

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Ballarat – Wednesday 22 May 2024

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

Nicole Werner

WITNESSES

Natalie Robertson, Director, Development and Growth, and

Matthew Wilson, Director, Community Wellbeing, Ballarat City Council.

The CHAIR: Hello, everyone, and welcome to beautiful Ballarat. Thank you for joining us today at this public hearing for the inquiry into securing Victoria's food supply.

On behalf of the committee, I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land, the Wathaurong people, and pay my respects to elders past and present as well as all members of the Ballarat Aboriginal community, many of whom are a part of the stolen generation.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting as a part of its inquiry into securing Victoria's food supply. 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. 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 the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

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

Thank you very much for making the time to meet with the committee today. Would you please state your full name and title before we begin. Matt.

Matthew WILSON: Thank you. Matthew Wilson, Director of Community Wellbeing with the City of Ballarat.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Natalie Robertson, Director, Development and Growth, with the City of Ballarat.

The CHAIR: Terrific, and can I just say as the local member I am delighted that the City of Ballarat is presenting for us today, so thank you for making the time out of your very busy schedules. Would you like to make any opening remarks?

Natalie ROBERTSON: I do have a submission, which is quite detailed, and it probably provides context before we address the very specific core questions. So I was just inquiring whether you would like me to do that.

The CHAIR: That would be great.

Natalie ROBERTSON: All right, thank you. As Director of Development and Growth, which does entail the portfolio of statutory strategic and sustainable growth areas planning as well as renewal in the City of Ballarat, I am pleased to be presenting to this hearing and having the opportunity to support a more resilient food system by the protection of agricultural land in planning provisions.

For local context, Ballarat encompasses an urban core, outlying townships and a large agricultural base across approximately 640 square kilometres. The population in 2018 was approximately 108,000 people, and it is forecast that we will grow to approximately 160,000 by 2040, making Ballarat one of Australia's fastest growing inland centres. Ballarat is also a significant source of jobs for regional Victoria. There are shared boundaries, connections and relationships with Hepburn shire to the north and Moorabool to the east, Golden Plains shire to the south and Pyrenees to the west, and it has a strong relationship to the central Victorian goldfields region due to our shared history and character.

Ballarat's relative proximity to Melbourne, being just 110 kilometres to the west of the capital, makes it a crucial part of the Victorian growth story. The rural areas of Ballarat are some of Victoria's richest agricultural areas, and our farming activities have some of the highest value of production per hectare in the state. Local

agriculture is important to Ballarat's rural character and identity and is advanced by access to markets, local food processors and transport routes.

Productive agricultural land is a finite resource that is valued, supported and needs to be protected. Ad hoc land use change can compromise agricultural viability and threaten the health and functioning of natural resources. Inappropriately sited rural living can remove productive agricultural land from supply, create significant environmental and servicing problems and create land use conflicts with nearby farming properties.

To give some context to Ballarat's local planning policy and how it relates to agriculture, we have three main objectives. They are to support agriculture as an important element of the city's economic and employment base, to ensure that productive agricultural land remains available for agricultural resource use and to provide for rural living development in appropriate locations.

The strategies that we have in place that guide our planning decisions related to agricultural land are as follows. I will refer you to and I will provide as part of our submission our new draft growth areas framework plan and draft housing strategy, which do have regard to how we then contain our growth boundaries. Our policies prevent the encroachment of urban land use and development into areas of productive agricultural land. They encourage sustainable farm management practices, having regard to land capability, sustainability and the conservation of soil, water and vegetation resources. Our strategies provide for the construction of dwellings in rural areas only where it can be shown that the development will result in improved agricultural productivity. They prevent further dwelling development on contiguous land in the same ownership and under the minimum lot size requirements through the use of legal agreement. They discourage rural living and other inappropriate use and development of productive agricultural land. They concentrate rural living land in areas with marginal agricultural values. Our strategies also avoid the conversion of productive agricultural land to rural residential living. We do discourage increasing the supply of urban living land beyond 15 years, including consideration of regional land supply.

I will provide this submission electronically when we finish, so apologies and pull me up if I am taking too long. I have probably just got another 3 minutes.

The CHAIR: No, no. Please, Nat. We are really enjoying it.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Thank you. So what we understand as a key message from today's inquiry is that land use conflict is one of the most significant issues facing food production, including cropping, grazing and other farming industries. Conflicts are more likely to arise in the peri-urban areas close to Melbourne and other settlements where there is an increased demand for housing and rural residential development approximate to existing amenities and infrastructure.

In addition, climate change, including more extreme weather events, such as overland flooding, sea level rise and bushfire erosion, which disrupt or diminish production on suitable land, will have an impact on food supply. The planning system plays a critical role in protecting land for food production – the planning system we use to identify strategic food production land and areas where food production needs to be prioritised over other uses, such as housing or renewable energy infrastructure, and how competing policy objectives, such as environmental and landscape protection, can be addressed. We suggest this process will require a layering of existing and new information, including agricultural land values, climate hazards, settlement patterns, environmental values and strategic infrastructure.

To more broadly address the three criteria today, impacts of urban sprawl and population growth on arable land and the farming industry in Victoria, land use conflict is one of the most significant issues facing food production. Conflicts are more likely to arise in peri-urban areas close to Melbourne and other settlements where there is increased demand for housing and rural residential development which are proximate to existing amenities and infrastructure. Climate change, including more extreme weather events, such as flooding, sea level rise, bushfire et cetera, as previously stated, which disrupt or diminish food production on suitable land, will also have an impact on supply. Given most food production occurs in peri-urban and coastal areas in Australia, land use conflicts and the impact of climate change combined have potential impact to our food production. In Victoria data confirms that 100 kilometres around Melbourne produces around 10 per cent of Victoria's gross value of agricultural production.

The use of planning controls to protect agricultural land in green wedge and peri-urban areas and the planning systems needed to provide for appropriate protection of production can be addressed as follows. Planning controls need to consider all aspects of food production, including extensive and intensive farming practices plus the infrastructure required to process and distribute food within the Australian and export markets. The controls need to provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate changes in farming practices – that is, not look specifically at industry standards – but also certainty as to when food production protections will be prioritised over other policy objectives. The farming zones alone do not provide clear criteria for the identification of strategic food production land. Overlays or schedules to farming zones would need to be developed and used to map strategic food production land. However, this is likely to be more suited to peri-urban areas within regional municipalities which are experiencing growth, undertaking an assessment of the ability of identified land to support food production as pressures for housing and competition for land increase. This would also provide guidance in the planning scheme as to where land use conflicts or constraints are identified. Policy would give an understanding of the priority of the location and where food production would be prioritised over other objectives, such as housing.

Broad policy on the right to farm: we would consider too uncertain to provide an appropriate level of protection within the planning scheme process for strategic food production. Matt is going to give you a short sort of community wellbeing perspective, but I will conclude from a planning perspective and then ask Matt, if that is okay. We would suggest a criterion should be developed to identify strategic food production land and would likely include some reference to the proximity of the land to transport and infrastructure and servicing as well as the local production capability of the land and other considerations, such as climate hazards and land use conflicts. If this approach is adopted, food production systems will be reflected in the planning system and be more resilient to future impacts from land use conflicts and climate change. We note strong state policy support for the delivery of housing; however, people in future houses will need food, and I think many people repeat that saying. As such, housing should not necessarily be prioritised in areas which have other strategic values, including high food production capability. Government positions on the direction of any future urban development must be informed by broader strategic planning that takes all these factors into account. The mapping of strategic food production land is one of the many matters that accompany settlement planning in peri-urban areas and the broader state, and this is what we would encourage. We thank you for the opportunity to submit to the committee and explain our submission in more detail. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Matt.

Matthew WILSON: Thank you. My contribution to the inquiry is very much from a community wellbeing perspective and more so in relation to the advocacy around the role that the planning scheme – albeit I am not a planner nor am I an economist – has in local accessibility and in particular the cost of access to healthy food. It is clearly not lost on the members of the inquiry that in many instances unhealthy food is more easily accessible and cheaper than healthy options. Clearly, the direct link between production, transport and points of sale has a strong impact on the way people are able to access choices for healthy living. So it is highly commendable that the inquiry is taking shape around those types of issues.

Our perspective is and we would certainly proffer a point of view that it is important to note that resilience within the Victorian state-based food systems needs to have a local focus. We obviously understood clearly the impacts of shocks to the system. Whether we want to continue to acknowledge COVID or whether we want to talk about other global impacts on the way local living was directly impacted by events outside of the ability of local communities to manage, they have a direct consequence on the way people access food selection, healthy and otherwise.

We need to ask the question: why is it that farm-to-table or similar is a high-end restaurant based culinary experience and we celebrate having access to it at a price point? Why is it that farm-to-table is not the local experience? Clearly there are economic drivers for points of sale and retail in relation to food and the product range that is offered at those points of sale. As I said, I am not an economist, but it is something that from a planning scheme point of view potentially could be leveraged in making change for local communities. It is fascinating that local grocers with broad-based fruit and vegetable offerings often find it harder to compete with the major retail chains or supermarket-based retail chains.

In relation to that and concurring with my colleague's comments to the inquiry from an expert position on the planning scheme, the community health and wellbeing point of view is that it is absolutely critical that all

people within the broad spectrum of the community have the ability to make the same choices. What people then choose is an individual right, but I think it is imperative on those that have the ability to influence systems to ensure that there is an equity of choice provided, not just economically but in place as well. I am happy to take some questions in relation to those types of things. But it is absolutely noticeable that the type of food that people choose directly correlates to their ability to choose it. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. That is a really great lens for us to be considering that we have not had before, so thank you. And thank you, Nat, for your expertise in planning. I am very keen to let other members of the committee drill into the City of Ballarat. But just going on from your discussions about community health and wellbeing, does the City of Ballarat have any measure on how successful the Lake Wendouree farmers market is in terms of providing an alternative to the larger retailers?

Matthew WILSON: I would have to take that question on notice and would be happy to do so. But I am unaware of any metrics that we are collecting in relation to that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Deputy Chair, lead off.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you. Thanks, both of you, for coming today. As I said before, we were out and had a very frank, open and honest conversation with some farmers this morning, which was wonderful, just to see how they are diversifying their farm to make it run more efficiently and also the by-products of having cows and milking cows and how that role plays out.

To that, though, there were a couple of issues that they spoke to us about today. I may as well ask and see what your lens is on them. One was where they are positioned out at Bungaree. We talk about the conflict between more housing development, which we need, but also the protection of the farmland. They were saying that there is a proposed development of around about 5000 new allotments to go through their area. It has been on the table for quite some time. What controls do you have on that? As they said to us, it is not only the best land in Australia; they have got the best land in the world out there to be doing what they are doing. What measures do you have in place not only for out there but around the City of Ballarat to make sure that we are not putting developments where we are going to need our food bowls to provide food for these people that are going to live under these rooflines?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Thank you for the question. I am going to anticipate that the 5000 allotment is a growth area that is either sitting in Moorabool shire or –

Martin CAMERON: Okay, yes.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Which is fine, because we do think of ourselves regionally and the impacts of that and how that has a long-term effect on all of us, because the infrastructure that is needed for 5000 allotments generally translates to City of Ballarat as well. So the means that City of Ballarat has and most councils have, for example, within the planning scheme are state and local policy on growth. The planning scheme says that we must provide for 15 years of residential development, so land supply for 15 years. Growth is inevitable or a necessity for any council or municipality, so when you weigh up where you are going to grow, you have to also weigh up what effect that will have on the land supply that you are impacting. City of Ballarat's approach – we tend to steer clear of our very valuable arable land, and to the north is a great example of that. We also try to confine our growth to the convenience of living within – you know, we do not want to become lineal and continue to sprawl out and impact our arable land, so we try to find the opportunities where our growth is compacted within a certain vicinity of the actual Ballarat CBD.

Also, when we are determining our land for our urban growth zone, the actual arable state of that land, we do not just economic analysis on the farming but also we understand biodiversity, we do environmental assessment and we also inform ourselves as to the farming activity on that land. We have been fortunate where our growth has not impeded, at this point in time, good contiguous arable land. That is embedded in our local policies as well, and that would be what I would encourage other municipalities to be looking at. It is probably harder for smaller municipalities such as Moorabool, and they will have to make a decision at certain points in time with the competing growth and farming. That is the challenging one. I guess that is why we are all here today to understand, because 'the farming zone' is a very broad term and it applies to a lot of land that is not necessarily farming land. That is why we suggest that understanding – and it becomes very complex – to understand agricultural land against rural land, for example. I hope that gives you an understanding.

Martin CAMERON: Great. Thank you very much.

David HODGETT: Could I just pick up?

The CHAIR: Jump in, David.

David HODGETT: Natalie, you guys grabbed my interest when you talked about criteria, because one of the other submissions was talking about and some of the discussions we have had among ourselves have been talking about how you map and identify the prime best agricultural land and protect that and then have others elsewhere. We as politicians in government or in opposition constantly deal with competing priorities of housing, of farming, of new energy provision and all that, so I was very interested when you started to talk about developing criteria. I wonder if you could tease that out a bit more and how that would work. I imagine it would have to be prescriptive or as an overlay or something, but I would be interested in your thoughts on that, please.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Thank you.

David HODGETT: I like it, by the way.

Natalie ROBERTSON: By all means, I have not technically got to a point where I could say I have got the perfect criteria, but I think I touched on it when I said 'farming zone' is a very broad term that applies to a lot of land that even would not be considered good arable farming land. There is topography and there are erosion or salinity issues that would rule out some land parcels for good farm production, whether it is agricultural, grazing, cropping or whatever it might be. So when we talk about a criteria, it is huge, but my suggestion would be you have to actually determine 'This is our farming zone across Victoria' and then the analysis of your farming zone and the land that sits within it. I would approach it in Ballarat by saying I need to understand 'This is all our farming zone' and then the analysis or mapping of the quality of each area or zone, which is then underlaid by either – I do not anticipate a change of zone to agricultural zone, rural zone or intensive industry zone or anything like that, but I anticipate schedules or overlays that tell us and guide us. I will use the north. It has significant farming and great soil for food production land, and it should be protected at all costs against competing issues such as housing. But then we have the challenge of – and we can talk about it – transmission lines as well. So how, if that is to come, do we still continue to preserve the agricultural component while we bring the other utilities to it? And schedules to zones help us give certainty when we are trying to make decisions in that respect. It will be a huge impost on the state if we are going to undertake that type of thing, but we may be coming to that as a state to seriously look at the planning scheme and how it gives far more certainty to us all, which includes the housing statement and Plan Vic. Well, why don't we then extend that into our farming zones and how we use them to protect our food supply?

David HODGETT: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Daniela, you look concerned.

Daniela DE MARTINO: No, no. I am taking it all in. Thank you. Last week someone had mentioned it would be great if government could give us a map of the good soil and the conditions, but that is an intensive job to undertake.

Natalie ROBERTSON: It certainly is.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I do not know that we can turn that one out very quickly. But I was listening intently. Talking about the different topography, it is very hard to farm on a hill. So looking at all the soil quality et cetera, although that can be built up, what planning policies and controls for agricultural land do you think are working well, if any, and what do you think needs to be strengthened overall?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Working well? Give me a second, because I will think about it before I jump into it. What is working well? I think from a City of Ballarat point of view, farm zone for us has priority, so when you want to use the farming zone for anything other than an agricultural industry or something that has a nexus to it, you have got to go through a lot of hoops to be able to justify that. That works very well with the large very broadacre farming agricultural land, and it works very well when it is already identified as that use.

The conflicts for us and where it does not work very well: fragmented farming zone, and there is a lot of it – farming zone. Because of the way the farming zone was implemented way back when, there is a lot of fragmentation. You have lots of small individual parcels of land, so it is very hard to not justify that, ‘Yes, it can have a dwelling on it,’ because it is not being used for farming and it does not even join contiguous farming uses. So you tend to be challenged on making decisions that would go against allowing a landowner to have a dwelling, for example, but not be genuinely farming.

Also, the planning scheme takes you on face value. If you make an application with your farming management plan, we must assume that that is what you are going to do, and whilst it sits on your land, potentially as an encumbrance as a section 173, for example, it is very intensive to enforce that and to be continually checking that everybody is actually doing on their pieces of land what they said they were going to do on their pieces of land.

I guess they are small examples, but they are good examples of how we would look at it day to day and the challenges we face, without certainty, in going, ‘Yes, I know very clearly with this land we are preserving it beyond a doubt. This land has these issues and these issues or could be suitable for this, this and this.’ They are the day-to-day challenges.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Does that help?

Daniela DE MARTINO: Yes, it does, because you have touched on another issue that has been raised by a number of farmers concerned about people with money from Melbourne coming and buying up land, increasing the value per acre and then not farming it. It is a lifestyle property, and you have touched on the difficulty in trying to actually oversee that and taking in good faith what they purport they are going to be using the land for.

Natalie ROBERTSON: I agree. Or it is being purchased in anticipation of potential growth – so land banking – and that may not even occur as well.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Yes.

Jordan CRUGNALE: I want to go further as well with this whole strategic mapping. Years back when I was on council in Bass Coast we had a full-on dairy that wanted to set up in Bass, near the Bass River. We had a thousand million objections and stuff, and it did not end up going through. So we were talking back then about how we kind of need to strategically, as a state, look at what is suitable for what and where. Also, within that, given all the waste is now becoming a resource, with our FOGOs and what have you, is the potential agricultural land. Like, it might be a bit crappy at the minute, but with climate change and a bit of nourishment and stuff – so how do you see that within that strategic mapping? It is a lot of work. It is going to have to be a collaborative thing, I think, with councils who know their areas well. Then someone was talking yesterday about having covenants – you know, agricultural covenants – as well. I am not really sure what my question is actually. What is my question? Also, going into that extensive intensive – farming is changing as well, and we saw that today. All of a sudden a dairy could have been this big but in modern times it is this big. How does that all fit into this strategic mapping, which I totally agree that we need to do?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Good question.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Yes, it is a big body of work.

Natalie ROBERTSON: Whilst it is a state dilemma potentially, it is not apples for apples, and that is why we always say local content is the most important content. It is not just, obviously, hearing from the City of Ballarat as an organisation, it is hearing from community and stakeholders. The one thing I would say to you is that your farmers know their land – good genuine farmers know their land – and they also know the impacts that are happening around them. That is why if we are looking at this and we do want to be very clear and understand as a state our good, valuable agriculture and what industries we encourage in certain areas – but not necessarily limit, because as I said it is not apples for apples – then we all have to work together. In having this conversation we are embarking on a very, very big journey. I would encourage that the very starting point is that we all get a context for our own municipalities.

The CHAIR: Did you have something to say?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Sorry, Matt.

Matthew WILSON: That is okay. Thank you. I was just going to probably add to the comment on the question about mapping. One of the greatest challenges is differentiating between current use, which can be impacted by generational change within families, versus historical use and acknowledging that not all land that can produce food is currently being used to produce food. To some extent it goes towards Mr Cameron's question around the 5000-lot subdivision, where a body of land that can accommodate 5000 lots is likely to be owned by several different property owners, all of whom may have different objectives. So the mapping question is really important. Reflecting on historical use of land can be quite helpful, because tracing back through time you will often see what people have identified land can produce economically, and it gives some insight into what it may still yet do.

Can I just make a further comment. When there is a decision to make about a large parcel of land zoned for residential development across multiple different property owners, the unintended consequence can be that farming becomes economically unviable for someone who wishes to continue to farm, because obviously the rateable land value can act. That is something that has been seen consistently across growth area councils, both in metro as well as regional areas, and it is something that is certainly worth further consideration from the inquiry point of view around timing. Sometimes it is not a question of yes or no but a question of when, and it is appropriate from a statewide consideration to say yes, but 50 years down the track is when, which provides a degree of certainty. Often investors need to understand when the return on investment may be viable, and if that level of certainty can be provided from a timeframe point of view, it disarms the local conversation for councils around the drive from certain interests to make their speculation realised, if I can put it in those terms.

The CHAIR: Very measured.

Natalie ROBERTSON: I will give you a very good example from the City of Ballarat of that. To provide certainty for Ballarat, and particularly around the challenges of a few years ago being thought to be in a land supply crisis, we have now established – it is out for draft – a growth areas framework. And it is for that very reason – because the land we have identified that will be in the west of west and the north-west as a future growth area is obviously farming zoned. The intent is to give certainty for that the very reason – the farmer understands that this is not until 2046 or 2050, for example – and it therefore gives a generational certainty to what is coming.

The CHAIR: Nicole, can I jump in, or do you want to jump in?

Nicole WERNER: No, go ahead.

The CHAIR: All right. Yesterday when we heard from the City of Greater Geelong they talked about their 70 per cent greenfield as opposed to 30 per cent established growth zones and infill. The City of Ballarat aims to provide 50 per cent of new residential dwellings required to accommodate forecast population growth through the densification of existing neighbourhoods. What practical measures have been implemented to achieve this 50–50?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Very good question. To use COVID, we would say that our growth data showed us that during that time we had a high spike in people coming to Ballarat, and we were more 70 in the greenfield and 30 in the infill. But our strategies point 50–50, and we are levelling off as we have emerged from COVID. The strategy we are using to recognise infill is actually a housing strategy that aligns quite well with the state's housing statement and, from what we can gather, Planning Vic. There are strategies within the housing statement for us that focus on bringing greater infill development by identifying renewal areas in particular and renewal areas that can meet higher densities. It is a public document, so I can publicly state that it is areas such as Wendouree, near the station. Obviously we are doing some master planning for the Latrobe Street precinct and the renewal of that and a couple of other areas as well, which I will provide you will the links to, and focusing on a diversity of housing. Ballarat has a strong model of single three- and four-bedroom dwellings with a garage on their own allotment, and the housing strategy is very focused on bringing that diversity of housing into Ballarat. We believe infill is the better opportunity for that whilst also encouraging models within our new emerging growth areas.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Matt, if you could just jump in with your lens in terms of community wellbeing. Obviously we are seeing growth in kindergartens and the government's early learning rollout. Why is it important that we have this focus on infill rather than continuing just to build greenfield sites?

Matthew WILSON: In answer to that question, it is important to note that communities are as diverse as the people living within them. It is important that diversity of offering from within market conditions around housing choices and livability is representative of the choices that people might seek to make. Where infill development versus greenfield development is concerned, the reality is both are required, and the mix at any one point in time is going to be dependent upon opportunity, market conditions and what people are seeking in how they wish to live as well. From a council and other government service point of view, we have obviously got established – and it is not unique to Ballarat – cities or urban environments where there is service-based infrastructure in place. If population change occurs around that, demand changes. Where greenfield development occurs, there is a need to provide all of that.

One argument can be made for why you would not just renew what you have. The issue is actually greenfield does renew old infrastructure through urban renewal. So typically people will sell what they have and either upgrade or downsize or change their living conditions. That is not only done in infill sites; that is often done in greenfield sites. You see that on Melbourne's fringes quite frequently. The first buyers in Caroline Springs, for example, were often, say, St Albans families, whether they were mums and dads upsizing or whether they were the children who were moving out of home and buying nearby. Then you saw the Aintree area come on line as a suburban opportunity and you saw people moving out of Caroline Springs doing the same thing. So the ecosystem of housing operates the way it does. From a service-based infrastructure point of view, it was evident in that Melton municipality context. I should add I previously worked in the City of Melton. It was evident that both the infill located service infrastructure and the new greenfield was required in order to service the population need equitably.

The City of Ballarat's objective around 50 per cent infill and 50 per cent greenfield is absolutely admirable as much as it is aspirational. In many respects the outcome of that aspiration will be driven by the real consequences of market conditions and the way people wish to live at any given point in time. What is critical from a planning point of view – and again I preface I am not a planner but often my role is to make the outcome of planning work for community – is that we are well placed as a council, supported by state government and Commonwealth government in the various roles that we each have, to enable people to live the way they need to at any one time in whichever market conditions present themselves as addressing the housing supply question. I am not sure if that directly answered your question there.

The CHAIR: No, but it provided some really interesting information, so thank you. I am conscious of time, so Nicole, did you want to ask a question?

Nicole WERNER: We have been looking a lot at Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land action plan, so just to that: do you have a view of those measures in how it seeks to protect agricultural land from inappropriate development and how that would then impact the City of Ballarat?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Correct me if I am wrong: you are talking about growth area boundaries in terms of doing that, so that you do preserve those peri-urban fringes and the agricultural land that is taken up in that, and does that translate to City of Ballarat?

Nicole WERNER: Yes, I suppose. The agricultural lands action plan – firstly, are you aware of it, and then secondly, how then is it to be implemented in Ballarat?

Natalie ROBERTSON: I am not as comprehensively aware of it as I should be in context to today. Obviously, I focus on the City of Ballarat and the context to it. I think, as I said, when we look at each municipality, we cannot compare apples to apples, and we are very different as a regional city in the local measures we already have in place and the way we ourselves have directed or use our planning system so that we do preserve agricultural land. I would have to take it on notice, because I really do not know it comprehensively enough to put a Ballarat context on it.

Nicole WERNER: No, I did note that you said that that was one of your priorities, to protect the farming land. I suppose then what is interesting about your note about the current use versus generational use is that, I mean, when it is privately owned, there is nothing you can do about that, is there? So is that something that you

try and keep your finger on the pulse of, when it progresses to different land use, where it might be arable land that could be used?

Natalie ROBERTSON: Yes. You are right, the planning scheme cannot change different land use, and it cannot have an oversight at all times of what the land is being used for. The best use of the planning scheme is to understand where you would confine the growth so that there does remain the agricultural land, regardless of how it is being used in context today under the farming zone. It is knowing that it is available and that there is that right to farm. You could not use the planning scheme to dictate how land is exchanged, obviously, and how it is ultimately used, but when you have the right zone and then you have the right schedules or overlays in place, that is when it starts to become more challenging for that purchase of land for land banking or that purchase of land with the understanding that I might be taken up into a UGZ at some point in time.

Nicole WERNER: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I am conscious of the time. That 45 minutes went incredibly quickly for us; I hope it did for you as well. I just want to say thank you very much. The reason we come and do our regional tours is because we learn so much from the regions. This is going to have an impact on all Victorians, so thank you very much, Natalie and Matthew, for being here today.

Witnesses withdrew.