

# 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**

Professor Michael Buxton; and

Professor Andrew Butt.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the public hearing of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply. It is great to have the next two witnesses, but I will just run through some requirements and 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 the 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 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 in our final report.

Thank you so much for making time to meet with the committee today. Would you please state your full names and titles and make any opening remarks which you would wish to.

**Michael BUXTON:** Michael Buxton, emeritus professor, environment and planning at RMIT.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome.

**Andrew BUTT:** And I am Andrew Butt. I am a professor of urban planning at RMIT University.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you so much for being here today.

**Michael BUXTON:** We have come in force.

**The CHAIR:** Great.

**Michael BUXTON:** And it is fantastic to know that we are not going to be sued for what we say. Thank you, Juliana. That is a huge relief.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Strap in, people.

**Michael BUXTON:** Get ready for the ride.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. Any opening remarks that you would like to start with?

**Michael BUXTON:** So, what – we just speak for about –

**The CHAIR:** You chat away. You get to talk and we get to listen.

**Andrew BUTT:** I would certainly want to thank the committee for inviting me and Michael as well, for having us together. Michael and I have worked for a long time together on these topics and been working on these things for at least the last 20 years together, and it is great to see that they are being taken seriously at this level. Clearly it is an agenda which has come and gone in significance over the many years I have been involved in looking at it, so I am always one for making sure we bring it back to the importance I think it always has had. Thank you.

**Michael BUXTON:** We wrote a book a few years ago. It was a terrific effort that we actually managed to collaborate; that was big. We do not expect you to read the book, but we are always looking for sales, so if you want to buy two or more, that would be fantastic. Our publisher will be really happy. What is it called again? I keep forgetting the name.

**Andrew BUTT:** It is *The Future of the Fringe*.

**Michael BUXTON:** *The Future of the Fringe*.

**The CHAIR:** Last night I was at the Stella Prize event, and the winner of the Stella Prize was Alexis Wright, and her book *Praiseworthy* is 796 pages. It is this thick. I went straightaway and bought it. She signed the copy for me, and I said, 'Look, it might take me 10 years to read,' and she said, 'That's all right, it took me 10 years to write.' But she got the sale, and I think she was happy with that.

**Michael BUXTON:** Well, books are hard.

**Andrew BUTT:** I think we are going to proceed with you presenting first and then me.

**Michael BUXTON:** Yes. We will just go for 5 minutes or so each, and then –

**Andrew BUTT:** Yes.

**Michael BUXTON:** Okay. We have each done a short PowerPoint. PowerPoint is much overrated. It is a bit like the Gettysburg address, PowerPoint – it does not work. But we will have a go at it and try to get some key points out, and then we will stop.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Michael BUXTON:** Just to define the areas, if we look at what we are talking about, we have got the urban growth boundary at the end of the dark bit in the middle, then we have got the green wedges that are the lighter grey and then there is a broader peri-urban area outside the green wedges. If we just look at the light grey area, the Yarra Ranges and the other areas, that basically is the Melbourne region. Andrew will talk in detail about the agricultural value of that, but that is about the second most productive agricultural area in Victoria. You have got four times the intensity of agriculture. It is very important, but I will leave that to Andrew to talk about. But then you have got the outer peri-urban area as well. We are really concentrating on the green wedges, but you can see that the regional green wedges are where the green areas are between the urban growth corridors, and the urban growth corridors, as you can see from that, have been widened out, so they have eaten into a lot of the green wedge areas. So we really have more of a conventional green belt; it extends right out beyond the urban growth boundaries, as you can see, to that boundary of the lighter grey area, for example, to the edge, bringing in the whole of the Yarra Ranges and so on. So it is a conventional green belt. I will leave all this. It is still incredibly important, with about 41 per cent of Melbourne's food needs.

But the point we want to make here is that it is being incrementally lost. Foodprint – Rachel Carey and her group – and others I know are talking to you as well. But it could drop from 41 per cent to 18 per cent on business-as-usual trends unless something is done about it. If we are serious about retaining the green wedges, this is the threat that we have. It is incremental – it is a bit here and it is a bit there – and unless something fundamental is done at this point it is going to be lost. Historically, as you know, Melbourne's regional food production was well within what is now the urban area – you know, Bentleigh and all those places – and it is being pushed further out.

I just want to focus really on the planning side and then Andrew will talk about the agriculture and relate that to the planning, and then we will stop. The planning issue really is that the government has to decide whether or not the green wedges are worth saving. We went through these periods where the board of works, the Hamer government and the Cain government had a consistent approach, and it lasted until the late 90s. Then in the late 90s there was a different interpretation of the rules. The rules changed and 4000 hectares of green wedge land was rezoned in a few years – we got these figures at RMIT – for urban-related development, and a whole lot of rural residential development was approved, particularly in the Yarra Ranges and elsewhere, right, so you had bigger areas broken up into smaller lots. Finally, there are all sorts of tourist-related uses – you know, the golf courses – and of course with them came function centres. You can see these in wineries and golf courses now. Mornington Peninsula was a particular target. We had a lot of residential development, so you have residential accommodation and accommodation uses, and one by one these developments started to pick off the rest of the green wedges.

Then in 2002 the Bracks government tried to change the rules and actually did. I headed up the working party that reported back to government, and we recommended bringing in a legislated urban growth boundary, which needed both houses of Parliament to change the new green wedge zones. That was a good approach. The government adopted it. Mary Delahunty as the minister I think did her best, but the problem is that the zones

were altered at the last minute to allow a series of urban-related uses to come in, and I have listed them in the submission. There are about 16 really major urban-related uses.

The threat really is this progressive expansion. Firstly, with the urban growth boundary, 50,000 hectares were lost from 2010 on, and particularly it began in 2006. So that legislated urban growth boundary did not stop the change. I thought it would have, with two houses of Parliament's agreement being needed and not just a planning amendment change, but 50,000 hectares has still been lost as it has been progressively expanded.

Allowing the non-urban uses – well, the point about them is that if you allow urban-related uses in what should be a non-urban zone or a rural zone, you are undermining the urban growth boundary. It is the de facto expansion of the urban growth boundary in another guise, right? That is inconsistent with the green wedge principles of agriculture, biodiversity and landscapes, and they are all spelt out in policy very clearly. That is an inconsistency, and really I think the government and the Parliament have to make a decision about whether they are going to let it to go on and continue or draw a line.

Our case here is that we have these periods. One was in the early 2000s when the government tried to do something about it, and now over 20 years later we are at another critical point, because we are seeing all the time through these urban-related uses more and more of these urban uses, which are inconsistent with the rural values of green wedges, coming in. They are commercial developments, and they are accommodation uses, function centres and schools – secondary schools are a really major issue. Why are we allowing secondary schools to be concentrated in areas in green wedges when the kids live in the urban corridors and parents have got to drive them 5 kilometres to school and back? Schools should be where people live. That is the principle, but it is cheaper land and so on. So you are getting these pressures.

Finally, inappropriate subdivision and inadequate subdivision minimums – that is basically the expansion of the urban growth boundary over time. Initially it was in 2006 with the blue and then there were the 2010 expansions, and then there were more in 2013. They were really quite major. They are the inconsistent uses – function centres, exhibition centres, group accommodation and so on, schools and residential buildings – you can put a residential hotel in a green wedge now.

I guess our point in summary is – look, if the government and the Parliament are serious about protecting green wedges, this has to stop, because this is incremental erosion of the value of green wedges. There is a decision to be made: either we are going to have a metropolitan green belt for Melbourne, with all its value – and we know what the values are; they are critical and really important, everything from mental health, physical health, the right type of tourism, agricultural and landscape values and so on – or we just say, 'Look, we'll give up on it, and we won't continue with that.' That is basically the argument that we are putting. This is what a lot of the green wedges already look like. There is an inconsistent, mixed-up pattern of land use with small lots, houses, larger lots, rural residential lots and so on, and that is what it often looks like, you know. You just get these landscapes which are fundamentally altered.

In summary, I think that is the challenge: either green wedges on international principles should be regarded as inviolate – they should not be changed, and their rural nature should be retained for the future value of Melbourne and great benefit for Melbourne; or we just give up on them and let this incremental erosion continue.

Finally: is this so radical, to say that green wedges should be solely devoted to rural-related uses? Well, unsurprisingly, it is not; it is the convention internationally. If we look at green belts around the world, urban-related uses are prohibited, yet we do not prohibit much at all. Most of these uses are section 2 uses, subject to permit, so it becomes a lawyers picnic – councils, residents, developers. There is no certainty, and it is all fought out. Sometimes someone wins; sometimes someone loses; But the net result is that there is an incremental loss of these values, and before we know it we end up back where we were in the late 90s. Thousands of hectares are lost, and we wake up the next morning or the next week or the next month or the next year and we say it is basically so compromised that the values that we thought were important are lost.

So that is the challenge that we really think is confronting the committee: to say, look, if they are that valuable, why not revert back to the international best practice and say they should be retained for the rural values that, by the way, they were set up to retain? When you look at the original Board of Works zones and the original Board of Works planning controls, they prohibited all these urban-related uses, right? There was certainty. So

developers went elsewhere. It did not stop development, it just meant they could not go there, and this worked for over 30 years. And since then, it is a bunfight, basically – uncertainty, complications. So we are arguing, let us get back to certainty and get the rules back and make them mandatory.

**Andrew BUTT:** I have got more slides. Are they following on?

**Michael BUXTON:** Yes, they are.

**Andrew BUTT:** Excellent. All right. Thanks so much, Michael. I am going to flick through all your stuff. Here we go. This is me, blue on blue. That was not how it looked for me, but anyway – old-school Prahran jumper.

I have some questions for you, Michael, and I will ask you later – but I want to pose some issues for the committee, and I suppose mainly they are around thinking through the broader sense of what we think these spaces are for. Michael has outlined some issues around the planning for them, but thinking this is around food systems, I was really wanting to try and present some ideas about what we might think the food system contribution is now, what it could be or should be and what the planning solutions that Michael has been discussing might mean for that. So that is a bit more of what I am doing here.

I really want to emphasise what Michael has said: that this does remain a critical site for food production. We have got those long-standing planning approaches, but they do lack certainty and clarity right now. And we have got diverse farming systems. I am about to present some issues on farming systems around this area, but I think looking at the data, we know they are quite diverse and we know they have changed radically and rapidly, certainly since the 1960s and 70s, when much of this was first proposed. A point I do want to make is if we are looking at Melbourne at 8 million, I do not think the solution is to continue to do what we are doing now. We are not going to satiate that need through the sorts of planning and the sorts of urban expansion we have seen. It just will not work. We have got to think in a more transformative way – notwithstanding the fact that there is a role for outer-suburban development and outer-suburban communities and the infrastructure needs they have, the housing options they provide. We simply cannot have a city of 8 million people that looks like the city's growth we have seen now for another 3 million. It will not work.

This is Ferntree Gully. This is actually on 4 May, but not this year – so that is tomorrow. There are your brussels sprouts, right up against suburban development in Ferntree Gully. It is possible. It is possible to have clarity about agricultural systems and urban developments meeting each other. Our problem of course is for much of the area we are talking about it is not simply about the diffusion of different uses, as Michael describes – schools and the like – but also about the certainty and uncertainty that is created by urban growth, with new investment decisions being made that are anticipating urban growth, because they have been anticipating urban growth for 50 years, so why not continue to. But there are examples, just as there are in cities around the world, and people love to point out examples in Amsterdam or wherever where this happens. Well, it happens in Melbourne too, and it can happen.

We know that in Victoria the immediate metropolitan region produces about 10 per cent – this is from the 2017 agricultural census – of agricultural production; the agricultural commodity share is about 10 per cent. The broader peri-urban region Michael describes has about a quarter of the state's share, including the immediate peri-urban area, and it is worth billions of dollars. That includes Werribee South, Clyde, the edge of Bacchus Marsh, the edge of Sunbury – those brussels sprouts sitting down there – as well as into more extensive areas where we have got more complex farming. Some of it is tourism focused. Some of it is intensive. It exists, and it is worth a lot.

We have got other agricultural regions of course in the state – on the River Murray, irrigation systems, the big, extensive commodity farming systems – but whether it is talking about climate change, talking about local food systems or whether it is talking about labour force availability, we have got to think about the value of these areas too. They are worth something. It is certainly easier to get people to pick leafy greens in Bacchus Marsh than it is in the Maffra irrigation area. You can find staff to do it tomorrow, and you cannot do it in Maffra. So we are losing a lot when we start to lose this stuff.

This is across various Australian states. This is from our book. If you are interested, you can buy it. Certainly the agricultural production per farm business is very high in the peri-urban regions, so in other words they are concentrated and high value. These are areas where despite the fact there is a prevalence of small farming

systems – I know that others might talk about this too, and by ‘small farming systems’ I mean, for example, extensive cattle grazing and the like, which use space but are not necessarily worth a lot of money – this area has got farm businesses that are worth a lot. They are intensive; they operate at smallish scales producing a lot, and so they are valuable and the sites they are on are valuable. You can obviously go to Werribee South or Bacchus Marsh and see that tomorrow.

The other point about it is that even within the peri-urban area – and again my slides have come up poorly on your screen; the peri-urban one is the middle, the broader extensive peri-urban areas Michael was talking about is the end – this shows us about the scale of agricultural output. Farms that have agricultural output of under about \$100,000 – that is in total turnover so probably not supplying a family income – in, say, things like beef cattle are obviously much higher in peri-urban areas because it is hobby farming. That is fine, but if you are going to look at other things like chicken meat, they are all worth a lot. There are various things in between. You can explore that, and particularly horticulture is a good example. Wine grape growing is more complex of course because it has often got tourism-related income and the like, but these are not worth nothing. So we need to think about their value, and I think we need to also think about the versatility of these spaces for meeting climate needs, for meeting labour force needs as well, and, for things like wine grapes and others, how they enter into other sectors of the economy too that other regions cannot do.

But of course they have problems. They create neighbourhood problems. We looked at the brussels sprouts, but clearly these signs – you may have seen them – are up for people who are concerned about neighbouring uses. We need to be very clear about the way that we are not creating conflict. The planning systems historically have been about avoiding those sorts of conflicts, yet Michael has described a green wedge and peri-urban land use pattern which in many instances constructs conflict. There was the government’s recent announcement around right-to-farm type legislation, which has been a longstanding issue and has certainly been discussed as long as I have done this, since the 90s. Work we have done for *Melbourne 2030* and other seemingly very old documents describes that land use conflict as a critical problem.

I think sometimes there is land use compatibility around peri-urban agriculture and related things like tourism that can show complementary land uses, though. It is not easy, and it is not a single story. It is a fairly complex mosaic of uses in these areas, from very productive through to tourism and consumption orientated, if you like, and you have got to get that pattern right. But what it is not about is just simply having de facto urban expansion into areas that are critically important and assuming that that will solve our population growth problem, because it just will not.

I suppose this is reinforcing some of what Michael said. He described that 50,000 hectares, or 500 square kilometres, that we have seen in the urban growth boundary between 2005 and 2013. I have said that that is more than the area of Whitehorse, Maroondah, Knox, Monash and Greater Dandenong put together that we just added to the urban growth boundary. We have not yet filled it. I know the property council are out and about trying to get more expansion of it, and I can see why – because that is a model of housing that we have. There is a bigger system problem about why we find that the easiest thing to do, which I think means that this discussion is not in isolation of bigger problems like that. We need to consider different sorts of models for the solutions we have. I feel that the infrastructure costs and the capacity for us to simply replicate the expansion model we had will not meet our needs, and it certainly will not meet the infrastructure needs of communities.

Michael made a very clear point about the need to consider the planning controls outside there. There is nothing new in this. This is 1967. The idea of these urban growth boundaries and expansion corridors and the like has been there for a long time, but we have not really come up with an answer to what we do when we have to just say, ‘No more.’ That is really what I think is the key problem we have.

There is a map of Melbourne from almost 10 years ago now, with the urban growth boundaries marked there. There is a lot of land, and you can see this still if you drive on the road to Wallan or out to Melton. There is a lot of land available. The housing densities being delivered there are not great. There are reasons for that, which are to do with, again, housing provision models, infrastructure certainty models and the like. We know why people are not building apartments where they say they will – because they are waiting on infrastructure that has not been delivered – but those things again will not be solved by simply expanding the urban growth boundary; they have got symptoms with another diagnosis.

I will flick that one on – I suppose I wanted to make two key points at the end. We need better solutions to peri-urban growth, and we are outlining some of those, I think, that are about creating certainty for agricultural systems, as diverse as they are, because they are part of the food system for the region and for Victoria, and a very important one that we cannot just dispense with. I think when we think about the uncertainty of systems like the Murray–Darling Basin irrigation system in future, we need to recognise why this is a valuable thing, but I would also argue it is not simply about planning. There are a range of issues. If you talk to any Werribee River system irrigation farmers, you will know why they are very concerned about things like costs, infrastructure, age and the like. I want to make the point that farming is real in this region. It is often innovative as well. It is real across all sorts of scales, from very high-intensity activities around horticulture, around intensive animal keeping and the like, through to real yet innovative farming which we might see as a bit more hobby or tourism orientated. We need to support both of those ends. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Amazing. So many ideas. Can I just start with one out of my own curiosity: Melbourne has a reputation for being a very livable city by international standards. A lot of that is because we have this huge urban sprawl and people are spread so far. I live in Ballarat, so I drive for 60 kilometres looking at houses and new developments and everything like that. With our population growth, what will increasing the density of the inner city do to the livability of Melbourne?

**Andrew BUTT:** We might have different opinions about this, but I think we have got big opportunities to improve the livability of a lot of parts of Melbourne. That is not to say that we should be looking to develop more, simply everywhere. I think there are strategic decisions to be made, and I am often concerned about discussions that simply suggest we should just do more everywhere. I think there are lots of opportunities to utilise existing infrastructure and a lot of opportunities to achieve economies of scale by building on existing infrastructure. We should not forget the infrastructure deficits in outer suburban areas. In fact many of the infrastructure deficits in outer urban areas are what is preventing them achieving the sorts of densities we might want to achieve as well, and we can see that in places where precinct structure plans have supported higher density developments that just will not be achieved until there is sufficient infrastructure. We can see that in things like western rail infrastructure in Melbourne. That is a classic example of where there are a lot of sites with railway stations that are dotted lines on the map and when they are there will achieve better outcomes I believe. It is not just about density, it is about housing choice and it is about jobs and services.

The first question in that is: what happens to Melbourne – does it become worse? I think it may well become a higher density experience with a lot more pressure on some infrastructure, but I suspect it is going to be a lot better than if we simply replicate the infrastructure-free expansion that we have seen in the last 10 or 15 years in a lot of places, which is leaving a lot of people – communities, households – in an infrastructure deficit. That is simply the truth, and it is an unfortunate one.

**Michael BUXTON:** I think there are two ways to look at that. One is the government has got this 70:30 split, and it is clear that the government wants to really try to meet that 70 per cent target in the established city. At RMIT we did a study a few years ago now called *Melbourne at 8 Million*. It is on the web, and there is an executive summary, so you do not have to read the entire report. What we found was that by just using the original zones that the Liberal government brought in in 2013 – Matthew Guy’s residential zones – Melbourne could easily accommodate within the existing metropolitan boundaries at 70 per cent. In fact we modelled it at 80 per cent, and you could do it, without building a high-rise city, and keeping heritage and keeping high livability, walkability and so on – and that was what the existing zones allowed. Now what the government is doing is a completely different approach. It has got major activity centre reconstruction to high-rise and so on. It is a different model. We did not believe when we did that report that that model was necessary, but that is what the government is doing. So clearly we can accommodate. The myth that the middle-ring suburbs have not pulled their weight is just completely false. If you look at all the figures from 2012 on, there have been more housing approvals and more houses built than demand. It is only in the last 18 months or so that they have dropped a bit, and that is because of problems with the housing sector itself – supply chain problems and additional costs and labour costs. It is a myth that existing suburbs have not been pulling their weight.

The other quick thing is that you can increase density in the urban growth corridors. Again, we modelled that back in 2010, and we found that you could get land savings at 20 lots per hectare, when at the time it was 12 lots per hectare. It is now 18, and we think it should go to 25, but with that kind of moderate increase in

average densities the government could have achieved the additional housing capacity that it has achieved through the expansion of the urban growth boundary, simply by increasing the density.

**Andrew BUTT:** I think it is worth adding, though, that the precinct structure planning approach of the last 15 or 20 years has achieved in itself higher densities than 1980s and 1990s housing as well, so they are steps on the way. But I think Michael is right, it could be more. While the media and the like hold out this idea that there are particular hold-out places to urban development – and we know there are some suburbs of Melbourne where urban development is very unpopular – in the scheme of things there has been a massive repatterning of this city.

I am on the record as being concerned about big infrastructure investments like Suburban Rail Loop not achieving enough, because I think there are too few stops and so we rely on really high density in too few places, whereas we could have more moderate density deliver a better outcome in more places. There are a range of reasons why that seems to have come to pass, but the city of towers, punctuated by towers and everything else staying the same, is not really realistic either. So I think there is infrastructure investment that can change that around. The urban growth areas have the capacity to achieve much more, and often it is limited by infrastructure provision, social and physical infrastructure provision. And the timeliness of it I think is as important as anything else. It is not about simply what could, should or will be provided but rather when it is provided and how stages of development can occur.

**Michael BUXTON:** Let us get to all the questions.

**Andrew BUTT:** Sorry, yes – I could talk about this for an hour.

**The CHAIR:** Exactly.

**Nicole WERNER:** If I may –

**The CHAIR:** Nicole, kick off, and keep on our terms of reference, please.

**Nicole WERNER:** I will try. I represent the seat of Warrandyte, so I am probably the most urban or closest to the CBD of the representatives on the committee. I think a few things that you touched on intersect with my electorate. Housing obviously is an issue, and in my electorate there are also the green wedges, which cover places like Donvale, Park Orchards, Warrandyte, Chirnside Park. We of course have some wineries, so we have got that tourism value. I know – terms of reference, talking about food supply, so I am trying to keep it related to that.

**The CHAIR:** Wine is food.

**Nicole WERNER:** Yes, wine is food. I appreciate what you said about the mosaic of –

**Andrew BUTT:** Yes, and it is a classic location of that.

**Nicole WERNER:** Yes. What I am particularly interested in is: the urban-related uses permitted I think are very apparent in my electorate with the schools, with the different accommodation or rather – no, not group accommodation – schools more specifically. And there is that tension – of course we want to build more housing but then, you know, you are juggling that with green wedge spaces and you are juggling that with also – talking about food supply – food supply. I just wanted to get your thoughts specifically on an area like that.

**Michael BUXTON:** Warrandyte is a really good example, but so is Healesville, for example. If we look at the Yarra Ranges townships and Warrandyte, I think you can see the benefit in a place like Healesville of an urban boundary – so what the government did in 2002 was define the boundaries of all those townships, including the Warrandyte townships and the Dandenong Ranges townships, by the legislated boundary. Now, in a place like Healesville, that has meant that the commercial and the retail activities then got pushed back to the township. So what was happening in a lot of these places was that while land was available for commercial-related uses and business-related uses and in the green wedges, people could buy rural land and they could put in accommodation and all the rest of these urban-related uses. Once that was stopped or at least it was harder to do – and it is not hard enough to do in our view because it is not prohibited, but it became harder to do because the government brought in minimum land sizes and minimum sizes of the businesses – it tended to push those



activities back to the town. So if you look at Healesville, and David will know this better than me – I mean, 20 years ago there were vacant shops and so on, and now it is a thriving place, right?

**David HODGETT:** You cannot get a park.

**Michael BUXTON:** I mean, there is high-end fashion in Healesville. The hotels all came back. Why – because they related it to local food, local wine, sold in the town. And you can see this all over the world, right? As soon as you have a line that separates those kinds of uses, it pushes them back and the towns thrive.

**Andrew BUTT:** Can I add a line to this too?

**Michael BUXTON:** Hang on. Wait until I just finish, Andrew.

**Andrew BUTT:** All right, go on.

**Michael BUXTON:** I have got to keep him under control, you know. So it is really important that we look at the economic benefits as well of demarcation and certainty. Prohibitions are now regarded in a bad light, but they are not necessarily. If they are targeted well, you get those really important economic benefits.

**Andrew BUTT:** I wanted to go to your point around the uses, though. I think we can see – and you can see it as you drive down from Ballarat as well – examples. It is about what we imagine urban places to be – that is generating some of this too. We are seeing obviously, you know, churches, temples, schools in green wedge zones in part because we do not imagine how they work in urban areas anymore. So we also see them in industrial zones. Going to an industrial zone there is a climbing gym, there is a church, there is a children's play centre –

**The CHAIR:** A Sikh temple.

**Andrew BUTT:** And there is a Sikh temple. And why is that – because we have forgotten how to imagine to put them in urban areas. And so this in part generates it – our lack of imagination about what constitutes an urban community leads us to driving some of these things out, and I think that is actually not entirely disconnected.

**Martha HAYLETT:** We have heard from quite a few other people today that there is a bit of a theme of people wanting a statewide food system and security strategy – something that is nice and broad and then you work with your individual councils. Is that an idea that either of you support? What are your thoughts on that as a possibility?

**Andrew BUTT:** I have been working on food systems and landscape systems and planning for a very long time, and I think there has often been very much a lack of spatial thinking about it. Obviously in an electorate like yours there are a lot of what might be seen as post-agricultural regions, old sheep farming areas that are marginal against goldmining areas and the like. We have got areas that are really ripe for change and we have got areas where we are seeing a turnover into energy production. We have had a long history of agricultural policy – although there are some exceptions, of individuals – being an economic development policy, not a spatial or geographic policy. So I think there are a lot of potential benefits in that, in thinking about the geographies of food production and the economic and policy drivers that support them in different sorts of places in different ways. Certainly for the last 30 or more years that seems largely to have been very aspatial thinking, and we saw the same in national policy during the Rudd government around rural and regional policy; it was an a-spatial policy about food exports, not a geographic policy about what we do where and what is best for it.

**Michael BUXTON:** I think one of the really big spatial issues is the impact of allowing urban uses on land value. You do not actually have to zone the land urban or rural-residential to necessarily get the value of the land to rise. It rises massively once you do to seven to 10 times what it is at a rural value. So the size of the allotments and the minimum subdivision size is a critical determinant of the land value. But you do not actually have to zone it that way; you can just have what we have in our green wedge zone: permitted uses in a so-called rural zone. If somebody comes in and wants to build a tourist-related function centre, accommodation or restaurant complex, what that does is it raises the value of agricultural land, because the next person who sells the land wants more than what it would seem to bring as purely agricultural. What that does is it delivers a

lower comparative rate of return on agricultural products, because landowners do their figures and say, 'I can make a lot more money from selling my land for quasi-residential or tourist-related developments than I can for farming.' We have got to be very careful –

**Andrew BUTT:** Five minutes.

**Michael BUXTON:** Yes. So what you allow on land affects the value of land, and that can then lower the rate of return for rural pursuits.

**Martin CAMERON:** I am interested in your view: are the Victorian planning provision policies and planning and planning controls adequate to protect peri-urban agricultural lands from inappropriate development?

**Michael BUXTON:** No. I did not put my recommendations on the presentation. Did you get them separately?

**A member:** We do have them.

**Michael BUXTON:** Okay. That list of proposals is my interpretation of what needs to be changed under the planning regime. I will not go through all of them but have a look at those. I think if those land uses and changes to the Victorian planning provisions were addressed, they would basically solve the problem. The fundamental one is greater emphasis on prohibited uses: getting rid of the urban-related permitted uses in the green wedge and the rural conservation zone. There are not even any conditional controls on those uses in the rural conservation zone. The rural conservation zone was originally brought in as a tougher zone, and now it is the weakest zone, and the green wedge A zone has an 8-hectare control instead of a 40-hectare minimum for tourist-related developments. So what are developers doing? They are going to the green wedge A zone. Now, I helped write the green wedge A zone, and the green wedge A zone was designed for all those higgledy-piggledy blocks in places like the Dandenong Ranges – you know, the 3-acre and the 1-acre lots that could not be picked up under the residential zones. They were not meant to allow developers to target them for major tourist and accommodation and function centre resorts. But that is what they are doing, because you do not need to buy 40 hectares as a minimum land size, you can go and buy eight. These are the kinds of anomalies that have to be fixed. I think that list is my summary of that.

**Martin CAMERON:** Beautiful. Thank you.

**David HODGETT:** First and foremost, we will have the secretariat buy a copy of your book. But given that we are expecting a very tough state budget, we will not buy a copy each, we will just buy one. I was going to mention your 11-point plan, Michael. My only question there, I guess, is: are we done with logical inclusions? Do we need another round of that before we implement –

**Michael BUXTON:** I think so. I think the three different expansions of the boundaries are done. Once you do rezone the land, people buy it, and it is very hard to –

**Andrew BUTT:** I think we have still got a lot of supply remaining.

**Michael BUXTON:** There is a huge amount of supply.

**Andrew BUTT:** If you can find me a little pocket somewhere that makes sense, sure. But in any overall sense there is no logic to it.

**Michael BUXTON:** We did not want to revisit that.

**David HODGETT:** The other thing I was just going to touch on is: we are always interested in what other states are doing, and there was mention of the Adelaide green belt protection.

**Michael BUXTON:** That is really important.

**David HODGETT:** Is it something we should be looking at or focusing on to enhance our work here?

**Michael BUXTON:** I think so. Look at, say, the Vancouver agricultural zone. I think the big mistake we made in 2002 with the green wedge working party work was that we thought the urban growth boundary, the legislated boundary, would solve it, right? The idea was it would force the government and the development industry to go back into the urban growth corridors, increase the density and then concentrate on the urban area, and it did not. It sent a signal to the developers – once the government changed the first boundary in 2006, it sent a signal that we will just have to buy the land around the urban growth corridors and pressure the government into rezoning it, which is exactly what happened. What we should have done was say, ‘These areas are inviolate,’ in the sense that they are never going to change. Define your agricultural areas, define your landscape biodiversity – define them up. That is what Adelaide did. If you look at the Adelaide plan, it defined up your wine growing, your other agricultural areas, your important landscape and biodiversity areas, and it said, ‘These are it. These are the first cab off the rank. They have priority.’ Urban development has to find other solutions, as Andrew was pointing out – go elsewhere. Vancouver did this with its agricultural zoning idea, and this is done all over the world. The critical thing is to look at the other side of the urban growth boundary and give that primacy by defining up in detail what it is that can never be changed and why it cannot be changed.

**David HODGETT:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Look at that: 45, perfectly. That went really, really quick. It was fantastic. Thank you very much, Michael and Andrew. Many more questions will come from what you have talked about, particularly as we tour our regional centres over the next couple of weeks. I am very interested in making sure that lessons learned in Melbourne can really play out well in our regions.

**Andrew BUTT:** Just to Martin’s case, I think it is also about thinking about what role urban growth has across the state rather than simply assuming you have got 8 million people who have to live here and have to be pushed somewhere.

**Michael BUXTON:** Thank you very much. I guess in a nutshell, what we are saying is the green wedges in recent decades have been seen as ‘land in waiting’. It is there for every other reason; you can use it for whatever. Now what we are saying is: get rid of that idea and say no. From David’s question, the values in there that you define up are the primary uses. It is not land in waiting anymore for urban-related uses.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We will end the transmission there. Thank you so much, Michael and Andrew.

**Witnesses withdrew.**