



VFF ELECTION BREAKFAST

Hotel Windsor

18 September 2018

David Jochinke

Good morning and thank you for being here.

I would like to begin by acknowledging members of the Victorian Farmers Federation policy council who are here today.

I would also like to welcome those Members of Parliament who have joined us on this final sitting week of the 58th Parliament of Victoria.

This morning is meant as a celebration and a reflection on what has been a big four years for Victorian Agriculture and our state as a whole.

To those MPs who are here today, you are here because you are the MPs representing Victoria's rural and regional electorates and regions.

Your constituents are the VFF members – Victoria's Farmers, spread across our state, who are responsible for more than \$13 billion worth of production annually.

We thank those of you who have taken the time to be here today.

As the 58th parliament draws to a close we are also looking ahead to the state election, which is now just nine weeks away on 24 November.

By now, you would all be aware that we have launched our 2018 election platform and key asks, calling for all the parties and candidates to deliver for agriculture and grow our communities.

This theme acknowledges that farmers and their work form the backbone of so many rural communities.



When they do well, our regions do well, and, by flow on, so does the state.

I have also written to all of you, as well as your rival candidates in your regions and electorates – reiterating our key asks.

We are seeking \$6.2 billion over five years to fix the terrible state of Victoria’s rural and regional roads.

We are after a long term plan for energy security and we are after reliable telecommunications infrastructure.

Without these things – things that many city-dwelling Victorians take for granted – it becomes increasingly challenging for our farmers to continue producing food and fibre for the state, country and world.

So we are asking you as elected members of parliament, many of you seeking to be re-elected, to listen to your farmers and start delivering on these issues.

But there is one issue in particular which we have brought you here today to discuss - that’s the issue of excessive regional and rural council rate increases.

We’ve been talking about this now for some time, and the response to date has been completely unsatisfactory.

The VFF phones are continuing to run hot with members concerned about their rates bills

While we continue getting reports of annual increases as high as 40 per cent, we continue to run the risk that some farms will be rated out of existence.

That is a risk Victoria cannot afford.

That is why today we are calling for a moratorium on future rate increases until the state government, election candidates and councils stand up and commit to doing something about the rates issue.



Our current rates system is irreparably broken and needs to be demolished and rebuilt from the ground up.

It's difficult to think of any small or large business that could remain viable in the face of 20 to 40 per cent hikes to such a significant fixed cost each year.

Compounding this, the difficulties posed by the drought and difficult seasonal conditions many farmers are facing make significant increases even harder to absorb.

We know the current system isn't fair.

That's why the VFF is encouraging farmers with concerns about their rates bills to contest their valuation.

Similarly, those farmers with the option of doing so are being encouraged to withhold their rates payments until the final lump sum payment is due to council, rather than paying in instalments.

But we need to go further than that.

Enough is enough. Our rates system needs to be torn down and rebuilt to ensure a fairer deal for our farmers.

To tell you more about it, I would like to welcome farmer and long-time VFF member Mark Johns.

MARK SPEAKS

Thanks Mark for making the effort to speak here today on this very serious issue.

I also wanted to thank you all again for taking the time to come to be here this morning.



As you may also be aware we are also having events in a number of key electorates we are targeting including, Rippon, Shepparton, Morwell, Bass and Bellarine.

We're looking forward to engaging further and working with all candidates in what is sure to be an interesting election campaign.