Dear Minister D’Ambrosio and Minister Symes

REGENERATIVE AUSTRALIAN FARMER’S SUBMISSION ON VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT EMISSIONS REDUCTION TARGETS

I am writing to provide you with Regenerative Australian Farmers (RAF) comments on Victoria’s emissions reduction targets and opportunities to reduce emissions in the State. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Regenerative Australian Farmers is an Australian organisation dedicated to encouraging the widest possible adoption of regenerative landscape management practices (also known as regenerative agriculture) across rural, remote and urban environments.

We address an alarming problem. According to our senior scientists, two thirds of our soils have disappeared since European settlement. Regenerative Australian Farmers supports the growing number of innovative farmers and land managers who are successfully regenerating their landscapes and maintaining or increasing their production.

Regenerative Australian Farmers (RAF) was founded in 2015 after its members recognised the need to bring together key practitioners who had been working in the regenerative farming / soil carbon space for some years. As chairman of RAF I have played a key advisory role in this regard, having liaised with politicians and key Government officers over many years to help bring about the Carbon Farming Initiative. During this time we have actively supported our alliance partner Soils for Life through its patron and founder, former Australian Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery AC, (AO (Mil), CVO, MC (Reid), and continue to closely collaborate with them.

Firstly, may I commend the Victorian government for passing the Climate Change Act 2017. The Act’s legislated goal of net zero emissions by 2050 and its comprehensive program to realise this goal and ensure Victoria’s climate resilience are vital objectives that underpin the future social, economic and environmental security of the State.

Regenerative Australian Farmers supports the report and advice of the Independent Expert Panel to the Victorian government on emissions reduction cuts, namely that Victoria should aim to cut its emissions by 45 to 60% from 2005 levels by 2030. The Panel’s approach of establishing Victoria’s fair share of a global carbon budget is a just and reasonable approach. Regenerative Australian Farmers also supports adopting the upper end of this target range.

Regenerative Australian Farmers, Soils for Life and other leading organisations within our network recognise the critical importance of healthy soils to underpin sustainable, productive agriculture to support rural communities providing food for Australia and the world. We are part of a growing global movement that recognises how critical healthy soils and soil carbon are to sustainable food production, biodiversity and a habitable atmosphere on Earth. The United Nations estimates that land-use conversion and soil cultivation have historically been an important source of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to the atmosphere and are still responsible for about one-third of GHG emissions. Furthermore the Australian Government is a signatory of the 4/1000 Initiative: Soils for Food Security and Climate, a voluntary action plan under the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) 2015.

Healthy soils also present a significant emissions reduction opportunity for the Victorian agriculture sector and I want to highlight this opportunity to the Victorian government as it considers how to reduce emissions.
For Victoria, soil carbon farming is a real and significant (and possibly under recognised) method to sequester carbon, extremely cost effectively. Importantly, it does not compete with agricultural production for land, is very effective in sequestering carbon and boosting farm productivity.

In recognition of the important role of soils, the Prime Minister recently reappointed Soils for Life’s founder, Michael Jeffery, as Australia’s Advocate for Soil Health and provided Soils for Life with $2 million in funding over the next four years to support its important work.

Soil carbon farming has developed to the extent that under the Commonwealth’s Carbon Farming Initiative there is a very robust soil carbon farming methodology (Measurement of soil carbon sequestration in agricultural systems) so that soil carbon farming can generate Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs). Regenerative Australian Farmers was involved with the first registration in Victoria for a soil carbon project under that methodology. Indeed Regenerative Australian Farmers provided the verification for the first soil carbon ACCUs generated in Australia and globally (which occurred in Victoria in 2018).

There is a growing market for ACCUs:

- under the Commonwealth’s Emissions Reduction Fund;
- for compliance under the safeguard mechanism;
- in the voluntary market; and
- for other compliance purposes (such as for Victorian water corporations to meet their regulated obligations to reduce emissions, and other carbon reduction obligations that the Victorian government is likely to develop).

To date, Victorian farmers have received a relatively small proportion of the income available from the sale of ACCUs. Regenerative Australian Farmers believes there is an excellent opportunity for the Victorian government, in developing its agricultural sector emissions reduction pledge, to support the development of soil carbon farming in Victoria with all the attendant environmental and agricultural productivity benefits.

We know that as many Victorian farmers take up regenerative farming practices, many of them are also unaware of the potential of their practices to generate ACCUs for sale to diversify their income and support good farming practice. Many farmers already sequester soil carbon, albeit with no baseline, registration, monitoring, recording or ACCU contract. For these farmers, as well as the State, this situation represents a significant forgone opportunity, because the ACCUs that could be generated unfortunately, in effect, do not exist. We believe that supporting Victorian farmers to realise these opportunities can form a key plank of Victoria’s agriculture sector emissions reduction pledge.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you both to further discuss this opportunity in the context of implementing the Victorian Climate Change Act.

Please contact me on [Contact Information] should you wish to arrange to meet with either Regenerative Australian Farmers and/or Soils for Life.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr John White,

Regenerative Australian Farmers