

26 May 2025

The Hon. Ros Spence MP
Minister for Agriculture
Shop D00-02B, Craigieburn Central
340 Craigieburn Road
CRAIGIEBURN VIC 3064
Delivered via email: ros.spence@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister Spence,

RE: REQUEST FOR INCLUSION OF HUME REGION LGAs IN STATE DROUGHT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

I am writing to seek much needed drought support for affected farmers in within the Hume Region.

The Hume Region Local Government Network (HRGLN) has serious concern that several Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Hume region have been excluded from the State Government's recently expanded drought support package.

The Victorian Government's \$29.4 million commitment to supporting drought-affected farmers is both timely and welcome. However, the current eligibility framework does not accurately reflect the lived realities in many parts of the Hume region. Livestock and cattle producers in our LGAs are facing mounting pressure due to limited feed availability, dwindling hay reserves, rising fodder and transport costs, and depleted water storages. The financial strain is becoming untenable, and the emotional toll on our rural communities is growing.

Regional livestock sales and producer forums continue to reveal the gravity of the situation. Farmers have reported paying up to \$20,000 per load to source hay from interstate—costs that are simply not sustainable. For many, these challenges are not abstract—they threaten their immediate operations and long-term viability.

In light of this, we respectfully urge Agriculture Victoria to:

- Reassess current drought conditions across the entire Hume region;
- Revisit the eligibility criteria for drought support packages;
- Consider including all affected Hume LGAs in the current drought assistance measures.

We also note with concern that LGAs excluded from the current eligibility framework are also ineligible for partial rebates under the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund, available through participation in the drought infrastructure grant program. This compounds the disadvantage experienced by affected communities and is fuelling frustration among producers.

At present, many of our farmers are not focused on infrastructure investment—they are focused on survival. Immediate financial assistance is urgently needed to secure fodder and maintain core herds. Without access to this support, we risk losing not only farms but entire livelihoods and generational ties to the land.

While we recognise the importance of mental health and decision-making support programs—and value their presence—these services cannot replace the immediate need for direct financial relief. Our farmers need both.

We would welcome the opportunity to brief you or your Department further on the situation unfolding across our region. Our rural industries are strong and resilient, but they require an equitable and inclusive support response that recognises need—not just geographic boundaries.

The Hume Region Local Government Network stands ready to work with all levels of government and local stakeholders to coordinate efforts and ensure a fair and timely response for the communities we serve.

Yours sincerely,



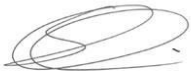
Cr Claire Ewart-Kennedy
Mayor – Strathbogie Shire Council
Chair – Hume Region Local Government Network
Our ref: SSCEDOC-462710569-636



Cr Sarah Nicholas
Mayor - Alpine Shire Council



Cr Bernie Hearn
Mayor - Benalla Rural City Council



Cr Shane Sali
Mayor - Greater Shepparton City Council



Cr Sophie Price
Mayor - Indigo Shire Council



Cr Steve Rabie
Mayor - Mansfield Shire Council



Cr John Dougall
Mayor - Mitchell Shire Council



Dr Graeme Emonson PSM
Chair Administrator – Moira Shire Council



Cr Damien Gallagher
Mayor - Murrindindi Shire Council



Cr Andrew Whitehead
Mayor – Towong Shire Council



Cr Irene Grant
Mayor – Rural City of Wangaratta



Cr Michael Gobel
Mayor – Wodonga Council

Cc:

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP, Minister for Regional Development
The Hon. Nick Staikos, Minister for Local Government
The Hon. Wendy Lovell MLC, Member for Northern Victoria Region
Gaelle Broad MLC, Member for Northern Victoria Region
Georgie Purcell MLC, Member for Northern Victoria Region
Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell MLC, Member for Northern Victoria Region