22.15 BROILER CHICKEN FARMS

This policy applies to all land within the Rural Zone.

22.15-1 Policy basis

Broiler farming is a significant land use on the Mornington Peninsula with over 90 established broiler chicken farms. The broiler industry has intensified over time, with the industry standard tending towards farms of 4 to 6 sheds, an increased shed size and an increased number of birds per shed (in the order of 40,000 birds per shed). The sheds are relatively large buildings – approximately 130 m x 15m, with a height of approx. 5 m and associated structures and works including feed silo’s and water supply dams. It is important to avoid poor drainage of the sheds, including seepage through the shed floors— or in the worst case flooding of sheds. Sheds are therefore generally constructed on an impervious clay pad, involving a substantial area of earthworks.

Maintaining a stable temperature is a major aspect of broiler farm operation and there are a number of shed designs that aim to provide temperature control through a combination of fine mist water sprays within the sheds (foggers) and ventilation. Regardless of shed design, air from the sheds is vented to the atmosphere. Air emissions are a central factor determining the impact of broiler chicken farming on township areas, nearby dwellings and other sensitive uses, in terms of both direct odour and concerns regarding the contamination of water supplies.

The Westernport Regional Planning and Coordination Committee Broiler Farming Policy has been in operation since 1988 and provides a range of guidelines and criteria relating to the siting, development and operation of broiler chicken farms. The policy has been useful in providing a framework for assessment of applications. However, there has been ongoing concern regarding the consistency of the policy with the State Environmental Protection Policy in relation to air emissions. The Westernport policy includes buffer distances and population density recommendations (ie no more 10 dwellings within 400 metres of a proposed broiler farm). The State Policy, however, is based more directly on the level of odour exposure of any sensitive use and in practice requires odour modelling combined with best practice environmental management. A new Victorian Code for Best Practice Broiler Chicken Farms is currently in preparation and is intended to address these issues. In the interim a policy in relation to broiler farming is necessary to give effect to the environmental and sustainable agriculture objectives outlined in the Municipal Strategic Statement.

A further critical consideration is the management of broiler farming development in relation to landscape protection objectives. Many areas on the Peninsula have significant landscape values that would be undermined by the establishment of broiler sheds. Even with extensive landscaping, the scale of broiler sheds is inevitably intrusive, particularly in open rural and coastal landscapes, and in areas of high exposure, such as the Arthurs Seat escarpment and southern slopes. The strategy that was implemented by the Western Port Regional Planning Authority (WPRPA) through the Conservation Plan for the Southern Mornington Peninsula, was to exclude broiler farm development from certain critical landscape areas, while allowing applications for the establishment of new broiler farms elsewhere on the Peninsula.

The WPRPA recognised that some sites for broiler farms could be found in most land units, but that in practice it is almost impossible to achieve an adequate degree of control over the establishment of broiler chicken farms through the exercise of discretion on a site by site basis. In position papers, the Authority noted that:
“Each individual development generally has only minor adverse impact. Since incremental
disamenity is small it is difficult to substantiate why any particular operation should be
refused. A refusal is additionally difficult to defend because of comparisons. This leads to
accusations of favouritism and arbitrariness. The practical difficulties are compounded
because the environmental factors may take on different weights in different but similar
decisions regarding development. In view of these difficulties and the opportunities that are
provided for future poultry development it is felt that a real measure of landscape
protection will be possible only by the exercise of prohibition in certain land units.”

The landscapes of the Peninsula are a valuable recreational and economic resource and the
potential impact of broiler chicken farming is such that a precautionary approach is
warranted – in this case through the exclusion of this form development from a number of
land units. This approach is also relevant to other forms of intensive agriculture, egg
production farms and rural industry, that involve buildings of a similar scale.

22.15-2 Objectives

- To implement a strategic approach to the location of new broiler chicken farms which
  includes appropriate recognition of the landscape, recreational and environmental
  values of the Mornington Peninsula.
- To protect sensitive landscape areas from intrusive development.
- To ensure that proposed broiler chicken farms produce no adverse impact on
  environmental or landscape values.
- To provide a framework for the establishment of new broiler chicken farms that will
  facilitate confidence in the ability to manage environmental and amenity impacts.
- To protect the amenity of adjoining landowners.
- To encourage remedial works, where necessary, as part of any proposed extension of an
  existing broiler chicken farm.

22.15-3 Policy

- A landscape plan, prepared by a properly qualified person, must accompany any
  application for a broiler chicken farm and must provide for adequate screening of the
development and the enhancement of the landscape of the area.
- A farm management plan accompany any application for a broiler chicken farm,
detailing to the satisfaction of the responsible authority:
  - The proposed operation of the farm, including litter and dead bird disposal.
  - Contingency response plans to address potential environmental and amenity
    impacts.
- Each application for a broiler chicken farm or extension be considered on its merits and
  consideration be given to both the Western Port Region Broiler Farming Policy (1988)
  and the Environment Protection Authority Residual Air Emission Guidelines. In the
  event of any inconsistency, the responsible authority will seek advice from the relevant
  agencies.
- The site of a proposed broiler chicken farm is not located on land shown on the
  planning scheme maps as being within any of the following schedules to the
  Environmental Significance Overlay:
  - Northern Mosaic – in the area Between Golf Links Road and Baxter Tooradin Road,
    Baxter, North of the Baxter Tooradin Road, Baxter or west of the Moorooduc Road,
    Baxter.
  - Moorooduc Plain and Balcombe Valley – in the area west of Moorooduc Road,
    Moorooduc or north of the Baxter Tooradin Road, Baxter.
  - South East Peninsula.
In the case of an application to extend an existing broiler farm, a variation to the above requirements may be approved provided the responsible authority is satisfied that:

- There will be no significant effect on the landscape quality or environmental values of the area.
- The amenity of nearby residents will not be adversely effected.
- The proposed extensions incorporate actions to address any outstanding concerns regarding the design, landscaping or operation of the farm.

22.15-4 Decision guidelines

Before deciding on an application for use or development of land for the purpose of broiler chicken farming the responsible authority must consider, as appropriate:

- In relation to provisions regarding to odour buffer distances, the responsible authority will give equal consideration to the Recommended Buffer Distances for Industrial Residual Air Emissions (EPA 1990) and ensure that proposals are consistent with the requirements of the State Environment Protection Policy (the Air Environment), as varied from time to time.
- The proximity of other broiler chicken farms or other poultry farms, the intensity of their development and the cumulative impact of these developments on the landscape of the area, environmental values and the amenity of residents.
- The existing subdivision pattern in the vicinity of the proposed broiler farm site and the potential for additional housing.
- The need for an environmental effects report, prepared by a properly qualified person (or persons) and including odour emission modelling, to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.
- The effect on the landscape quality of the locality and the need for a landscape impact assessment by a properly qualified person.
- The ability to screen the development by means of landscaping and the proposals contained in the landscape plan.
- The effect of additional run off to the drainage system of the locality.
- In the case of an existing broiler chicken farm:
  - The condition of existing buildings.
  - Whether the buildings are capable of being operated in an efficient manner, which does not generate adverse off site effects.