

## **UPDATE: GPSA opposes proposed Grain Harvest Code changes**

After extensive consultation with its members, Grain Producers SA (GPSA) is standing firm on its position to oppose an alarming reduction to the measurement of the cease harvest number in the Grain Harvesting Code of Practice.

Following GPSA intervention to delay the roll-out of the new Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) at short notice prior to the last harvest, a Working Group with the members being SACFS, SAPOL, PIRSA and GPSA was established to review the FBI in relation to the Grain Harvest Code (Code). GPSA took part in this process in good faith that we could reach an outcome that was workable for all parties involved. After four meetings of the Working Group, upon realisation the FBI was not feasible to implement in its current form, with GPSA support the CFS decided to no longer pursue this option. The CFS then put forward a proposal to review the Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI).

The preferred option put forward by the CFS is to reduce the GFDI to 40 at 10 metres (approx 28 at two metres) or 45 at 10 metres (approx 31 at two metres) with, in GPSA's view, additional unworkable measures.

Current practice by grain producers in South Australia is ceasing harvest at GFDI 35, which can be measured by weather stations and directly by grain producers in situ at two metres. This practice of measuring at a standing height of two metres has been widely undertaken since the Code was formed, noting the original intention under the McArthur Index was to measure at 10 metres. The proposal put forward is to measure the GFDI at 10 metres.

As the cease harvest threshold is voluntary, GPSA believes any changes to significantly reduce the cease harvest number will completely undermine the very successful adherence to the Code, of which other Australian states are envious.

If the significant reduction in the cease harvest number is given the green light, this would stop grain producers from reaping during conditions that are described by farmers as excellent harvesting weather.

The \$4.6 billion grain industry simply does not exist without the ability to harvest during these times. Grain producers harvest dry grain and growers take steps to mitigate fire risk but a zero-risk approach as proposed means stopping harvest in environments that are safe to do so.

GPSA also remains concerned that there has not been any economic modelling on the full impact of reducing the GFDI despite requests to do so. Some of the things that remain unknown are:

- Will the fire risk increase because grain producers are unable to harvest for as many hours as they usually do and therefore the seasons are pushed out to January and February, the hottest and driest months of the year?
- Will grain quality be impacted because grain producers are spending more time out of the paddock during harvest?
- Will farmer fatigue and mental health be factors as farmers are likely to harvest all night to try and reduce the harvest period? (The quicker a crop comes off, the less risk, both for crop quality and pricing).
- Will more hours out of the paddock from harvesting impact the supply chain, including freight and delivery to silos?

- Will grain producing businesses be forced to take on more cost burden paying workers to sit around for more hours waiting for harvesting conditions to meet the new parameters?

GPSA argues that reducing the Grain Harvest Code threshold significantly would create risk by undermining the Code's current strong adherence. It should also be further noted that the grains industry already has additional mitigation practices in place, such as water and fire fighting equipment on hand always. And part of this is thanks to the State Government's Farm Fire Fighting Unit grants. GPSA has already agreed to increase the minimum amount of water carried by farmers as an extra fire mitigation option.

Comments attributed to GPSA Chair Adrian McCabe:

"Our farmers and communities are safe because we have a Code that, while voluntary, sets a proven benchmark."

"It's extremely disappointing that re-negotiation of the current practice has been forced on industry after successfully working for more than a decade."

"The Code must be balanced for grain producers to do their job and contribute billions of dollars to the state's economy, as they do year in, year out."

"At GFDI 50 (measured at 10 metres and approx 33 at two metres), GPSA believes this would be a fair compromise and allow grain producers to cease and clear paddocks prior to reaching the Total Fire Ban limit and meet the legal requirements."

"Community safety is forefront of mind for grain producers. The previous Code has been well adopted and has great adherence. Having a new Code which is unworkable, and causing economic loss for grain businesses, will mean great unrest, anxiety, and a lack of compliance. Compliance issues have the potential to greatly impact policing of this Code."