



## Farmers' first-rate argument

Kate Dowler 13-2-13

**A HORSHAM farmer's refusal to pay his full rate bill, in protest against municipal rates, throws the spotlight on the three tiers of government.**

Sadly, buck-passing between governments is not restricted to crucial areas, such as health funding. Neville McIntyre's protest is a bold move, and one that is likely to cost him money.

The farming community's complaints that they are paying more than their fair share in rates are not dying down.

But it seems governments - state or federal - are not bold enough to tackle the big question of the future of local government and funding.

Victorian Local Government Minister Jeanette Powell's office is running meetings around the state, examining details of the new differential rate guidelines, beginning this week.

She told Stateside the guidelines were designed to compel councils to treat landholders, including farmers, more "fairly and equitably".

The guidelines would enforce consistency on how rates were applied, she said.

While this was welcomed by the Victorian Farmers Federation, it doubts the guidelines would make a serious difference.

But their point of view has some support.

Horsham Rural City Council chief executive Peter Brown said the "current rates system is a wealth tax".

He said councils, through the Municipal Association of Victoria, had called for a share of GST revenue for many years.

Meanwhile, last week shareholder activist Stephen Mayne announced plans to run for MAV presidency. He wants to demand the Commonwealth waives \$80 million Victorian councils have to pay, on top of their superannuation debt blow-out, in contributions tax.

He may be right, but whether he would have more luck getting it waived, something MAV has already requested, is unknown. Watch this space.

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