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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

14 February 2011

COUNCIL SUPPORTS THE HAMILTON CHARTER FOR FARMER HEALTH

Southern Grampians Shire Council is pleased to announce that at its February Council Meeting it decided to acknowledge and support The Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health.

Hamilton is home to the National Centre for Farmer Health and Council venues played host to the Inaugural Conference "Opening the Gates" which set out to establish a Charter to improve the circumstances around farmer health.

Southern Grampians Shire is also home to a large number of farmers and farm families and owes much of its history and prosperity to these people and their ancestors. The Shire has a diverse agricultural base including livestock, cropping and horticulture which provides 20.3% of overall employment.

The face of agriculture is changing in complex ways; family farming is being challenged, input costs (wages, contractors cost, rates, maintenance and repair costs) are rising, land uses are changing, maintaining water security requires innovation, farmers are increasingly relying on off-farm income, business succession is problematic as the average age of the region's farmers continues to increase and fewer young people are taking up agriculture as a career.

These matters all impact the health circumstances and prospects of farmers and farm families.

Given the extent of change in agriculture and rapidly emerging impacts of climate change, greater recognition of farmer health issues are important to this Shire.

Council planning and decision making processes are expected to benefit from the guidance provided by The Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health which includes the following five principles:

- Empower ourselves and others to consider the health impacts (individual, family, community, environment) of agricultural production and campaign to ensure that negative impacts on farmer health is recognised and not normalised as a by product of production.
- Understand the cycles (seasonal and biological) of farmer health and the relationship of farmers to nature whilst delivering appropriate and quality farming health programmes to all.

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- Defend and celebrate profitable and sustainable rural industries in the global market recognising and valuing the key role of farmers in providing food and fibre for the world.
- Broaden the identity of farm men, women and communities beyond the life is work ethos, and thus enable them to successfully meet their new challenges through opportunities, alliances and education.
- Recognise that improving farmer health involves new relationships and the strengthening of old relationships across sectors and within sectors. Research, policy development and service delivery will need to be developed in place, recognising the valuable interaction in and with communities. The interdependency and synergistic drive of these relationships will move this Charter forward.

Southern Grampians Shire Council Mayor Cr Bob Penny said, “Council is delighted to acknowledge and support The Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health.

“The Charter will be integral to Council’s future planning and decisions making processes and will also ensure various important farmer health issues can continue to be highlighted.

“Congratulations to the National Centre for Farmer Health on the creation of this important Charter for our Shire,” Cr Penny concluded.



Southern Grampians Shire Council Mayor Cr Bob Penny with National Centre for Farmer Health Director Susan Brumby and Western District Health Service Chief Executive Officer Jim Fletcher with The Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health

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For further information regarding this media release, please contact Rory Neeson, Communications Coordinator on telephone (03) 5573 0433 or email rneeson@sthgrampians.vic.gov.au