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Farmers demand Allan government halt key talks during bushfire season

Rural communities are being forced to juggle bushfire recovery and meet strict government consultation deadlines, sparking calls for an annual pause during the fire season.



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Already furious over CFA funding, pothole ridden roads and the hiked emergency services tax, regional and rural residents have now blasted the government's "unacceptably short" consultation periods made particularly difficult due to destructive bushfires.

With deadlines looming, farmers, local mayors and anti-duck shooting advocates in bushfire zones are calling for an annual pause to consultation periods during Victoria's declared Fire Danger Period.

Concerns have been raised over 'unacceptably short' consultation periods on solar farms and other projects. Picture: Aaron Francis

Farmers in western Victoria, many who have locked horns with the Allan government over the rollout transmission lines and wind turbines, say they have not been given enough time to review and respond to the final drafts for renewable energy zone maps, released in November.

Patchewollock farmer and Yarriambiack Shire mayor Andrew McLean, whose farm sits just outside the contentious Wimmera Southern Mallee Renewable Energy Zone, said if the government was serious about engaging with locals they'd suspend consultations.

"Stopping the clock on these projects during the fire season is the right thing to do," he said.

“It’s not a genuine consultation if our communities can’t participate.”

The Allan government is being urged to ‘do the right thing’ during the fire season. Picture: David Crosling

Rural Councils Victoria has formally written to Premier Jacinta Allan, Planning Minister Sonya Kilkenny, Energy and Resources Minister Lily D’Ambrosio and the VicGrid CEO Alistair Parker requesting that consultation periods be paused during the fire danger period.

Chair Cr Rob Amos said it was a “common sense change the government can make with the stroke of a pen”.

“People can’t give time to government consultations while they’re also preparing for, actively fighting or rebuilding after bushfires,” he said.

Anti-duck hunting campaigners have also hit out at the government after being given just 10 days to respond to changes to deer and duck hunting regulations.

In a scathing letter to the government, Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting fired up over fines of just \$400 to duck shooters who fire early in the morning and deer hunters who fail to immediately kill wounded deer.

“It is hard to believe this is ‘consultation’ at all,” spokesperson Karen Mander wrote.

“We are the people who are forced to live with this noise pollution and disruption to our families, businesses and animals.

“The government should be aware that regional communities are very upset about many issues at present – inadequate funding for firefighting, potholes in roads, new emergency services fees – and now this!”

Fines could be reduced for duck shooters who fire early and deer hunters who fail to kill the animal immediately. Picture: Peter Ristevski

Animal Justice Party MP Georgie Purcell said the government’s “so-called” consultation had become a “tick and flick exercise”.

“This is disappointing but not surprising after the government ignored its own parliamentary inquiry into recreational native bird shooting which recommended a ban on this outlandish practice,” she said.

“I don’t support the actions of shooters and hunters but this also impacts their right to be engaged in an important process.”

A Victorian government spokesperson said the hunting changes were minor and that the consultation period was extended to two-weeks.

She said the government would also consider extensions for consultations over energy zones, which are due to wrap up on February 22.

“We recognise many local communities have been affected by recent bushfires, with this in mind, we have postponed engagement events related to draft renewable energy zone orders in bushfire affected areas and will look to extend the period for this consultation,” she said.