

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Agriculture

Acting Minister for Local Government

Acting Minister for Suburban Development



Tuesday, 21 September 2021

NEW ON-FARM ACCOMMODATION PLAN TO BOOST WORKFORCE

Farmers across Victoria can now invest in worker accommodation on their farms without the need for a planning permit, under a new streamlined planning approval process adopted by the Victorian Government.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas today announced an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions that exempts farm businesses from requiring a planning permit for on-farm accommodation for up to 10 people.

This will help farm businesses provide suitable on-farm accommodation for their vital seasonal workforces, removing one of the common barriers to the attraction and retention of workers for this industry.

On-farm accommodation eliminates the need for seasonal workers to find a place to stay in nearby towns. It removes the often long-distance travel to and from farms, cuts travel expenses and reduces the impact on rural and regional roads.

The planning permit exemption is available exclusively for accommodation for workers engaged in agriculture and must be on at least 40 hectares of land on a property within the Farming Zone. It must meet requirements relating to connections to electricity, water and wastewater treatment.

The new planning process will deliver yet another boost for the industry ahead of the peak harvest season and aligns with the Government's comprehensive \$84 million package to support the Victorian agriculture industry as it continues to meet seasonal workforce challenges.

This support includes the \$6 million *Seasonal Workforce Accommodation Program*, which has backed 13 projects to boost accommodation options, pastoral care and transport services for 2,000 workers in key horticulture areas.

It also includes \$5.2 million in grants through the *Agriculture Workforce Plan* for new and upgraded accommodation to support 80 businesses.

Increased on-farm accommodation may also contribute to improving broader housing supply issues in regional areas by reducing seasonal demand on housing in rural towns.

This complements the Victorian Government's commitment to tackle housing shortages and other barriers to regional workforce attraction through the \$5 million *Regional Workforce Pilots*.

The Robinvale pilot will be delivered in partnership with the Seasonal Workforce Accommodation Action Team led by the Swan Hill Rural City Council, which has been established to encourage investment solutions for seasonal workforce accommodation and ensure greater COVID safety compliance.

For more information visit planning.vic.gov.au.

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"On-farm accommodation will provide more options for farm workers and make it easier for growers to recruit the workers they need for the upcoming harvest. These planning changes are about supporting our agriculture sector to thrive."

Quote attributable to Minister for Planning Richard Wynne

"Streamlining the ability for Victorian farmers to provide suitable accommodation for rural workers is common-sense planning that will help secure a critical rural workforce, supporting our farmers and Victorian agriculture."

Media contact: Nadia Dimattina 0438 701 306 | nadia.dimattina@minstaff.vic.gov.au