

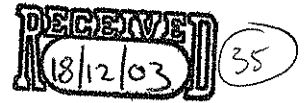


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**Southern Grampians**  
SHIRE COUNCIL

K'OB:ER  
1/6/91



16 December 2003

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

Dear Sir/Madam

**INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSE OF FATALITY AND  
INJURY ON VICTORIAN FARMS**

Southern Grampians Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to have input into the inquiry into the cause of Fatality and Injury on Victorian Farms. Southern Grampians being a rural shire is well aware of the safety issues involved with farms and therefore supports an inquiry to look at the causes of injuries and fatalities building on current approaches and developing initiatives to improve farm safety. In our submission we want to highlight in particular initiatives that are occurring at present that are addressing some of the key points highlighted in the report as well as provide specific input from the local area.

Of the 6 points highlighted in the terms of reference Southern Grampians Shire Council wants to address point 3 in particular and summarize with some general comments about farm safety issues.

**3** *Current Programs and Initiatives designed to improve occupational health and safety on Victorian farms*

- a) One body that is focused on improving safety across the agriculture industry is Farmsafe Australia. Farmsafe Australia is an association incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory to facilitate farm safety action across all agricultural industries in Australia. Farmsafe's mission is to improve the wellbeing and productivity of Australian agriculture through enhanced health and safety awareness and practices. The programs and activities of Farmsafe Australia are based upon the philosophy that the key responsibility for farm safety rests primarily with individual farmers, farm families, and farm workers.

- b) A local initiative through the Western District Health Service is Sustainable Farm Families - the human resource in the triple bottom line (addressing farm fatalities, injury, health and its impact of farming families).

Western District Health Service has just commenced a three year project in collaboration with the Farm Health and Safety Joint Research Venture (managed by Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation RIRDC), RMIT University Hamilton, Farm Management 500 and Land Connect Australia.



This project is unique and has broad based farming support with the Victorian Farmers Federation, Australian Women in Agriculture, Farm Bis, Meat and Livestock Australia and Department Primary Industries supporting and steering the project.

The main aim of the project is to investigate the strong link between farming family health, farm related accidents and farm sustainability. The poor health status of rural communities is well documented, and the hypothesis behind the project is that poor health effects farmer productivity and contributes significantly to farm accidents, injury and death.

The proposed outcomes for the project are as follows:

- \* To investigate the link between farming family health, farm related accidents and farm sustainability.
- \* To build capacity across rural disciplines.
- \* To enhance farm family and rural disciplines' awareness of early signs of poor health and factors associated with potential illness and potential injury.
- \* To enhance farming family health (reduced cardiovascular disease, lower incidence of cancer - skin, bowel, breast), and the reduction of farm related accidents.
- \* To enable farmers to make family health and practice comparisons between other farmers in similar and different agricultural sectors.
- \* To recommend changes to current farming families lifestyle and OH&S practices to promote good health and OH&S on the farm by developing a family health plan consistent with other farming practices such as business and natural resource management planning.

The Sustainable Farm Families project is an example of an innovative strategy designed to reduce the incidence of farm fatalities and injuries and improve long-term farm sustainability and profitability. The project will provide important outcomes that can be adapted and utilized across all farming sectors.

- c) More recently there was an initiative in Victoria where farmers were required to complete a course and gain a certificate to that they could use chemicals on the farm. This approach was taken to address the chemical safety issue on farms and proved very successful with a large number of farmers completing the course and gaining a thorough understanding in the use of chemicals. An approach like this could be taken to address other key farm safety issues as it proved very successful in engaging the farming community.

*Other comments*



A particular potential safety issue identified in South West Victoria since the Ash Wednesday fires is underground power. As part of reducing the risk regarding future fires to the area farmers were instructed that the power to their properties was to go underground. The problem that now exists is that a number of farms do not have plans which show the location of underground power. There is the potential for injury or fatality especially in the case where there is a new owner as a result of not knowing where the power supply is for example when digging post holes. Ideally the location of underground power should have been identified in farm titles but this has not occurred and not all properties have details on site of where the underground power is situated. Two ways to overcome this potential safety issue are to include the location of where the underground power is on the farm title and or to have markers to alert farmers where the underground power is located.

*Summary*

To reduce the likelihood of injuries and fatalities to farmers a risk management approach needs to be taken. Incentives need to be provided to engage the farming community so as to enhance their safety. Ultimately there needs to be a strong commitment by the sector to improved OH&S which is difficult considering the complex nature and diversity of farming. There may be an incentive for larger companies to reduce premiums but this may not be the case for the self employed. An approach where all farms are required to be at a certain standard regarding OH&S is required being mindful of the level of resources required to be at this level so that positive outcomes can be achieved.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into this inquiry. Should you need to discuss this matter further or require any further information please do not hesitate to contact myself on 55 730 422.

Yours Sincerely

KEVIN O'BRIEN  
ACTING DIRECTOR  
COMMUNITY & LEISURE SERVICES