



National  
Office

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PO Box 5427  
Kingston ACT 2604

Telephone: (02) 6262 5933

Facsimile: (02) 6262 9970

Email: [info@planning.org.au](mailto:info@planning.org.au)

Web: [www.planning.org.au](http://www.planning.org.au)

A.B.N. 11 802 663 785

The Secretary  
Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
Email: [agriculture.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:agriculture.sen@aph.gov.au)

### **Inquiry into Food Production in Australia**

Dear Sir/Madam

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) welcomes the timely Senate Inquiry into Food Production at a time when issues around sustainability, growth boundaries, climate change, energy security and regional food shortages are all on the national agenda.

The Planning Institute of Australia is the professional association representing urban and regional planners and related professions in Australia and overseas. PIA has around 4700 members with PIA Divisions operating in each state and territory in Australia. Around half our members work in local government, 30% for the private sector and the remainder in State and Commonwealth Government and universities.

PIA believes that it is critical to have a national approach to supporting a secure and sustainable food supply for Australians. The relationship between where people live now and into the future, and where the food can be produced, requires a national analysis and response. In addition much of Australia's productive land especially along the coastline and watercourses is under pressure from development.

Historically most early settlements have been established close to productive land and most had market places for selling and distributing food. Traditionally, large allotments also provided opportunities for residents to grow their own produce. As towns and cities grew and new settlements were created, these productive farming areas have been pushed further out as development expanded. Now, increasingly many of the areas of traditional farming at the fringes of our cities and towns are under pressure for development for residential or related purposes.

**Since 1945, the expansion of Australian cities has removed more than one million hectares of rural land. If current trends continue, by 2021 Melbourne will have lost another 25,000 hectares of rural land to urban development.<sup>1</sup>**

Planners and the planning system through regional plans, state planning policies or local government plans play an important role in certain aspects of food production. Examples include identifying land suitable for food production that should be protected from more intense development and promoting a range of initiatives to support community participation in food production, as is increasingly the case in some parts of Europe through urban micro-farming, edible backyards and productive streets.

In the attachment, PIA has provided additional information under one of the headings provided by the Terms of Reference.

**In summary PIA recommends:**

- **Mapping of areas of productive land to be used as the primary spatial planing constraint for urban containment**
- **Value land at the fringes of urban development to include its value for food production**
- **Lessen controls on rural subdivisions to enable innovative and niche products to be developed**
- **Remove terminology of 'DSE' as a measure of production and instead move the focus to horticultural productivity**
- **Relate 'lifestyle subdivisions' to an economic use**
- **Provide R&D incentives that lead to technologies to limit the use of potable water for irrigation and encourage innovative agricultural and horticultural industries**
- **Reward farming practices that minimise erosion and soil degradation**
- **Introduce the concept of food miles as a measurement of cost of delivery of a product to market to create the lever for a modal shift from road to rail**
- **Centralise food distribution within city centres and locate it within close proximity to public transport**

Please contact me on 02 6262 5933 if you would like to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours sincerely



Di Jay  
Chief Executive Officer  
21 October 2008

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>41</sup>Buxton, M. and Goodman, R. (2002), *Maintaining Melbourne's Green Wedges: Planning Policy and the Future of Melbourne's Green Belt*, School of Social Science and Planning, RMIT University, p76

## **Further information addressing the Terms of Reference**

### **3. How to produce food that has a sustainable impact on the environment**

Urban sprawl can impact significantly on the availability of land for food production. As noted in the covering letter, for example, if current trends continue, by 2021 Melbourne will have lost another 25,000 hectares of rural land to urban development. Areas of productive land should be mapped and this should be used as the primary spatial planning constraint for urban containment so as to protect and enshrine productive land as the most valuable to the any urban areas survival. The true cost of land at the fringes needs to factor in its value for food production. This will enable decision makers to properly assess the costs of accommodating population growth at the fringes with alternatives such as within existing centres at higher densities.

A paradigm shift away from sheep and cattle as being the “rural productive industry”, combined with the lessening of rural subdivision controls could lead to the adoption of a wider variety of food production options. It is further recommended that the “Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE)” be removed as a measurement of production and the focus be moved to horticultural productivity as the primary measurement. Lifestyle subdivisions should be tied to an economic use rather than imposing blanket restrictions on small subdivisions. This sector has shown it can innovate eg olives and other ‘farmer’s market’ produce.

It is also important that technologies that limit the use of potable water for irrigation and lead innovative agricultural and horticultural industries are encouraged through some form of incentives. Farming practices that minimise erosion and soil degradation should be rewarded and the farming of crops that are inappropriate for our climatic conditions should be phased out and alternative crops grown. For instance, incentives for identifying micro climatic and niche marketing of product for export should be encouraged.

In relation to transport, the introduction of food miles as a measurement of cost of delivery of a product to market could create the lever for a modal shift from road to rail. Centralised food distribution within city centres and located within close proximity to public transport, will further assist in sustainable food production. The adoption of food miles might also encourage the use of urban land for food production.