

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Melbourne – Friday 3 May 2024

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

Nicole Werner

WITNESSES

Natalie Reiter, Deputy Secretary, Policy and Strategy, and

Michael Orford, Director, Strategic Land Use Planning, Department of Transport and Planning; and

Sarah-Jane McCormack, Executive Director, Agriculture Policy and Programs, and

Dougal Purcell, Acting Chief Executive and Deputy Secretary, Agriculture Victoria.

The CHAIR: Welcome, everyone. It is fantastic to be here. This is a public hearing into securing Victoria's food supply, and all the committee members that are here today are delighted to be here. I will just run through some important formalities before we begin. Thank you for joining us at this public hearing.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past and present and elders from communities who may be here today. I also extend a welcome to any members of the public and the media watching today.

This is one of a number of public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about issues relevant to the inquiry.

I will just run through some important formalities. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give; however, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside this hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted in our final report.

Thank you for making time to meet with the committee today. Could you please state your full names, titles and which department you are from before we begin.

Michael ORFORD: I am Michael Orford. I am the Director of Strategic Land Use Planning from the Department of Transport and Planning.

The CHAIR: Thank you for being here today.

Natalie REITER: Natalie Reiter, Deputy Secretary of Policy and Strategy at the Department of Transport and Planning.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Natalie.

Dougal PURCELL: Dougal Purcell, Acting Deputy Secretary and Chief Executive of Agriculture Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dougal.

Sarah-Jane McCORMACK: Sarah Jane McCormack, Executive Director responsible for Agriculture Policy and Programs in AgVic and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you so much for making the time to be here today. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Natalie REITER: Michael will commence by making an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Transport and Planning.

Michael ORFORD: Thank you very much, Natalie. It is great to be here this morning.

Visual presentation.

Michael ORFORD: The Department of Transport and Planning has a lead role in the identification, enhancement and planning for a range of land uses across Victoria. Our role is to provide advice to

governments and implement policy decisions of governments through the land use planning system, and principally that is through Victoria's planning schemes. DTP recognises that agricultural land is essential, firstly, for food and fibre production and, secondly, for the economic and social sustainability of rural settlements in Victoria.

As you would be aware, Victoria's population is growing, and it will see Melbourne grow to 9 million people and Victoria to 11 million people, both by the 2050s. This population growth increases the demand for food and fibre production and places pressure on natural systems, urban areas and farmland.

Victoria's planning system sets clear expectations for the use and development of land across our state, including through planning scheme zones such as the farming zone and the use of strong legislated settlement boundaries such as Melbourne's urban growth boundary. Planning policies facilitate agricultural and farming activity and prevent inappropriate uses on or near prime agricultural land, and zones and overlays control land use and development, protecting rural communities and agricultural businesses and livelihoods. Indeed some of Victoria's most fertile agricultural land is located within 100 kilometres of Melbourne.

The *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land* action plan was released in March of 2024 and sets out a policy program for protecting rural and agricultural land for food-producing purposes and growing agricultural businesses, protecting this land from inappropriate urban uses.

As you would be aware, *Victoria's Housing Statement* was released in September of 2023 and recommitted to the government's goal for 70 per cent of new housing to be in established areas along with the legislated urban growth boundary to help protect Victoria's valuable farmland from urban encroachment. The forthcoming plan for Victoria has a time horizon to 2050, and it will focus on rural and regional economies, further safeguarding agricultural land. As part of the plan, Melbourne's urban growth boundary is also sought to be retained.

Many food-processing activities require food to be transported to Melbourne or to major regional cities. The land use planning system identifies key industrial precincts and nodes across the state along with freight interchange points at the state and national level, with the most significant areas protected through the *Melbourne Industrial and Commercial Land Use Plan*. A refresh is also underway of the Victorian freight plan, which was released in 2018, to assess Victoria's freight network for major anticipated growth and seek to identify ways to better connect agricultural land with markets.

In summary, Victoria's planning and transport systems are well established to protect our valued agricultural land and secure Victoria's vital food supply for our growing population. I will pass over to Dougal Purcell now from Agriculture Victoria. Thanks, Dougal.

Dougal PURCELL: Thank you, Michael. Panel, my name is Dougal Purcell, as I said, and my colleague Sarah-Jane is here from Agriculture Victoria.

Visual presentation.

Dougal PURCELL: Today we would like to present our organisation Agriculture Victoria's role and responsibilities in the context of supporting a resilient, vibrant and competitive agricultural sector. The agriculture sector strategy that was released in 2021 identifies clear roles and responsibilities in the context of supporting a resilient agricultural sector, and it identifies clear areas of focus and investment by government to help the sector remain strong, innovative and sustainable. This focus includes building sector resilience to the challenges of climate change, responding to and preparing for natural disasters and biosecurity threats and being responsive to growth opportunities linked to the export and domestic market opportunities.

I think it is important to note that the agriculture sector is constantly transitioning in response to internal and external factors, including land use pressures. The effectiveness of this transition is evidenced by the sector's growing contribution to the Victorian economy. The agriculture sector employs more than 154,000 people in agriculture and food manufacturing. We are Australia's largest export state, exporting a record \$19.6 billion of product in 2022–23, and we export far more than we consume domestically.

Land use planning is an important part of the efficient operation of the agricultural sector and supports certainty for investments and best practice developments. In our role in regard to planning, Agriculture Victoria provides data and information to support government decision-making and for government to understand further context

about the agricultural sector, its practices and the location of high-value agriculture. Agriculture Victoria and the Minister for Agriculture do not have a role in planning decisions except for a very specific role in regard to cattle feedlots related to the Victorian Code for Cattle Feedlots 1995. We do not make recommendations or decisions about what type of land is strategic or should be prioritised, as this is a role of government. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you very much for that. It is really important that we start today with both your departments, because you are so important to this. I might just kick off with one of the questions. As someone who represents a community outside the 100-kilometre limit on protecting farmland around Melbourne – I come from Ballarat, and a number of MPs come from regional areas as well – what happens to farmland 101 kilometres from Melbourne?

Natalie REITER: That is a great question, Chair. We are going to really pursue these protections through the plan for Victoria, and the housing statement foreshadowed both the retention of the urban growth boundary and targets for all local government areas. We are pursuing that through town boundaries, and we will be engaging with local governments on those over the coming months. Putting settlement and town boundaries in place will have the same effect as an urban growth boundary around Melbourne and provide that protection that is being sought.

The CHAIR: Great. Deputy Chair, would you like to go next? Then we will get to the Member for Croydon.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, everyone, for attending today. A question from me – as the Chair said, I am the Member for Morwell, so I am outside the 100-kilometre zone also around Melbourne: how will the department ensure that the new plan for Victoria balances objectives of the government's housing statement with protecting peri-urban agricultural land?

Natalie REITER: Thank you, Member. The conversations that we are having with these peri-urban councils and rural and regional councils are very much focused on their aspiration to have population growth to enhance the social and economic vitality of those towns as well as ensuring that we do not encroach on those rich agricultural lands. Those conversations are leading to us talking to them about an indicative town boundary that we will be having essentially autogenerated based on what we understand of the natural assets of the land and the social and connectedness opportunities of the town centre. We will then refine those boundaries, and that will go out for consideration and public exhibition so that people can interrogate: 'Have we got that balance right?' Certainly in places particularly like Wangaratta there is a concern that it is not just residential but also other encroachments into ag land for non-ag purposes that are impacting the food production and the food security of the state.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: David.

David HODGETT: Dougal, you talked about data to guide government decision-making. Is that all levels of government? The reason I ask is that I am conscious you have got, what, 79 councils out there all making a lot of planning decisions, and we go round the state and see urban sprawl housing – someone might want to put in an intermodal freight hub, someone might want to put in golf courses or quarries and of course the farmer wants to protect land for agricultural land. So I am just wondering who overlays ultimate decision-making, given you have got all these decision-makers and to some extent the feds as well?

Dougal PURCELL: Noting that under the planning scheme it is a decision for the Minister for Planning, other than that specific feedlot code of practice that I have mentioned, Agriculture Victoria supports with our data in multiple ways. We have an online service VLUIS, which provides really detailed information for local governments, state government and individual developers around land use, land use change, natural vegetation and land tenure. So that is a really interactive service on the internet.

Over the period of time Agriculture Victoria has produced reports to support decision-making, such as the SALAD – strategic agricultural land and development – report, which particularly looked at land use change and impacts on agriculture and I think was published around 2020. In addition, particularly with the lens of 'How do we support the development of the agricultural sector in regional Victoria?' Agricultural Victoria does

have an agricultural advisory team within the department. Again, their role is to support agricultural developments particularly through regional Victoria. It is supporting local government in their decision-making under the planning scheme and in helping them to inform decision-making, because we appreciate that for some local governments a significant agricultural development such as intensive dairy, a shedded dairy, a broiler farm or something may not come across their table regularly. So there is a service from Agriculture Victoria to work with local government to help them assess and step that through but then also to work with the landholder, the farmer or the investor to help them navigate how that development may go about.

David HODGETT: The other thing I wanted to explore – Natalie, you touched on it in response to Marty’s question. Do we track the cumulative loss of agricultural land? The example I am thinking of is as the government of the day is looking at, and we are transitioning to, renewables, obviously a lot of land is being taken up by solar, wind and other uses and things. And there are often competing uses, as I said, like quarries and that sort of thing. I have not got any data to suggest this, but it is almost like agricultural uses come last because of other priorities of the day. So I am just wondering: do we track that, so the alarm can go off to say, ‘Hey, this is getting critical,’ before it gets critical?

Natalie REITER: We have not done that to date, but it is a very good suggestion and is something that could be done with aerial imaging to overlay and assess that loss and that impact. So I am very keen to pick that up as a recommendation. We are alert to those concerns, and I guess the reason this inquiry was convened was because government is alert to these concerns. We will be, through the plan for Victoria and enacting these green wedge actions, making sure that we start to implement many more of these protections. But in terms of an evidence base, that is something that we could do.

David HODGETT: Thank you.

Martha HAYLETT: I have got a question for Dougal or Sarah-Jane again. Just coming back to the green wedges themselves, do you have any detail around which agricultural industries are located in our green wedges and why those green wedge locations are such productive areas for that?

Dougal PURCELL: We do. The VLUIS internet portal will give a very detailed overlay on the agricultural use in those areas. What I would probably call to is that the green wedge action plan identified the importance of horticulture particularly around Werribee and Bacchus Marsh – very, very important industries and also significant employers in those regions. If we head down towards Mr Cameron’s area, towards Gippsland and the south-east parts of Melbourne through Pakenham, they are particularly important for horticulture. There is very significant horticultural practice there with a highly sustainable rainfall and very productive soil types. Look, the information that we have to hand is that the 100-kilometre perimeter around Melbourne does make up in the realms of 10 per cent of Victoria’s gross value of agricultural production, so it is a very important agricultural part of the state.

I think it is also important to note, Ms Haylett, that agriculture is continuing to transition and always will transition. Through technology, innovation and research the way that we use land right across the state is continuing to change and will always change. I acknowledge particularly the importance of horticulture in that peri-urban space, but I also recognise that there are other parts of the state that are changing their land use, and that includes in horticulture.

Martha HAYLETT: Thank you.

David HODGETT: So will we see more protected planning scheme overlays like Bacchus Marsh and Werribee?

Natalie REITER: Yes. The short answer is that the green wedge action plan makes a number of commitments. We are now working through enacting that and will be moving on that very quickly.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Can I ask further to that, then: we talked about the 100 kilometres and beyond the 101, with towns having boundaries, so bringing in the planning scheme and the Victorian planning provision regulations. How could they be further strengthened to protect Victoria’s food supply?

Natalie REITER: The town boundary will probably have the most significant effect because it is a signal to the market then of the expectation of the state around the uses of that land, which has been quite fuzzy. Taking

Wangaratta as another example, again, it is quite difficult, even as somebody that has lived there, to understand exactly where that delineation would start to occur, so I think that that will be a very significant marker. Then there is the use of the overlay to once again make clear what those specific land uses are permitted to be. Did you want to speak to that, Michael?

Michael ORFORD: Yes, that is absolutely right. We can look at how those planning controls can put in place stronger protections for particular uses, particularly through identifying particular parts of the state, and as Natalie mentioned, outside of those town boundaries, where there are those pressures.

Jordan CRUGNALE: So we are doing that work where, if we are looking at the whole state, it is like, 'This area is actually really good for high industry, farming or dairy, and then this one over here is good for growing stuff in the ground'? Because I think that would actually help local councils, who sometimes get these big applications, to do that strategic work.

Natalie REITER: Yes, and we can certainly have prioritisations from a strategic point of view. Of course we cannot limit to, from a market point of view, too fine a grain of detail. However, we can ensure that there are not conflicts of use which mean the introduction of that new use would impact on others.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Thank you.

Nicole WERNER: Given the government has introduced a legislative requirement for each green wedge council to prepare and implement a green wedge management plan, I am interested in the councils that have done that well – if they are ahead in that space and if there are any leading in that space.

Michael ORFORD: That is a really good question. I am aware that at the moment Cardinia are engaging with the department particularly well in relation to the development of their upcoming green wedge management plan. We will be meeting with them in a couple of weeks to understand what their needs are and how we can best support them in that space.

Nicole WERNER: And in practice what is that looking like in terms of implementation?

Michael ORFORD: It will be a long process to help to identify which parts of their green wedge need what kinds of policy parameters put in place and what kinds of controls. We will work with them to understand what their priorities are, as the council, for different parts of their green wedge and provide whatever support we can to the council.

Nicole WERNER: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Can I just follow that up with: have councils been provided with additional resources to develop and update or implement these? Because we know that councils are often really stretched.

Natalie REITER: They have not directly, although we will as a department be working much more closely with councils than perhaps has been the case in the past to collaboratively design and develop this strategic work. I think Dougal's example of what Ag are doing with particular council requests is something that we will be emulating in the Department of Transport and Planning.

Martin CAMERON: David touched before on solar farms, and down in my seat in the Latrobe Valley, obviously with the power stations there, there is a push towards having a lot of solar farms around the power stations and pushing out into farming land. One of the questions that I get a lot from our farmers is: is there a process that has to be ticked off by your department for where the solar farms are going and how big they are, or is it like a free-for-all where they can just set it up and go for it as we transition into renewables?

Natalie REITER: My understanding is that the hurdles are quite limited. We are alert to this. We need to add additional protections because this is an unintended consequence I think of a whole lot of terrific aspirations around getting renewables out there quite quickly and that contributing to companies' green credentials, but it is coming at the expense of other policy objectives around food security. So that is something that we will be working on very quickly.

Martin CAMERON: Do you feel if they are not located in the right spots, it could diminish how towns can actually spread to build as more people come into these towns – if we wedge ourselves into a certain spot because we have the solar farms in the wrong spots?

Natalie REITER: I mean, potentially. I think the bigger concern is that these companies are, quite sensibly, locating proximate to the grid to minimise their costs of feeding in. I doubt that that would actually impinge on residential development, although there could be instances where that occurs.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

Martha HAYLETT: I have just got a bit of a macro question, zooming out a little bit. What do you all think – and I guess this is for AgVic and DTP: what aspects of the planning scheme or Victorian planning provision regulations do you think could be strengthened to protect Victoria's food supply? It is another big question, but what do you think are some of those things that could make improvements there?

Michael ORFORD: I think that is a really great question. I think that to date we have been really strong in a lot of aspects about protecting agricultural land. But there is always an opportunity to go further – so identifying particular uses that could be safeguarded for the future, putting in place those planning controls that can really identify particular parts of the state where agricultural land is particularly valuable and where we need to put in place special parameters or special controls. I think Natalie has spoken about some of those irrigated areas as well. Those might be a good area for a focus for planning controls moving forward.

Natalie REITER: And for those who spend their time reading the planning scheme, there are permitted uses, then there are uses that could be considered and then there are uses that are out of bounds, if you like. I think particularly with regard to the renewables piece, that had not necessarily been considered at the time that those uses were being drafted. So that is a key focus for us, having a strengthened tool, triggering the considerations and then making decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Martha HAYLETT: And then how will that work be done? Is that through the plan for Victoria or is that through a different –

Natalie REITER: The plan for Victoria can provide the strategic authorisation, if you like, for that policy. Then the statutory work would be done through either a ministerial advisory committee or a panel arrangement that would then be able to have the voice of submitters evaluate the various views and the minister then make a decision on an overlay or a change to the zone.

David HODGETT: Can I ask: the agricultural advisory council – what is the make-up of that? How many people are on that?

Dougal PURCELL: It is not a council, sorry, Sir.

David HODGETT: Sorry.

Dougal PURCELL: It is the Agriculture Victoria Planning and Advisory Service within Agriculture Victoria – a team of staff who undertake that work. It is in the vicinity of three staff, give or take several. But it is a small team that just works particularly on developments. A lot of our work has focused up in the Goulburn Valley, where we have seen significant agricultural developments in dairy and other infrastructure.

David HODGETT: Okay. I think that you mentioned a team within AgVic that helps councils with some extraordinary –

Dougal PURCELL: Sorry, that is the Agriculture Victoria Planning and Advisory Service.

David HODGETT: Yes, it is a great initiative. I just wonder how many councils are aware of that, or if they all are, and if they use it, recognising that these things do not pop up all the time. Certainly when I talk to a lot of councils, not only about agricultural pursuits but some big developments, they do not have the resources or the capacity or the expertise to deal with them and would welcome that support. But sometimes I do not know if councils are aware that they can access that.

Dougal PURCELL: I will take that on board. Can I take that question on notice, Sir –

David HODGETT: Yes, sure.

Dougal PURCELL: because we have got some data around the number of councils that we have supported and the significance of the economic infrastructure we have supported to be developed. Can I take that on notice and get back to you?

David HODGETT: Yes, absolutely. But it is a great initiative. I think it is a great idea.

Martha HAYLETT: Even how much you are proactively reaching out to councils versus them coming to you – that would be interesting to know.

Dougal PURCELL: Yes. I can say that we are well known to councils, and I think a service like this kind of spreads amongst councils. But we will come back to you with some more information.

David HODGETT: Yes. Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I have got a really broad question that may be even a bit broader than all of this. With innovations to the ag sector in terms of particularly our love of artisan producers and stuff like that – often it is not the big broadacre farming that has certainly dominated Australia's economy for many, many decades and everything like that. These artisans, whether it is artisan cheeses or whether it is artisan people doing special things with meat or different fibre – how is that changing in terms of land use, because people can produce some beautiful products using a lot less of the acreage than they had previously, in the past?

Dougal PURCELL: I am happy to have a go, Ms Addison. I think we particularly acknowledge that it is very real – it is happening – and it is a positive in that it is diversifying the agricultural sector, it is providing important employment and it is a different skill set in many circumstances. Just coming back to what I spoke about earlier, often the development of those businesses does require movement through local government and the planning scheme and therefore consideration and supports are important. So I would just acknowledge that it is happening and it is an important part of regional and rural Victoria and our economies.

Sarah-Jane McCORMACK: I would add to that as well that historically we have acknowledged that from an AgVic perspective and helped support those smaller scale businesses. So we have previously had a small-scale and craft program that was focused on grants and other supports to really acknowledge the particular needs that some of those smaller scale producers have but acknowledging also their contribution to the ag sector. The Vic Grown program as well is another one that government is supporting at the moment which is really looking to build awareness of some of those smaller producers and the produce that we have here in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Amazing. I just know that even within my electorate we have got some amazing gin distilleries coming. We have got Joe White Maltings and different grains and stuff like that, we have got great lamb from Waubra and people are doing really interesting things. It is a real shift in gear often to what we think of when we think of food supply, because it is that real value-add and high-quality stuff.

David HODGETT: We need a gin overlay.

Jordan CRUGNALE: We have got some great distilleries in our lovely seat of Bass too. I guess further to that question, in the list of submissions we have had one from Corinella – White Cloud Farms. We have got these new forms of growing – they do blueberries, above ground, all activated by a mobile phone. Sometimes the land size can be smaller but the production is actually equal to traditional kinds of farming practices, and it is out of that 100-k zone. So how do we support these innovative producers who are young and very active in this space? Also, kind of looking that workforce as well, the further out we get in Victoria workforces are having to come out and do a lot of the work and there is a whole time factor. We will have submissions from Schreurs as well, who are in Clyde and who are also in Tarwin Lower, and again they are having to transport – so it is sort of a double question really.

Natalie REITER: I think that provision of housing for key workers proximate to these agricultural enterprises is probably one of the key challenges from a planning point of view to pitch the controls correctly such that you allow that type of housing to be delivered, yet you do not set up that perverse consequence whereby that then creates a conflict with the agricultural use. I think that we will continue to struggle with that

balance too, because of course dwellings are created, and maybe it is all very well intended at the beginning, but then over time the person living there changes and they are no longer associated with the ag use but the dwelling continues and so forth. So that is a constant tension that we just have to accept and live with and then try to advance those opportunities for that key worker housing to make those properties viable, because if they have to be paying for a lot of travel time for their staff, it does erode the profitability of those enterprises.

Michael ORFORD: And we have done some work to that end. We do provide for rural worker accommodation on farm lots currently. About two years ago I think that was introduced into the planning scheme – I think is up to 10 rural workers. Then last year as well there were the small second-dwelling reforms to allow a dwelling up to 60 square metres on lots in the farming zone, also to provide for that type of key worker housing that Natalie has referred to.

Sarah-Jane McCORMACK: Sorry, just to jump in as well –

Jordan CRUGNALE: To the blueberries?

Sarah-Jane McCORMACK: To blueberries. Or more to your point about technology and new ways of – I think that is a really important point as well. Dougal has already mentioned the longer term transition of the sector, and from an Agriculture Victoria perspective we would see technology uptake and new ways of doing more with less, or doing things more efficiently, as something that is really important that we support from an Ag Victoria perspective, because that will continue to build the resilience of the sector as well.

Jordan CRUGNALE: And do you track within that 100 kilometres also the loss of agricultural productivity and land and the types of agricultural production that are happening?

Sarah-Jane McCORMACK: Again, to the point before, aside from the VLUIS data, which Dougal mentioned, which is the broader piece, we would not necessarily have business-by-business information within that. But we do have a good understanding, again with the data we have, about the broad uses, and when you look at irrigated areas and things like that, we do have a good sense of what sorts of production happen in those areas.

Jordan CRUGNALE: And with climate change and businesses or producers having to move a bit further out, which happens in Gippsland, how are we supporting them with the infrastructure that is then required, including water? Are there any programs that support producers having to move with climate change?

Dougal PURCELL: Yes, in short. Agriculture Victoria have extensive services to support farm businesses in building their resilience and adapting to change, including climate change. Some examples of those are currently: the Victorian government has invested in the climate pledge, which is seeing a significant investment in research or what are the research outcomes to support resilient businesses in the future and to reduce the emissions footprint for agriculture. We are undertaking work to build the literacy, the understanding by the farming community, of climate change, its drivers and what the future climates may look like. As a part of that we are undertaking a really intensive on-farm action plan where 250 Victorian farmers are really doing a deep dive on their own emissions profile to identify ways that they can reduce emissions.

That is part of our service, and then to support that we have some large programs – for example, the farm business resilience program, which is working with the Commonwealth government to build the resilience of farm businesses across the state. We have farmers coming together in groups of 10 and 15 to really work with leading technical experts from government and the private sector, and they are working on how they develop and improve their farm businesses or their opportunities in the market, the opportunities from a productivity perspective and with the nature of the changing climate, to build resilience. We are quite proud, to be honest, of our services to the farming community, because I think we make a difference.

The CHAIR: Can I just add to that: I was listening to the radio a while ago, and they were talking about a very prominent Victorian winery actually setting up in Tasmania because they wanted the cooler grapes to make some of their products. I note from one of the reports that about 26 per cent of all strawberries come from metropolitan Brisbane as opposed to 40 per cent in Victoria. Do you think we are going to see more pressure from industries who have previously been in Queensland and New South Wales coming down to Victoria as climate change bites?

Dougal PURCELL: I think we are seeing a shift in land use and businesses, for sure. In the wider Australian agricultural context I am aware of businesses that have relocated from northern Australia to southern Australia for the climate variability and to reduce the risk and diversify the risk of their businesses and with a consideration of climate. Even within the state of Victoria, in south-west Victoria, where I come from, cropping was not a common activity going back 25 years because it was so wet, and then we saw technology come in, with raised-bed cropping, to allow cropping in a wetter rainfall zone. As we have seen drier years more recently, cropping has expanded through south-west Victoria. I think the agricultural sector is quite resilient and quite good at adjusting to a changing climate to an extent, and that is what we are seeing.

The CHAIR: Are we putting in planning measures to allow for diversification? Previously down in the beautiful areas around Hamilton it was heavily sheep, or it was dairy down at Warrnambool, but if we are doing more cropping, will planning support those moves?

Natalie REITER: Yes. Because the farming zone is quite a broad zone, we have not been challenged by those changes of uses in the past, but to the extent that we do need to respond to those, we definitely will, yes.

The CHAIR: Sure.

Martha HAYLETT: As this urban sprawl happens – it is obviously happening around Melbourne; it is happening on the outskirts of Ballarat as well, which Juliana and I represent – with residents and farmers all living together and with nuisance complaints from residents to farmers, how are they being protected so that they can continue doing what they do best with farming?

The CHAIR: Like, ‘I don’t like the piggery that’s down the road’ – the piggery has been there for three generations.

Martha HAYLETT: Exactly. People are moving closer to these things and then complaining that they are living closer to it. How are we protecting those crucial agricultural industries from those complaints?

Natalie REITER: We can use adverse amenity overlays or clauses. By and large I think people that do live in these areas do understand that when you go to that area there are conditions, and of course there is always the exception to the rule. In Ballarat there is an adverse amenity –

Martha HAYLETT: Is it the livestock exchange?

Natalie REITER: No, it is with the airport, because people often go to Ballarat and do not realise there is an airport there and then they perhaps do not want to hear the aeroplanes. So we can use those kinds of – ‘controls’ probably is a better word, although we do not as a general need to use them. I think, you know, conversation by and large deals with that matter.

Martin CAMERON: Are there any glaring alarm bells that are going off when you think about that future planning we are wedged into – what is the best way to put it – to stop our growth moving out and stopping the supply of food for Melbourne? Are there one or two issues that you can foresee as we move forward that are going to cause us trouble, or can the planning that you are putting in place now direct us in the right direction to move forward?

Natalie REITER: Look, internationally the use of these boundaries has been really successful in making very clear to the market the purpose of that land. If we take London as an example, I do not think they have moved their urban growth boundary for, I do not know, 40 years or 60 years – a significant amount of time – and will never move it. Then it becomes very, very clear to people that they need to think about how they are going to use the land that is available for that particular use. We have not done that in Victoria to this point. We are quite a young nation of course in terms of settlement of dwellings, so we are now putting that line in the sand and then working out how we can maximise the value of the land both for urban development and then for food supply and other uses.

Martin CAMERON: And our food supply, as Jordan said before, is heavily reliant on water obviously, so the protections are paramount to go around those water supplies for our farming and food supply.

Natalie REITER: Yes, in terms of prioritising those rich agricultural lands. That work really did start some 20-odd years ago with the Yarra Ranges and the protections put in there and the Macedon Ranges and so forth,

so those more significant ag lands have received quite significant planning attention over time. Uses have changed, technologies have changed, and we need to respond to that.

The CHAIR: Excellent. I am just looking at the clock and keeping an eye on things. Is there a final question that someone would like to ask?

Martha HAYLETT: I was just going to ask about the green wedge management plans for each of the councils that are developing them, what the status is and how the department will ensure that these plans are implemented properly, because you might get very different plans based on each council. Are there particular guidelines that are being provided and how will they be implemented properly?

Michael ORFORD: That is a great question. There certainly are guidelines as to the preparation of green wedge management plans, and we will look to review those in light of the legislative changes that were made. We can certainly take that on notice and get a status report for the various councils and their green wedge management plans.

Martha HAYLETT: And is that a part of them getting approval and ticking off on their plans, that DTP has a look at them and gives feedback? Or is that not actually a formality, it is just that your teams will look at that?

Michael ORFORD: Yes, indeed we will look at it, and if there are implementation measures that need to be taken through changes to the planning scheme, we will absolutely work with the councils and look to implement those planning controls accordingly as a result of that work.

Martha HAYLETT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Terrific. In the interests of time I would like to really thank you very much for really springboarding our inquiry today. We have been able to get some really high level ideas which will help us as well have great discussions with other people who have made submissions as we go around Victoria over the next couple of weeks, which we are very much looking forward to. I would like to thank you very much for your time and the work that you have put in to be ready to answer all our questions, but I will also say there are probably a few other questions that will come up that we would like to correspond with you and seek other responses on. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.