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YOUNG entrepreneurs . . . 'The Shovel Buddies', Hamish Jeffery (left), 7, and Liam Jeffery, 8, know more than a thing or two about digging. The youngsters have established their own vegetable garden, worked out sales tactics and future plans. Story: PAGE 4. Photo: ABBY HAMILTON. 120703ah01

TAXI FEAR

REX MARTINICH

HAMILTON'S taxi company has warned the Victorian Taxi Industry Inquiry that its recommended reforms will destroy country taxi services.

The taxi inquiry, chaired by Professor Allan Fels, recently released a draft report that urges the state government to put more taxis on the road and introduce pre booked 'minicabs'.

Taxis of Hamilton director, Jan Uebergang, is one of many rural and regional taxi operators who have gone public with their concerns about proposed changes to the industry.

Mrs Uebergang believes the changes will have a devastating effect on the value of taxi licences and result in a much poorer experience for taxi passengers.

"A major concern of mine is that he has devalued the licences by calling for Pre-Booked Only (PBO) cab permits," she said.

"We'll be looking at 547 licences being devalued in country Victoria alone, and that's being conservative.

"It means the owners of those licences will lose their money, lose their superannuation and lose the right to run a legitimate business.

The inquiry report recommends that many

taxi industry barriers to entry be removed, including public interest tests and the provision of licences at a set price.

Some rural operators bought their licences for \$400,000-\$500,000 each, and their retirement plans depend on the sale of those licences.

Mrs Uebergang said she was also concerned about the impact PBO minicabs would have on service quality.

"Prof Fels modelled this on New Zealand, on Paris and on the London minicabs, and in all three areas it hasn't been a great success," she said.

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