

## Draft rural land use strategy

# Agriculture summary

### Introduction

In 2006, Macedon Ranges Shire Council introduced the shire's inaugural 2002 Rural Land Strategy. The Strategy identified critical issues facing the shire arising from growing competition for rural land. Since 2006 there have been changes in the shire's rural areas, a raft of state and local strategies have been adopted and Ministerial amendments to the suite of rural zones have been gazetted.

All of these have implications for rural land use and development. To address these changes, the Macedon Ranges Shire Council has prepared the draft Rural Land Use Strategy to update the rural framework plan and policy directions for rural land. It has regard for the changing nature of rural land use, the strategic and policy context and the unique circumstances associated with Macedon Ranges Shire's peri-urban location. The draft Rural Land Use Strategy addresses all land currently in the Farming Zone and the Rural Conservation Zone.

### Agribusiness

Agriculture is a small economic sector that plays a significant role in the landscape and identity of Macedon Ranges and its attraction as a tourism destination.

Protection of Strategic Agricultural Land is important to give businesses confidence to invest for the long term. Elsewhere, agriculture will be more diverse both in scale and type as farm businesses adapt to the challenges, particularly land use conflict and farm viability, of operating in a fragmented landscape.

In areas that are still relatively unfragmented, planning policy should support agriculture by protecting productive agricultural land from further fragmentation and uses that would conflict with agriculture.

### Land demand

Shire-wide rural land competition is being driven by demand for rural lifestyle, rural tourism, recreation and land banking. Land competition conflicts with commercial scale agriculture as it inflates land values which deters farmers from investing in their operations as they anticipate the conversion of their land out

of commercial agriculture and makes smaller farms less attractive purchases for farm expansion. As commercial agriculture is out-competed in the land market, it is replaced by sub-commercial agriculture, rural lifestyle or other non-agricultural activities.

Local land use conflict is caused by differences in the expectation and aspirations of landholders, lack of understanding of agricultural practices and poor standards of land management.

## The draft rural land use strategy is now open for consultation

Further details on this consultation can be found here: [mrsc.vic.gov.au/yoursay](http://mrsc.vic.gov.au/yoursay)

You can also find copies of the Rural Land Use Strategy, other strategy summary documents, and details of the engagement program on this web page as well.

Submissions should be addressed to:  
**Rural Land Use Strategy Submission,  
C/- Macedon Ranges Shire Council**



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Examples of the impacts of rural land use on agriculture raised during consultation included:

- Farm operations are not undertaken at the optimal time or in the most efficient manner;
- Agricultural producers incur crop or stock loss or lose industry accreditation (e.g. organic accreditation), due to poor biosecurity measures, weed control or stock containment practices of neighbours.
- Domestic dog attacks on livestock.
- Complaints regarding noise from agricultural operations such as scare guns, agricultural airplanes and frost fans or loss of visual amenity from orchard or vineyard netting.
- Large farm machinery and trucks are sharing narrow country roads with commuters, cycling groups and touring visitors.

Issues can be addressed through better policy such as clearly identifying locations where commercial scale agriculture will be supported over rural lifestyle or hobby farming. However, Council will need to consider non-policy response to manage land use conflict including:

- Infrastructure planning to accommodate the needs of a range of users.
- Education and capacity building of rural landholders.
- Incentives to encourage optimal and productive land management.

## Climate change

Macedon Ranges Shire currently experiences cool and relatively wet winters and warm, dry summers. By the 2050s the climate of the greater Melbourne region could be more like the current climate of Wangaratta with reduced and variable rainfall patterns, increased evaporation, an increase in maximum and minimum daily temperatures, resulting in a shorter growing season for crops and pastures and a reduced productive potential. Farm business located on land with access to irrigation water and in higher rainfall areas of the shire, will be more resilient to the future climate.

## Irrigation areas

Groundwater irrigation development between Romsey and Lancefield enables production of a range of higher value products including summer and winter crops and vegetables. There is significant capacity for further irrigation development using treated wastewater from the Gisborne South, Romsey and Riddells Creek wastewater treatment plants. The main barrier to further development is the lack of delivery infrastructure and high water costs.

Protected cropping may become an option given the areas access to the required services and labour supply. Protected cropping enables production of very high value horticultural products under controlled growing conditions.

The Rural Land Use Strategy supports diversification and adaptation to climate change.

