

SUBMISSION

Bellarine Peninsula Statement of Planning Policy

20th August 2021

From: [REDACTED] Farmer – cropping and beef

I am making this submission as a farmer operating a 140 ha property located at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] rolling landscape of The Bellarine Peninsula. My wife and I fatten young beef cattle (60-100 head per year) for food production and have engaged a cropping share-farmer who produces grain and oil seed crops from ~55ha on our farm. We have had an association with the region for over 50 years and have farmed at our current location for almost 20 years.

Since 1970, the population of the Peninsular has increased 5 fold to an estimated 60,000 permanent residents at 2020. This change has introduced many challenges to farmers, including a significant increase in the population of feral animals (cats and dogs) in addition to the usual and increasing numbers of rabbits and foxes, pest weeds and a major increase in roadside litter either being thrown from vehicles or falling from unsecured trailer loads. All these issues add significant cost and time to operating a farm.

In addition road traffic volumes and the speed of vehicles creates significant safety hazards for slow moving farm vehicles and the large (semi trailers and "B" doubles) trucks moving livestock, fertilizer, grain products and other farm related items to and from farms on the Bellarine.

The draft Bellarine Statement of Planning Policy, is a reasonably comprehensive documentation of some of the existing features of the Bellarine Peninsula and addresses some of those features that are worthy of conservation. To that end I congratulate the authors.

However, as a farmer, I read the document, I view its presentation and I cannot help but see the emphasis being heavily skewed towards coastal landscapes, tourism and protection of "first nation people" culture and heritage. Almost 80% of the internal landscapes on the Bellarine from the roads and recreational areas are of farmland. Yet at least 90% of the document appears to be devoted to discussion or photographs of tourist areas and seascapes. It appears to me that the authors, by devoting so little coverage to the farming landscape either do not understand or have not interviewed any farmers to determine what may need to be included in future planning policy to ensure the "survival" of rural landscapes in the future. This disappoints me enormously. I am not a "whinging" farmer, but emphasis of the draft report is very obvious. It is urban centric!

People who live, work, visit or holiday on the Bellarine frequently will comment on the attractive, wide rural vistas which can be viewed in abundance over much of the region. If those vistas are to be preserved then there must be an improved understanding of the infrastructure and incentives needed to encourage the farming families to continue farming in the region. If farmers feel there is little support from the local authorities or state government then they will move to areas where farming can be carried out without feeling "squeezed" by urban spread.

The draft report makes little or no mention of the increasing numbers of farms owned by city based investors. The "real farmers", I suggest, are already in the minority as farms are sold at prices well in excess of real farm values. Hence the vast majority of sales in the region over the past 20 years have seen "non-farmer" buyers coming into the district. Some quickly learn to become a reasonable "custodian" of their farmland whilst others are either property investors or "sea-change" families. In my it is the latter group that will change the landscape.

I would hope that the beautiful broad acre farmland views could be retained on the Bellarine, but when I look at other peri-urban areas around Melbourne, I do not hold out a great deal of hope.

The draft planning document, as I have noted, does not in my view adequately address the rapid changes that are already occurring to the farmland areas on the Bellarine.

I would strongly suggest more consultation is required with the existing farming community if DELWP really wants to understand the needs of farmers.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]