



5 June 2025

Hon. Jacinta Allan MP, Premier of Victoria
Office of the Premier
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne, Victoria
Australia, 3002
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Dear Premier

Emergency Services Volunteer Fund (ESVF)

I write on behalf of the Glenelg Shire community with a heartfelt plea to reconsider the ESVF.

This new tax has come on the back of the worst drought on record for Victoria's South West. Our farmers are resorting to daily supplementary feeding, early stock sell-offs, and drawing down limited emergency funds to manage the crisis.

All of our constituents will be facing increases with Residential facing a 39% increase, Commercial a 56% increase, Industrial a 54% increase and Rural a 113% increase. This equates to an approximate additional \$3,000,000 extracted from our community. These are not just numbers, we believe our community is nearing a breaking point, and we are deeply concerned that enforcement of the ESVF could be the final straw for many.

The announcement last week of carve outs for our primary producers to Fire Services Levy levels of 2024/25 provides a 1 year respite, but what about everyone else?

The implementation of this levy has heightened Council's existing concern about the financial and mental health impact on farmers and volunteers by being disproportionately allocated to those who feed us, protect us and power our economy. Almost 80% of CFA volunteers in rural Victoria are farmers. Farmers are already twice as likely to take their own life as people living in the city, please don't make this levy the final straw.

Victoria's South West and the Glenelg Shire sit at the heart of one of Australia's most important agricultural regions. We contribute significantly to the nation's food and fibre exports, yet the people producing these goods are being driven to the brink. Drought support from the State Government has been inadequate, particularly when compared to support provided by other States, and has exacerbated a terrible situation.

After personally speaking with many farmers, it's clear that the financial toll of this drought is so severe it could take a decade or longer to recover from. The prolonged dry period has severely affected soil moisture and pasture growth, depleting natural seedbanks and reducing fodder availability. Many dairy operations are entirely dependent on imported feed due to depleted grass and water supplies. The drought now has the strong potential to have a significant impact on our national economy, especially in light of the devastating floods in New South Wales in recent weeks.

The introduction of the levy is fundamentally inequitable, placing a disproportionate financial burden on farmers. For our drought-affected region, its timing could not be worse. Even those who volunteer with the CFA will find it financially unfeasible to cover the upfront cost of the ESVF while waiting for a rebate. Moreover, the rebate fails to acknowledge the many community members who contribute to emergency response in other volunteer roles. As has been widely noted, it also overlooks the reality that most modern farms operate across multiple land titles.

The levy is hitting at the heart of our farmers, the people who feed us and are a significant driver of our national economy.

We ask the State Government to:

- 1) Reconsider its position and withdraw this new tax.
- 2) If the State Government is not willing to do this, then we ask for an extended moratorium on its implementation in drought affected areas until we are back into some stronger seasons. We ask that this moratorium be initially for 2 years, noting the State Government has already committed to 1 year, and before the expiry of the 2 year moratorium a review be undertaken to consider the need to extend this.

Premier, we would also like to extend an invitation for you to visit our region and meet with farmers, speak to our volunteers and hear firsthand how difficult their current circumstances are. We believe this is very important for our community.

We look forward to hearing from you on these points.

Yours sincerely



Cr Karen Stephens
Mayor

Cc: The Hon. Nick Staikos, Minister for Local Government of Victoria
The Hon. Vicki Ward, Minister for Emergency Services
Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan
Roma Britnell MP, Member for South Coast