



INTERVIEW
WITH PHIL
WALSH

- Page 24

EXCLUSIVE



CELEBRATION TIME: Rohan Fitzgerald (front left), Mary-Ann Brown, Sue Brumby and Jasla Pulford along with staff and WDHHS board members celebrate the \$4 million announcement. Photo: ABBY HAMILTON

FARMER DOLLARS

Labor vows to back National Centre for Farmer Health

TERESA HAYWARD

A STATE Labor Government if elected in November would ensure the future of the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) with \$1 million each year for four years.

Shadow parliamentary secretary for agriculture, Jasla Pulford announced the news on Friday to staff and board members of both the NCFH and the Westerns District Health Service (WDHHS).

NCFH director, Sue Brumby was speechless and overwhelmed with emotion when the announcement was made.

Coinciding with World Mental Health Day, Ms Pulford was in an appropriate day as way to make the announcement.

"Farmers have a unique set of health problems and a particular set of health risks, whether it is illness or injury, disease or workplace death, farmers are tragically overrepresented in the statistics," she said.

"If the work that you guys do here is good enough

for the Canadians, we reckon it should be good enough for the Victorian Government."

Ms Pulford said the Liberals and Nationals had nearly destroyed the NCFH. "Only Labor will save the NCFH by providing the ongoing certainty and support it needs," she said.

The centre, established by the previous Labor Government in 2008 along with funding from the Helen and Geoff Handbury Trust, is a world renowned facility dedicated to improving the health of Victorians working in agriculture.

Ms Pulford said in 2012 that funding ran out and the Ngeborian Government chose not to renew it.

"What we have seen in the intervening period is a reduction in staff numbers, a reduction in the capacity for the NCFH to do what it does so well," she said.

"The NCFH is a wonderful thing for Hamilton to be able to offer to the world."

Ms Brumby said it was such a fantastic announcement and she could not be happier

"It is great to know that there is such a serious commitment, we have been hanging on by a thread, it is just wonderful news," she said.

WDHHS board director, Mary-Ann Brown said the announcement made so much good sense.

"Agriculture is a significant economic driver in this state and we need to invest in a workforce that is aging and contrary to what people think farms are not healthy environments," Ms Brown said.

"I really commended the opposition for their continued support, the centre has shown it can be delivered in many ways which has been recognised nationally and internationally, it is fantastic."

Southern Grampians Shire Council councillor Paul Battista said the NCFH was one of their key advocacy strategies.

"We have been working extremely hard to ensure that this centre will stay here not just for today but for the future," Cr Battista said.

"I think the most important thing that it does is that it looks after the most important assets we

have in our shire, it's not about the structure it's about the farmers of the shire.

"This centre should be here for good."

WDHHS chief executive, Roban Fitzgerald said Ms Brumby's contribution to the NCFH could not be underestimated.

"She has been a significant driver for our success and I think she is certainly our future," Mr Fitzgerald said.

He said it would give them the certainty they needed to deliver programs way into the future and it also meant they would be able to create jobs for the local community.

"It will create more opportunities for farmers to be educated in the right type of program, it also means we can create more opportunities for people who need to train to provide those programs," he said.

"It will provide state of the art services not only for our region, not only for our nation but also internationally."