

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Morwell – Thursday 16 May 2024

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

Nicole Werner

WITNESSES

Rosemary West, Coordinator,

Alan Thatcher, Member (*via videoconference*), and

David Gibb, Member (*via videoconference*), Green Wedges Coalition.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing today of our Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply, and we are thrilled to be here in Morwell. I will just run through some important formalities before we begin.

All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report. Thank you so much for making the time to meet with the committee today, and we are really looking forward to hearing from you.

I might go to Alan on screen first and then David and then loop back to Rosemary. Could you please state your full name and titles, and then we will come back to you, Alan, for any opening remarks – starting with you, please, Alan.

Alan THATCHER: Thank you. My name is Alan Thatcher, and for these purposes I am a Member of the Green Wedges Coalition, and my background is in land use planning.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you so much for making the time to be here today.

Alan THATCHER: It is a pleasure.

The CHAIR: David?

David GIBB: David Gibb, Member of the Green Wedges Coalition, a beef cattle farmer, for 20 years involved in local government and built up quite a knowledge of planning under the *Planning and Environment Act*.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you very much for being here today. Rosemary.

Visual presentation.

Rosemary WEST: Thank you. I coordinate the Green Wedges Coalition. We formed about 20 years ago when the green wedges were hand-over-glove being bought up for other purposes, so we were just losing our green wedges. You might remember the Bracks government decided to introduce a green wedge protection package, and this was on our lobbying. The government that year did community cabinets. Because we have got people all around the city, we had someone at every community cabinet, and they told them basically the same story and convinced Mary Delahunty that she should do this – she was the upcoming minister – so we have been going since then really. We are trying to basically keep the agricultural land as agricultural land. We sometimes have some objections from some of the farmers who think it is their superannuation. They would like to be able to sell to the highest bidder and carve it up for residential development, and we are trying to find ways to make the transition so that does not happen. There on the Powerpoint are David Gibb's cattle – a few of his young cattle.

The CHAIR: They are very good looking cattle.

Rosemary WEST: David is a third-generation farmer and for 20 years was a councillor on the Mornington Peninsula shire, including as mayor. I was a councillor for 18 years on my council, which is Kingston. We also have some green wedge. Ours is one of the little close-to-the-city chopped-up ones, but we have got still a few nice market gardens left.

The CHAIR: Well, thank you for your work in local government. We know local government is very challenging as the form of government closest to the community –

Rosemary WEST: It is very challenging.

The CHAIR: so thank you to both you and David for your work as councillors and to David as mayor.

Rosemary WEST: Yes, that is right. Alan drafts pretty well all of our submissions. He has drafted this one, and we have all had a bit of a go at it. I will present, and if there are questions that you ask that I cannot answer, Alan will answer. David will come in when he wants to. David wrote a fair bit of this – some of these points are David’s – so we just might be a bit flexible. You have not seen this, have you? I think Helen has got copies she might hand out afterwards.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you. We are very excited with the brains trust, so over to you, Rosemary.

Rosemary WEST: That is good. Okay. Over half of the green wedges, some 350,000 hectares, is zoned as privately owned land, and the major use is farmland. The total value of agriculture in the green wedges is some \$1.2 billion and accounts for nearly 10 per cent of the state’s total value of agricultural production. I think you have heard that before. I did listen to your session on Friday week.

The CHAIR: Terrific.

Rosemary WEST: This data is sourced from the Australian Bureau of Stats, and one study estimated that it could be as much as 25 per cent under-reported. That is absolutely true, because the Kingston figures seem to have omitted our three continuing market gardeners – one quite big one, and two of them sell to Coles and Woolies, and they are not mentioned in this list here, so perhaps they did not take part in the survey or whatever.

While the data is from the 2010 to 2011 census, the state government is still estimating the same 10 per cent, so Alan feels, we feel, that that is still a reasonable indication of the situation today.

There is a table on the next slide, and you can see there the green wedges. Of course in 2002 it was like a green belt, but the rezoning that happened in 2010 and 2012 pushed the urban area up through to Craigieburn there, so the green belt has been sort of shifted. Originally it was green wedges that Premier Hamer introduced. I think he might have been minister when he introduced them actually. So that is kind of what it looks like. Of course at Morwell we are way beyond the green wedges – we are even beyond the 100 k limit I think here, aren’t we? So it is kind of theoretical, but of course your Yarra Valley farmers are in that big green patch there.

What you can see from this table, and part of our issue, is that we are concerned that in the *State Government’s Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges and Agricultural Land Action Plan* basically the main thing it is proposing to do is an overlay for one irrigated area, Werribee, and also Bacchus Marsh, which is in the 100 k area. Basically, Alan has pointed out that there are five municipalities with more agricultural production in terms of costs than Wyndham. Nothing against them or obviously what they are growing – Werribee and Bacchus Marsh are focused on market gardens; you do need to do something to protect that land, but we say it should be all agricultural land. We took part in the earlier consultations, which were done in 2020. And basically, that is what all the farmers said. And when people drew lines and said, ‘This is significant. This isn’t,’ some said, ‘Why? It’s all the same land and my neighbour is significant and I’m not. Why?’ You know, it is no different. We basically –

David GIBB: A comment here, Rosemary.

Rosemary WEST: Please do. Yes.

David GIBB: The Boneo district of the Mornington Peninsula, just that district alone, has 16 farms that are on recycled A-plus water, so they are drought free. They are frost-free with water on three sides – because in the Murray Valley crops are wiped out overnight with frost; there is no frost at Boneo – and it has got the sandy soil. Now, these 16 farms, one alone, a 1000-acre farm, sends eight trucks a day of vegetables. That is absolutely huge. Just one of 16 farms is sending eight trucks day of vegetables. So we say to the government – and we have been saying for a long while – this is the last place for houses, with a very low number of food miles to get the product to Melbourne markets. Back to you, Rosemary.

Rosemary WEST: Thanks, David. So I guess what we are saying is, with that consultation, the outcome of that was we should be protecting all agricultural land and potential agricultural land. Because if you just say all

productive agricultural land – and I know we have said it there – the risk is that you build in a perverse incentive and people say, ‘Right, I’ll stop farming and then it won’t be agricultural land and then I can carve it up for whatever else.’ So we say ‘potential agricultural land’. That is what we think it should be. I mean I am really encouraged by the fact that you have got a lower house committee on this, and we have got high hopes for you. We were a bit disappointed in the action plan. You know, it has not got too much action in it. We are saying that Werribee focus should be broadened.

I will just get the next slide, which is that the green wedge zones were legislated in 2002 to protect rural land uses, including the natural environment, agriculture and rural open landscapes. The major threat to the future of agriculture in the green wedges is continued pressure from many forms of urbanisation. This is where we are basically. People ring us. We have got a link on our website and people can get in touch and say – and they do it all the time – ‘There’s this ghastly development proposed next to me. What do I do about it?’ We just give what help and advice we can. We are totally unfunded. We work out of our own pockets, so we cannot pay for anything. But sometimes the neighbours will stump up and put up a good fight, but they should not have to – they should not have to. So the major pressures include: large tourism developments; applications for schools and places of worship; clean fill dumping on agricultural land – and I will talk about that in a minute; the failure to apply the in-conjunction condition of the green wedge zone and rural conservation zone that is designed to protect rural land use; the loss of agricultural land to industrial development and also to rural residential development – that is really important; and the incursion of prohibited commercial uses.

I will speak briefly. The incursion of rural residential has really got worse. It is not just people wanting to buy hobby farms or excise a bit from here and there or get a block from an old subdivision and put a house on it and say they are going to restore the land, the original vegetation, but really what they want is a permit for a house. It is not just that now. The government has made it so much worse, and this is something I reckon you actually could do something about. In the housing statement there are two new provisions, clauses 53.22 and 53.23, which basically say that if anyone wants to do a big development of \$50 million or more, whether it is residential or economic, the minister can approve it and it overrides all of the planning provisions. When I rang the person in the department who was dealing with the action plan she said, ‘Oh, it won’t be for green wedges,’ and I said, ‘Well, there’s nothing here that says it can’t be.’ The minister genuinely wants to protect the green wedges. We have met her twice, and she is good and she is also my local member.

The CHAIR: The Member for Carrum.

Rosemary WEST: Yes, the Member for Carrum. So it is not her fault, but someone is causing the problems there. We actually said, ‘Just exclude those new provisions. Just say they don’t apply to the green wedges.’ This would be pretty easy – the green wedges or the peri-urban land that is now supposed to be protected. There are other things we found. We were helping someone to stop a Telstra tower – a telco tower – in the beautiful Lysterfield Valley. She fought it and won. VCAT refused it. But what we are finding is there is a thing called an amendment VC226, which allows telco towers and a whole lot of other uses, including community care, so residential, and a few other emergency services. We do not mind so much about emergency services. But what is happening is, I rang a Mornington Peninsula councillor I know and he said that half a dozen of these telco applications are going through and the reason why this one went to VCAT was because it is on a Landscape Significance Overlay and it is within 100 metres of a house. That is why that went to VCAT, but most of them just go through and the residents have no say. This councillor said quite often the residents will say, ‘Look, if you do it over there but not over there’ – quite often you could have a compromise, but now there is nothing anyone can do about it. So the telco developers are just as bad as any other developer – and of course all developers are usually producing something good in the end, but gosh they can be pretty difficult to deal with. So those telcos, all they have got to do is find someone who will lease their land so they can put a telco tower there and they can go ahead, and there is no opportunity for the government or residents or anyone or council to have any say. That is another one that should be just taken out of the green wedges. That is fine for the urban areas maybe, but not the green wedges and not the peri-urban area, it seems to me.

What else? There is an order 16 that allows childcare centres – I mean, childcare centres currently are prohibited in the green wedge, or they were, but there is an order 16 which says that anything the minister for child care wants to do overrides the planning scheme. So there is too much of this removing residents’ rights to even have a say, to even negotiate. The same with schools that are government funded. So the government when they fund schools are effectively making planning decisions. It is very difficult to defeat a school application that has got that. There is one with the minister now, which I will talk about later.

Our recommendations: we have got recommendations because we are working with people on the ground. The *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land* plan and its highly problematic focus on the Werribee irrigation district – we have mentioned this. Clauses 53.22 and 23 – there is an ‘in conjunction’ test which, among other things, requires a minimum lot size of 40 hectares for some tourist uses. That needs to be strengthened, because too often people plant 100 square metres of vines and say that is farming. We say that any built development on farmland should be less than 10 per cent of the site or 2000 square metres, whichever is less. Mornington Peninsula has an interim dwellings policy, which requires that. We say it should be everywhere.

Alan THATCHER: Can I just say something there, please?

Rosemary WEST: Please do.

Alan THATCHER: With the in-conjunction tests, the emphasis there is also on having it within an envelope of development, because some of the developments will say that they only cover 10 per cent of the land, but in that process it is fragmented. The development is a bit here, a bit there and a bit somewhere else, so it effectively takes out the capacity to use the rest of the land for a rural use. That is why we talk about an envelope as well. Thank you.

Rosemary WEST: Thank you. The biggest bugbear at the moment is places of worship and schools, and of course these are hard to fight. This is why different governments have approved them, because they are good uses. What we say is if you fill up the green wedges with good uses, you are not going to have green wedges and you are not going to have agricultural land. We say they should be prohibited, but even if they were not, there are half-measures. For example, places of worship in the residential zones are a maximum of 250 square metres. That is why you have got all those little churches in the suburbs. The new churches should be moving into some of the old churches that are not being used. I notice the Eternity Church on the edge of Morwell is in a factory, so they can put their churches in the urban areas, not in the green wedges. They go out to the green wedge, they get a church there, then they want a school and they end up just covering the whole site.

Clean fill is a new nasty. The first one that I heard about was in 2017, and it was actually one of the developments that would not be allowed now. It was a farm that was carved up, and there was a cluster of houses on each paddock. They do run cattle on their land and this farmer was going to have – and they have got beautiful 1-hectare native gardens – an 8-metre-high wall of dirt, which is called clean fill, because the developers nearby are paying people. They are paying farmers \$1 million to cover their land with what is called clean fill. Some of it is not that clean. What I said at the time was they are turning the good earth into a waste product, and it is a huge problem, particularly for the downstream farmers, because what happens if you fill a gully, as happened to one of the people we are working with? Next time it rains the clean fill washes down into the creek downstream and ruins the property downstream.

This is one of the things where the action plan does have a requirement for a new trigger in the planning scheme. At the moment so far it is only Hume and Nillumbik, because they are the councils that we have dealt with. They have got a trigger. They say any earthworks more than 100 cubic metres has to have a planning permit, and we say that anything where a developer or a developer's agent is paying a farmer to put clean fill on their land should be prohibited. We say remove the perverse incentives. This is because people do not want to pay to put their leftover clean fill into landfill, and there are plenty of landfills left. They could, but no; it is easier to put it on farmland nearby.

Coming up, recommendations for future support for agriculture. We say apply the urban growth boundary as a readily identifiable line that should be the indicator of the boundary between the urban, metropolitan and regional areas for the purposes of farm labour, market programs and payroll tax. Reintroduce tenement controls to incentivise amalgamation of lots, thereby reducing fragmentation and the risk of rural residential development in the future. Create a farmland revolving trust fund to buy land from retiring farmers, apply an agricultural covenant on the land, resell and re-employ the funds to buy more land. There is a guy who is a farmer who was sort of pushed off his farm when the father retired and needed to carve up the estate for all the kids, and he is running a group called Future Farms. He works as a consultant. What he does is he puts together a retiring farmer with an aspiring farmer and an investor. The investor pays for the land. They do some kind of deal where if a retiring farmer wants to stay in their house for as long as they want to, they can, and the aspiring farmer farms and eventually pays off the investor and becomes the farmer. That seems to us to be a really good

model for keeping family farms as family farms. I notice Bronwyn said her dad did not want to sell to an overseas investor, so he sold to the neighbour, which is something. Finally, increase access to the class A recycled water by the state government funding pipes and other infrastructure. In Kingston our farmers went to see our CEO and put this proposal, and as a result we have got a purple pipe project which was funded for \$20 million in the last budget, I hope it is still in this one, so that is going ahead, hopefully in time to save the market gardens.

That is the end of our presentation. I will say that I grew up on a farm. I rode my pony around the lambing ewes, hopefully before the crows got to them. My grandfather started Victoria's first Poll Hereford farm, I was looking for something environmental to do, but I do have roots there. I was part of the urbanising generation. Both the farm they had and the farm my family had are still farms. They have not been carved up for something else, but they are well away from town. It is the farms close to town that are at risk. If we go to the –

David GIBB: Rosemary, do you want me to speak to that 1-pager?

Rosemary WEST: Yes, please.

David GIBB: Helen, it is difficult to describe it, so could we pause for a moment and you give each of the committee members the 1-pager, which is titled 'Green Wedges Coalition tabled attachment to the presentation'.

Rosemary WEST: Sorry, David, I did say I would hand that out first. There is just one page each, I think, unless you have got something wrong.

David GIBB: It is a 1-pager. About an inch down it says 'easy wins to secure Victoria's food supply'.

The CHAIR: With three points or four points with the harder goal. Excellent, David. Over to you.

David GIBB: Thank you. The big picture, bigger than all of us, is the increasing city–country divide. In the old days everybody had a relation or a friend farming. That is not the case now. There is a lack of awareness of agricultural issues across the community, across media, across government, and that is reflected in our planners and our planning scheme, where planners come out of Melbourne University and RMIT and have no knowledge of agriculture. They will be sent to a rural shire, and they are starting completely behind the eight ball. That is the first big-picture issue which really needs addressing, and it is exacerbated by –

The CHAIR: David, can I just jump in there to say that on our last day of hearings we heard from a planner from the Municipal Association of Victoria who had done his planning course in Bendigo and then gone to the Shire of Moyne and said that now that he works in a city planning thing he has really got a great insight that many other people do not have. Exactly what you are saying there – the importance of making sure that there is that rural and regional lens and opportunity for planners.

David GIBB: There is a thing called, as you would be aware, the agricultural planning and advisory service provided by government, but it only has three team members. It is supposed to be there assisting the rural planners who are encountering their first application for an intensive animal industry or whatever it is, these planners who have come straight out of that urban environment, but it is massively under-resourced, remembering there are 79 councils in Victoria and all the rural councils, the 32 in the farming zone and the other in the B12, in the interface, that have the green wedge zone. They are the lion's share of the landmass, but three people clearly cannot keep up with that advisory service. It exacerbated the planning scheme when agriculture was taken out of the productivity and economic areas of the planning scheme and put into the environmental section of the planning scheme. You have got the EPA Act overlaying the *Planning and Environment Act* and Agriculture Victoria, which again is misrepresenting agriculture as one of the economic drivers of Victoria. That is the big picture stuff. Down to the more nitty-gritty, in that page I have just given you that we are tabling there are some easy wins to secure Victoria's food supply: amending state planning policy in clause 14 as I have described, adding to the purpose of the green wedge zone, again using exactly the same wording as currently exists in the purpose of the farming zone to encourage the retention of productive agricultural land and then adding to the purpose of the green wedge zone to discourage dwellings that are not essential to agricultural use as described in the farm management plan, because the greatest threat to agriculture and food supply is this rural–residential. Certainly schools and places of worship are major threats, but the number of applications that occur per annum – it is rural and residential. It is vastly in the majority.

That is displacing agriculture in two ways. Number one, the rural amenity – the residential amenity is far greater than any agricultural entity, so the urban dweller who buys the rural land spends much more at auction or a private sale than the farmer can afford. So it is displacing the agriculture. The alleged reason for the dwelling is a farm management plan, but then, when you look at the farm management closely, actually all the work is going to be done by an agricultural contractor who lives offsite. There actually is not a requirement for a dwelling. In Mornington Peninsula shire one time, or several times, there were applications, for example, for 50 walnut trees, and the fellow wanted a dwelling. We said, ‘What are you going to do, hug the trees at night? Get out of here.’ But that rigour is not being applied to farm management plans, and really flimsy farm management plans are slipping through. Because neighbours do not want to object to an application – they do not want neighbourhood disputes – it rarely goes to VCAT. When it does go to VCAT, VCAT will as often as not say, ‘This doesn’t meet the Victorian planning provisions, it doesn’t meet the provisions of the municipal strategic statement or the local planning provisions.’ But unfortunately so few get tripped up at VCAT and refused.

Then to the issue of the in conjunction, which has been touched on – point 4. This is harder because of the very dominant development industry. The development industry is all the time saying, ‘Oh, we’re using vacant land.’ Well, no, it is not vacant. There is vibrant agriculture producing nutritious food for local consumption and export. The in conjunction rule needs tightening up.

The third dot point is the subordinate use, remembering this is a use that is otherwise going to be prohibited. It is only allowed in the special circumstance if it is in conjunction with agriculture; otherwise it is a prohibited use. So the subordinate use for the in conjunction – the otherwise prohibited use – is relating to the building envelope point that was made earlier by Alan. It is not the dominant use of the site.

So I commend those three easy wins – the top three. The fourth one is also really important. It will be a mountain to get through.

Can I say this is the umpteenth inquiry on food. I spoke to your parliamentary inquiry on agriculture and the interface and peri-urban areas in 2009. That parliamentary inquiry was chaired by Mr Sykes. It also consisted of Mr Nardella, the Member for Melton, and Mr Hodgett from Yarra Ranges. It did not achieve any protections for food and for agriculture then. Can I encourage your committee to be bold, to be courageous, to be outrageous in protecting the food supply for Melbourne if you are going to be making a difference and to not feel at the end of the time that you and your committee have wasted your time. Be tough. Stand up to the developers and make a difference for Victoria. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, David, for those words. I have heard them loud and clear, as I am sure everyone else has. Rosemary, back to you.

Rosemary WEST: I would like to go back to this slide, which you saw. I should have said at the time: what you are seeing there is part of the southern ranges green wedge, the part that is covered by Knox, Yarra Ranges and Casey councils, and there is a Cardinia part as well, but it is not on this map. That just shows the school and place of worship applications in the past few years. There are 10 of them there on that map. Of course places of worship and schools do exactly what every other commercial use does and what rural residential uses do – they put the price up so the people cannot afford to buy it as a farm. This is why these things need to be controlled. It is not that they are not good uses; they might be very good.

The CHAIR: Rosemary, can I just jump in to make sure – David, Alan – we are all on the same page? Because we started late, are people happy to go through till 1 o’clock, for another 10 minutes?

Rosemary WEST: I certainly am, yes.

The CHAIR: Rosemary is happy, I hope everyone is happy. If we could have an extra 10 minutes, we would really, really find that worthwhile. Over to you, Rosemary.

Rosemary WEST: That is great. I have got a few individual cases at the end. We have just got photos, so if Sam would not mind just going to the picture headed ‘Current photo of 19–23 Horswood Road’. There is an application by the minister. There is a wetland at the bottom of that property. You can see it is quite a sloping hill, and it is next to the Lysterfield Lake national park. Sorry, it is not a national park, it is a state park – the Lysterfield Park. The kangaroos come out of the park and graze there. I think the current farmer – well, he

thinks he will sell it, so he obviously does not mind for that reason. So that is the property, and that is what they are going to put on it. It looks as though there are some neatly mown lawns there, which kind of look green. I do not know whether they are neatly mown or whether they are synthetic turf, really, but clearly the kangaroos do not belong there, and clearly it will replace agriculture. That is 8 hectares which are going to be covered with, as you can see, what should be an urban use, because we say schools and places of worship should be in the urban areas where the students and the parishioners live. It would seem to be obvious, but it has not been.

The CHAIR: Sorry. Over to you, David.

David GIBB: Rosemary, leave time for the committee to ask questions of us.

Rosemary WEST: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: David, you took the words out of my mouth. We will try and get through some questions, because it is so important.

Rosemary WEST: I will quickly run through this. The next is headed 'From paddock to wellness retreat plate'. It is a *Herald Sun* article. There is a good story here. That is a host farm, and the council basically knocked it back. Two days ago I got the notice it has been knocked back because it is really group accommodation under a different name, so good for the council. The next one is a block in Pearcedale, and the last one –

The CHAIR: We will get copies of this, Rosemary, and we will go through it.

Rosemary WEST: You will? And the last one is a little farm – 6 acres – a 6-acre market garden in the Kingston green wedge. It has got a creek going along which is called the South Clayton main drain on that picture, but in our green wedge plan it is called the 'settlement creek', and they fill their dam from that – you can see their dam. That has probably been farmed for a few generations too, and it is being sold as a 'huge land-banking opportunity', so it is probably going to be lost. It is being farmed at the moment. Anyway, I will let you – your questions.

The CHAIR: In the interests of time will hand over to Deputy Chair Martin Cameron for the first question.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you very much, and thanks for the presentation. Just with our green wedges and our peri-urban boundaries, do we need to look at altering those, or do we need to, in your opinion, toughen up the scope that allows developers and other people to sell their land to the developers and cause a bit of grief in these areas? Do we need to make them tougher, or do we need to be able to pivot and be a little bit flexible about where these boundaries are? I open it up to anyone to answer because I am not sure who is the best.

Rosemary WEST: I would just say that that both major parties are now committed to a permanent urban growth boundary, and that is hopeful. We thought that would have worked in 2002, but unfortunately you had governments that changed their minds and we lost 50,000 hectares out of the green wedge, plus another 15,000 hectares of farmland because the compensation, the offset, was the Western Grassland Reserve, of which only 2000 out of those 15,000 hectares has yet been purchased. Most of it is degrading, basically – growing weeds – and it is a huge problem. So do not listen to offsets; they do not work. I am committed to that happening because we lost the best of the Themeda Grasslands in the western suburbs: lots of habitat for southern brown bandicoot, growling grass frog, golden sun moss and the Spiny Rise Flower. Anyway, a lot was lost for that, and I am attending the grasslands meetings to try and say this is got to happen, but it is taking a long time, and none of it is open to the public yet; over 10 years later and nothing is open.

David GIBB: Rosemary, the other important point is that it is often said that we need to open up more land for housing – by implication, agricultural land – but in fact there are tens of thousands of planning permits issued without appeal to VCAT, which applicants have not acted on and have not developed because they either cannot get the finance or their costs have gone up to blazes and it does not make economic sense anymore. There are permits waiting to go, so it is not a question of lack of land availability. These are all lots ready to go inside the urban growth boundary.

Rosemary WEST: It was in the paper last week – there are more permits that have been approved and are not being acted on than there are things being built at the moment. So there are a lot of problems, including shortage of labour and costs.

The CHAIR: Daniela.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you. I just want to touch on green wedge management plans and see if anyone would like to expand on it. Would you like to comment on the recent legislative reforms making them compulsory that happened last year? So they are now required and must be reviewed within every 10 years. And how can the government support local governments to implement their plans properly?

Rosemary WEST: Well, the government could ring up local –

David GIBB: Two issues there: first of all, there has got to be rigour in developing a green wedge management plan. It is all very well for a council to say it has a green wedge management plan, but if it is really flimsy and weak in protecting agricultural land, then the green wedge management plan is not worth the paper it is written on. So the first point is the green wedge management plan has to have rigour in the provisions that are in there. There was quite a bit of debate recently about a northern council's green wedge management plan – the green wedge management plan read more like a development plan than actually protecting the green wedge. If you were to do a planning scheme amendment, a council has to have it vetted by the department of planning and transport. Similarly, the green wedge management plan needs to be really strictly vetted, and arguably it should be peer reviewed by someone like the Victorian Farmers Federation to check that it really is meaningful and sensible in its provisions for agriculture. Even if you have got an excellently produced green wedge management plan, then you want to have excellent execution of that plan to follow up to show that planning compliance by council officers is actually enforcing what your green wedge management plan says. And planning compliance is generally under-resourced at municipal level. They are the two key points I would make. Rosemary, back to you.

Rosemary WEST: Absolutely right, and David, if you were thinking of Hume council, they do not have a green wedge management plan. They had something called a rural something land use plan, and they should be just whacked over the knuckles. This legislation was introduced in February last year, and no-one has even rung them. I said to the project officer for this project, 'So, have you had a chat to Hume yet?' No. I think Hume know there is something in the wings, so they are being a little bit better on some things, but I think it would be good to have a recommendation that at least they have – the southern ranges green wedge, this one here that I showed you with all the dots on, that does not have a green wedge management plan, because it has got four councils. The department needs to step in and coordinate those four councils and get a green wedge management plan.

What you have got with all these applications – Yarra Ranges is quite strong, and they refuse most of their applications. Casey approve most of theirs. Knox have refused most of theirs. Cardinia: the reporter who did the story on the Pearcedale land which was in the *Age* recently – this one here, 'Fears green wedges in danger of being chipped away' – rang Cardinia, and they said they have had nine place-of-worship applications in the past two years. I have only been contacted by one of those, and they seemed pretty well organised.

The CHAIR: Rosemary, in the interests of time, I am just going to jump to Nicole and see if there is something that she would like to raise in our last minute before we need to finish off.

Nicole WERNER: Okay. Well, I mean, I always want to look through my own electorate lens. I am in Warrandyte, so we have got plenty of green wedge there. I actually included it in my maiden speech that I would be a protector and defender like my predecessors have been.

Rosemary WEST: Yes, they have.

Nicole WERNER: So it is something of great interest. Could you speak to my electorate specifically, if I am allowed to –

The CHAIR: Yes. Please.

Nicole WERNER: – just ask about it, because it is very urban in parts of it – Doncaster East – and then you will blend right out to Park Orchards, Donvale and then Warrandyte state forest. And then it gets urban again in pockets of Chirnside Park where it does not have that really strict – I think you have proposed this stricter boundary. So if you could speak to mine, I would be very interested.

Rosemary WEST: Yes. What would you like – speak to what to do? You hang on to your boundaries. One of the issues you have got there is you have got a wonderful big place – I go there whenever I am out there – where you can buy all sorts of fruit and food and stuff like that. It is actually like a supermarket, and the risk with the new flexibility for farm gate sales in the action plan is that you will end up with a corner shop at every front gate or, even worse, a supermarket. So I think it is really important to clamp down on that. On the Warrandyte Road there is a wonderful berry farm – I have got a daughter who lives at Hurstbridge, so I am out there – and it has been there for generations. And that is wonderful; that is what you want. They have got a stand at the gate, and, you know, there are dozens of cars there parked if you go past at the weekend. So those are the uses you want, not little supermarkets with coolstores and things like that.

Nicole WERNER: Perhaps I will take my questions offline, because I have more specific ones around it.

Rosemary WEST: You are welcome to talk to me. I would love to talk to you.

Nicole WERNER: Yes. That would be great, thank you.

Rosemary WEST: But in terms of the boundary, the UGB is stable at the moment because both major parties are firmly supporting it. It is an interesting thing. Going to the peri-urban area, we said for every municipality that that line goes through you should include the whole municipality. So instead of it being a nice, neat circle, it should sort of zigzag around, like the green wedges, because the green wedges go around the outside of Yarra Ranges municipal area. We think it should be that way. I think those are the main –

The CHAIR: Rosemary, I am going to have to come over the top of you there.

Rosemary WEST: Please do.

The CHAIR: I want to say thank you for your expertise and thank you for your passion and your defence of our green wedges. It is such an important part of our inquiry, and it plays an important part in guaranteeing Victoria's food supply. To David, thank you for the work that you have done and also the expertise that you bring. Alan, you have been a very good listener, but we know that you are a big supporter of these two. Thank you so much.

If there is further information that you would like the committee to consider, please feel free to provide additional information. Thank you very much for that PowerPoint. We all look forward to getting it in our hands and really being able to get an understanding of those issues.

Committee adjourned.