

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **\$6M POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT LOST**

Murchison MLC Ruth Forrest attended a public meeting at the Moorleah Hall called by concerned land owners affected by the Waratah Wynyard Council's interpretation and application of the Protection of Agricultural Land (PAL) Policy on Monday evening.

Ms Forrest said that whilst the meeting did get somewhat 'heated' and 'personal' at times, she understood the frustrations that land owners were feeling in being denied the opportunity to live in a rural community and further develop their small existing land titles.

"Councils are blaming the State Government, the State Government blame local councils for lack of clear guidelines and misinterpretation of the Policy, meantime land owners are being turned away from developing small existing titles. In effect this region is missing out on much needed development in these small rural pockets which would give our local economy a financial and population boost" said Ms Forrest.

"This blame game only strengthens suggestions by Attorney General Steven Kons, that planning decisions be taken out of the hands of Local Government Councillors and be determined by an Independent or Government Planning Body, that could act as a point of reference for all Local Government bodies and planners in their decision making. This approach would assist in overcoming the shortage of skilled and qualified planners that many of the Local government bodies are experiencing, reduce costs to Local Government and reduce risks of a conflict of interest" Ms Forrest suggested.

"In the past two days I have become aware of upwards of 25 small property owners who wish to build a home on an existing title and have either been informed that an existing or potential development application would be rejected based on either a '40 hectare rule' that applies to subdivision according to the Waratah Wynyard Planning Scheme, or a perceived conflict with the PAL Policy"

"This equates to more than \$6 million of lost investment to this region, a region that can ill afford to reject this sort of investment" said Ms Forrest.

According to Hansard recordings (of the debate September 13<sup>th</sup> 2000) this policy did not intend to stop the building of a dwelling on agricultural land – as long as the building did not fetter the productivity of that land. The then Leader for the Government, Hon Michael Aird stated, "If the proposal did not fetter the sustainable continued productivity of prime agricultural land then it would be reasonable to expect that the planning scheme would allow the council to consider the application."

Hansard 13<sup>th</sup> September 2000 further has Mr Aird stating "...if a person wants to build a house on class 3 land but it is not all class 3 and 4 or whatever, would this policy prevent them? The answer is no, the policy would not prevent them..."

"Local and State Government must show leadership and co-operation in this debate by stopping the blaming game before this region loses further investment opportunities" said Ms Forrest

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