

Meatworks' \$300m boost

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THOMAS Foods International hopes to begin work in the second half of this year on a new \$300 million meatworks, north of Murray Bridge.

The company has lodged its plans for the development with Murray Bridge Council, seeking a 10-year time frame on their approval so it can complete the work in stages.

"This is a major undertaking and significant investment for our company," chief executive Darren Thomas, said.

"Given the staged approach we are taking, we have requested a more suitable time frame to work within. This is a plant to see us into 2050 and beyond, so we don't want to rush the process."

The new site, on farming land at Temora Lane and Wilkin Rd, at Pallamana, will replace the company's Murray Bridge property devastated by fire in 2018. It will provide work for up to 2000 people.

Mr Thomas said jobs created in the project's construction and operation would provide "significant spin-offs" to the community and boost Murray Bridge's population.

The plans include stockyards, slaughter works, processing facilities, dry and cold storage and dispatch, rendering and administration areas. Mr Thomas said the company would first focus on the beef processing facilities, with the timing of the rest of the project determined later.

"We estimate 400-600 of the jobs will be required in the initial start-up stages of production, with additional positions created as quickly as possible," he said.

The Murray Bridge plant employed 1600 staff before the fire. About 400 of those were redeployed to Lobethal and 300 to Tamworth, with those on temporary work visas let go. All but about 65 staff found other roles.

The company is yet to decide on the future of its Murray Bridge site, which for now is being used for skin and rendering operations.

The new meatworks will span about 34ha, having the capacity to process about 15,000 sheep and lambs and 1200 beef cattle a day. That compares with the old plant's 11,000 sheep and 1200 cattle.

Mayor Brenton Lewis said moving the abattoir outside of town was a positive step, as it would open up the potential for housing and accommodation developments near the existing Thomas Foods site.

“It’s desirable that an abattoir not be that close to town but the town has been built around it,” Mr Lewis said.

“Probably when it was built there wasn’t a house within cooee. It’s relocating to an area where you won’t even see it’s there. It’s all ticks in boxes.”