strategies.

Local farm safety action groups with established credibility will be the best conduits for delivery of educative projects / programs and training in partnership with the relevant organization.



The Wellington Farm Safety Action Group (WFSAG) voluntary committee consists of the following community individuals, groups and organizations which ensures that the farm safety message is continually being integrated into the wider community at every opportunity:

- ABC Radio
- WorkSafe Victoria
- AWU
- UDV
- VFF
- TAFE
- DPI
- CWA
- Individual farmers
- BestWool 2010
- Landcare Network
- Gippsland Women's Health
- Farmsafe Alliance
- Central Gippsland Health Services
- Gippsland Times
- Murray Goulburn Co-operative Ltd.
- Macalister Research Farm
- Division of General Practice
- Gippsland Farmer newspaper
- Ambulance Victoria
- Adult Community Education Sale

Projects and programs undertaken since 1997

- Primary Schools Farm Safety Project – 34 schools, approximately 1,200 students Every second year – grades 5 & 6
- STAP – Safe Tractor Access Platforms – currently funded by WorkSafe but in previous years funded by DHS and Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Shearing Shed Safety Switches and back harness for shearers. AWU initiated project funded by WorkSafe Victoria
- Community Safety – “Social Evening with a Farm Safety Theme” – Community orientated social evenings for farmers with a specific farm safety theme held in local halls, hotels –funded by WorkSafe and AWU - eg. Guest speakers:-
 - Sam Beechey – AWU
 - Phil Maskrey – WorkSafe Field Officer
 - Phil Byrne – State Coroner
 - Michael Lawrance – manual handling focused on the shearing industry
- “Health and Safety” days in conjunction with Community Health Nurses and local General Practitioners from the Division of General Practice. Health checks carried out eg. Blood pressure / sugar levels / skin (sun) damage etc and machinery / tractor displays, information handouts.
- Promotion of Chem Collect and Drum Muster
- Attendance at “Farm Safety 4 Just Kids” conference, Ames, Iowa, USA funded by RIRDC
- Attendance with displays and information handouts etc at field days
- Farm safety talks at local Landcare groups, VFF branches and TAFE ag students
- ABC radio presentations
- Awareness articles for local newspapers, newsletters, bulletins etc
- Organised and delivered the 2001 Victorian Farm Safe Alliance Forum
- Attendance at Conferences – Rural Injury Prevention Warrnambool 2001, Cairns 1999, Whyalla 1997, Echuca 1996 Funded by ACES, community donations and personal funds
- Facilitated local Managing Farm Safety Courses

- Assisted Monash University Accident Research Centre with research projects
 - Safe Tractor Access Platforms
 - Tractor Safety (Lardner Park)
- Shearing Shed Safety Sessions – Presentations of Shearing Shed Safety Manual at local shearing sheds. Includes shearing shed safety audit with woolgrowers (BestWool). Presenters – AWU, WorkSafe and WFSAG. Funded by WorkSafe
- Safety Audit – Macalister Research Farm
- Hypothetical 1997 (Safety Week) – Farm injury “accident” and its ramifications for the farm family. Maffra Community Hall, funded by ACES and WorkCover
- Basic Farm First Aid courses – promoted courses in conjunction with Ambulance Victoria and St Johns Ambulance
- Men’s Health Nights – guest speaker Simon Madden
- Participation in Safe Communities Week, Rural Health Week, WorkSafe Week



The Wellington Farm Safety Action Group actively involves a variety of community stakeholders in all of its activities. The relevant community groups and organizations which will be engaged in the Primary Schools Farm Safety Project include:

- WorkSafe Victoria
- Rural Ambulance Victoria
- Pony Clubs
- St John Ambulance
- Stock and Station Agents
- TAFE
- Farmers
- Machinery Suppliers
- Motorcycle Association & Motorbike Dealers (ATV suppliers)
- H.A.R.T.
- Community Health Services
- AWU
- VFF
- WorkSafe K.I.D.S
- CWA
- National Lifesaving Victoria
- Other Farm Safety Action Groups
- Monash University Accident Research Centre (Dr Lesley Day)
- D.P.I. and D.S.E.