



An Australian Government Initiative



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Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
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Parliament House
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Re: Inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia

Regional Development Australia Southern NSW & ACT (RDASNA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia.

RDASNA is part of a national network of 50 Regional Development Australia committees and works with all levels of government, industry and community to strengthen economic and social outcomes. We facilitate regional projects, collaboration, communication and advocacy across our region, which encompasses the ACT and nine NSW Local Government Areas, including Bega Valley, Eurobodalla, Goulburn Mulwaree, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Snowy Monaro, Upper Lachlan, Wingecarribee and Yass Valley.


This submission draws on evidence from RDASNA's regional industry engagement, including insights from the 2025 Southern NSW & ACT Tourism Roundtable. While informed by a tourism focus, the submission adopts a broader economic development perspective, emphasising how improved coordination across agriculture, food and drink production, small and medium enterprises, tourism, workforce and enabling systems can support sustainable growth in rural and regional Australia.

The submission responds directly to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference by identifying practical, system-level opportunities to strengthen domestic and international market access for regional businesses and to improve the effectiveness of public investment in regional economic growth.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission and welcome further engagement with the Committee on the matters raised.

Kind regards,



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Introduction

Sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia is underpinned by the effective alignment of agriculture, food and drink production, small and medium enterprises (SME), tourism, infrastructure, workforce and regional governance. While these elements are often addressed through separate policy and funding streams, evidence from RDASNA's industry engagement indicates that fragmentation across these systems remains a key constraint on long-term regional growth.

This submission draws on insights from RDASNA's Tourism Roundtable, which brought together over 120 stakeholders, including regional business owners, industry organisations, peak bodies and representatives from local, state and Commonwealth governments. The engagement was designed to identify structural barriers and enablers affecting the visitor economy. Although gathered through a tourism perspective, the findings consistently highlight wider challenges and opportunities in economic development, such as market access, regional branding, workforce stability, infrastructure connectivity and cross-sector coordination.

Tourism, in this context, is not treated as an end in itself, but as a market-facing component of regional economies that intersects with agriculture, food and drink, small business development and export pathways. When effectively aligned, tourism can support product testing, brand credibility and demand generation for regional producers. When poorly coordinated, it exposes systemic weaknesses that limit the capacity of regional businesses to scale and participate in domestic and international markets.

This submission focuses on how better coordination between marketing, branding, certification, tourism experiences and enabling systems can boost sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. It directly addresses the Inquiry's Terms of Reference by highlighting practical, system-wide opportunities to improve market access for regional businesses and to make public investment in regional development more effective.

ToR 1: Improving domestic and international marketing of Australia's 'clean and green' agriculture, food and drink sectors

Australia's 'clean and green' positioning remains a powerful point of differentiation in domestic and international markets. However, evidence from RDASNA's industry engagement indicates that the effectiveness of marketing efforts in rural and regional Australia is constrained less by brand strength and more by fragmentation across products, places and delivery systems.

Industry participants consistently highlighted that marketing investment is often deployed in isolation from product readiness, experience integration and regional coordination. Where branding and promotion are not connected to on-the-ground capacity, visitor and buyer pathways, and consistent regional narratives, their impact is diluted. This reduces conversion, weakens return on public investment and limits the ability of regional producers and small businesses to translate brand recognition into sustained demand.

In the Southern NSW and ACT region, food, drink and agriculture-related enterprises are embedded within broader place-based economies. Marketing effectiveness depends on how well these enterprises are connected to regional identity, distribution channels, complementary experiences and enabling infrastructure such as transport and workforce availability. Fragmented marketing approaches fail to reflect how consumers and buyers engage with regional products, particularly where provenance, story and place are central to value.

The Roundtable findings demonstrate that stronger outcomes are achieved when marketing is embedded within coordinated regional frameworks that align branding, experience development, logistics and workforce planning. This enables regional products to be presented consistently across multiple touchpoints, including domestic visitation, trade engagement and export-facing promotion, reinforcing credibility and trust in 'clean and green' claims.

Improving domestic and international marketing outcomes therefore requires a shift from campaign-led promotion to system-based approaches that support regional coordination, product integration and clear pathways from awareness to purchase. Marketing investment is most effective when it forms part of a broader regional economic development strategy that enables producers and small businesses to participate confidently in domestic and international markets.

Recommendation 1: Embed marketing initiatives within coordinated regional frameworks

ToR 2: Identifying opportunities to promote and support rural and regional small and medium businesses through enhanced branding, labelling and certification

Small and medium enterprises are central to rural and regional economies, yet many face structural barriers to accessing domestic and international markets. Evidence from RDASNA's industry engagement indicates that while branding, labelling and certification are widely recognised as valuable tools, their effectiveness is constrained by fragmentation, complexity and uneven regional capacity.

Participants consistently identified that individual businesses are often required to navigate multiple branding schemes, certification processes and compliance requirements independently. This creates cost, administrative burden and uncertainty, particularly for small operators with limited scale and administration capacity. As a result, opportunities to leverage collective regional identity, shared provenance and consistent quality signals are frequently missed.

In regions such as Southern NSW and the ACT, food, drink, agriculture and place-based businesses operate within interconnected value chains that span production, processing, hospitality, tourism and export-facing activity. Where branding and certification are approached collectively at a regional level, these mechanisms can lower barriers to entry, improve market recognition and support small businesses to participate more effectively in higher-value markets.

The Roundtable findings highlight that regional platforms which integrate branding, provenance and certification with real market pathways, including tourism, trade engagement and export development, provide a more practical and scalable model for SME support. These models enable businesses to test markets, build credibility and demonstrate compliance through lived experience.

Opportunities to strengthen SME participation therefore lie in shifting from isolated, business-by-business approaches to coordinated regional frameworks that support shared branding, streamlined certification pathways and clearer connections between producers, markets and consumers. This approach improves accessibility for small businesses while strengthening the integrity and visibility of regional products in domestic and international markets.

Recommendation 2: Support coordinated regional branding and certification frameworks

ToR 3: Aligning tourism with food and drink experiences in rural and regional Australia to enhance agriculture exports

Tourism, food and drink experiences play an increasingly important role in shaping how domestic and international consumers perceive Australian agricultural products. Evidence from RDASNA's industry engagement indicates that, when effectively aligned, these experiences function as market development pathways rather than standalone visitor products.

Participants consistently identified that food and drink experiences provide a tangible way for consumers and buyers to engage with provenance, quality and production practices. In doing so, they help translate 'clean and

green' positioning into lived credibility, supporting brand trust and repeat purchasing beyond the point of visitation. However, this potential is often underutilised due to fragmented planning, weak connectivity between experiences and limited integration with broader export and trade strategies.

In the Southern NSW and ACT region, food and drink businesses are embedded within dispersed rural economies where transport connectivity, workforce availability and seasonality strongly influence viability. Where tourism experiences are developed in isolation from production capacity, logistics and market pathways, their ability to deliver sustained economic value is limited. Conversely, when aligned with regional branding, SME support and export-readiness initiatives, tourism experiences can operate as low-risk entry points into domestic and international markets.

The Roundtable findings demonstrate that integrated approaches which link food and drink experiences with regional storytelling, coordinated visitor journeys and trade-facing activities are more effective in supporting agricultural exports. These approaches enable producers to test markets, build brand recognition and establish buyer relationships in ways that are accessible and scalable for SME.

Aligning tourism with food and drink experiences therefore requires a shift from ad hoc activation to deliberate integration within regional economic development frameworks. This alignment strengthens export pathways, supports business resilience and ensures that tourism contributes directly to long-term agricultural and regional growth objectives.

Recommendation 3: Support integrated regional frameworks that align tourism, food and drink experiences with export development pathways

Cross-cutting enablers of sustainable regional economic growth

Evidence from RDASNA's industry engagement indicates that marketing, branding and experience alignment, on their own, are insufficient to deliver sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia without enabling conditions in place. Participants consistently identified that constraints relating to transport connectivity, workforce availability, housing and governance coordination directly affect the ability of businesses to participate in domestic and international markets.

These enabling conditions determine whether regional branding initiatives convert into demand, whether SME can scale, and whether tourism-led market pathways can be sustained over time. Fragmented responsibility across infrastructure, workforce, tourism, trade and regional development policy settings limits the effectiveness of investment in any single area and weakens overall economic outcomes.

Addressing these constraints requires coordinated, place-based approaches that treat infrastructure, workforce and governance as integral components of market access and regional competitiveness. Aligning economic development, infrastructure planning and workforce strategies at a regional scale strengthens the capacity of rural and regional businesses to engage with markets and supports more durable, long-term growth.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen enabling infrastructure and connectivity for regional market access

Recommendation 5: Support coordinated regional workforce and governance approaches

Recommendation Summary

Recommendation 1: Embed marketing initiatives within coordinated regional frameworks

Marketing initiatives for Australia's 'clean and green' agriculture, food and drink sectors should be embedded within coordinated regional frameworks that align branding with product readiness, experience integration and enabling infrastructure, improving conversion and long-term market participation for rural and regional businesses.

Recommendation 2: Support coordinated regional branding and certification frameworks

The Australian Government should support coordinated regional branding and certification frameworks that reduce administrative burden, enable shared provenance narratives and improve market access for rural and regional small and medium enterprises.

Recommendation 3: Support integrated regional frameworks that align tourism, food and drink experiences with export development pathways

The Australian Government should support integrated regional frameworks that align tourism, food and drink experiences with export development pathways, enabling rural and regional producers to build market presence, credibility and demand in domestic and international markets.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen enabling infrastructure and connectivity for regional market access

The Australian Government should prioritise investment in enabling infrastructure, including transport connectivity and digital capability, that supports regional market access and underpins the effectiveness of branding, tourism and export development initiatives.

Recommendation 5: Support coordinated regional workforce and governance approaches

The Australian Government should support coordinated regional approaches to workforce development and governance that align tourism, agriculture, trade and regional development policy, enabling businesses to participate sustainably in domestic and international markets.

Closing Statement

Creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia requires more than individual programs or sector-specific interventions. It depends on how effectively regional systems align agriculture, food and drink production, small and medium enterprises, tourism, infrastructure, workforce and governance to support market access, business resilience and long-term participation in domestic and international markets.

As outlined in this submission, evidence from RDASNA's Tourism Roundtable highlights that fragmentation across these systems remains a key constraint on growth. Marketing initiatives, branding, certification and tourism-led market pathways are most effective when they are embedded within coordinated regional frameworks that connect product readiness, experience delivery, workforce capacity and enabling infrastructure. Where this alignment is absent, public investment risks delivering suboptimal outcomes despite strong underlying regional assets.

The Inquiry presents an opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness of national approaches to regional economic growth by recognising the importance of coordination, place-based systems and practical pathways to market for regional businesses. Improving alignment across trade, tourism, regional development and infrastructure policy settings will support more resilient regional economies and better returns on public investment.

RDASNA welcomes the Inquiry's focus on creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia and stands ready to support the Australian Government in progressing reforms that strengthen market access, business participation and long-term economic resilience across regional communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important Inquiry.