

Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE

Prepared by:

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. Our submission demonstrates how existing sustainable tourism verification programs (e.g. accreditation and certification) can support the Committee's objectives while avoiding regulatory duplication and ensuring accessibility for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in regional areas.

Key recommendations include:

- Avoid regulatory duplication by formally recognising existing industry verification programs
- Prioritising affordable, accessible verification programs
- Leverage existing sustainable programs in domestic and international marketing activity
- Use sustainable programs as delivery mechanisms for new SME development initiatives
- Support Working Holiday Maker settings that encourage labour dispersal into regional areas across multiple industries
- Support a policy framework on sustainable and affordable Sustainable Aviation Fuel that aligns with SME needs
- Targeted investment in agritourism development through the QTF — funding new sector-specific modules, business programs, and e-learning that build the skills,

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capacity, and credibility of agritourism operators, including Indigenous-owned businesses.

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY COUNCIL (ATIC)

The Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC) is the peak national body representing business across the Australian tourism industry. We advocate for policies and programs that support sustainable tourism growth while maintaining industry standards and competitiveness.

Our Representation

Through its membership, ATIC represents over 9000 tourism businesses across Australia, with particular strength in supporting small and medium enterprises that form the backbone of regional tourism. Our membership includes:

- Majority small to medium enterprises
- Tourism operators across all Australian states and territories
- Over 72% are in regional and rural areas
- Businesses spanning accommodation, tours, attractions, transport, and hospitality sectors

A key role of ATIC is to maintain the national standards for tourism accreditation and awards. The national standards are consistently upheld through the Quality Tourism Framework (QTF).

The Quality Tourism Framework (QTF)

Our program, the Quality Tourism Framework, is an online portal providing SME and regional tourism businesses with access to training, development and accreditation programs.

The QTF is designed with three core principles that make it uniquely suited to supporting regional SMEs:

1. **Affordable:** Competitive pricing structure accessible to small operators (starting from \$250 per annum for micro businesses)
2. **Accessible:** Online delivery model reaching remote and regional areas
3. **Achievable:** Practical standards that businesses can realistically implement

These principles have resulted in strong industry uptake to the QTF, with over 4500 businesses currently holding an accreditation through the program.

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Business registered in the QTF have complimentary access to training courses, development modules and accreditation programs. These programs work to improve business capacity, access new markets and develop workforce skills.

The courses, modules and programs available include:

Assessment & Development Modules	Accreditation & Awards	e-Learning courses
Accessibility Business Continuity Connecting to Culture Cyber Security e-Learning Hub Emissions Reduction Online Trade Distribution Review PRO Risk Management Business Continuity Tourism Toolbox	Accessible Tourism Accommodation Star Ratings Camp and Adventure Activity EcoStar Accreditation International Ready Accreditation Marine Tourism Accreditation Sustainable Tourism Accreditation Tourism Emissions Reduction Visitor Centre Accreditation Australian Tourism Awards Top Tourism Town Awards	Sustainability for Businesses Sustainability for Staff Accessibility for Businesses Accessibility for Staff Email Marketing Management Vertical Video Search Engine Optimisation Pay Per Click Marketing Tourism Essentials Course Food Safety: Enhancing The Guest Experience Customer Service - First Impressions that Last Pricing Strategy & Yield Understanding Travel Distribution First Nations Cultural Awareness for Staff First Nations Cultural Awareness for Businesses Maximizing the Benefits of ReviewPro Reputation Maximizing Visibility via 3rd Party Platforms

**some e-learning courses are still in production*

The program has had consistent state and federal government support across multiple jurisdictions and departments to reduce red tape (e.g. with liquor licencing or parks agencies), to recognise sustainable achievements and in the ongoing development of sustainable businesses. It is also a recognised program of both AUSTRADE and Tourism Australia, with many of its recent programs being launched by Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Tourism and Trade e.g. Tourism Emissions Reduction Program and Connecting to Culture.

The core program in the QTF is the Sustainable Tourism Accreditation (SUST) program which addresses general business practices (such as marketing, human resources, and customer service) and environmental, social, and cultural responsibility aspects of tourism operations, providing structured pathways for businesses to implement and demonstrate sustainable practices.

SUST is the industry's largest sustainability program with more than 3,300 accredited businesses. The program aims to enable businesses to enhance their sustainability to build their own and Australia's reputation as a sustainable tourism destination. The

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program has been developed over time through consultation with industry, State Tourism Organisations and National Park agencies.

CREATING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

ATIC has developed a range of recommendations, focussed on the terms of reference, to support the Australian Government in identifying opportunities to create sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia

1. IMPROVING DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETING EFFORTS

Australia's positioning as a sustainable destination is increasingly critical in international markets, particularly within the visitor economy where traveller preferences are shifting toward environmentally and socially responsible tourism experiences. Global research indicates that 83% of travellers believe sustainable travel is vital¹. This trend is particularly pronounced among high-value international visitors who contribute significantly to regional economies.

For rural and regional Australia, sustainable tourism positioning offers a competitive advantage by:

- Differentiating Australian experiences from competitors in increasingly crowded international markets
- Appealing to premium international segments willing to pay more for authentic, sustainable experiences
- Supporting the broader 'Brand Australia' narrative of clean, green, and authentic experiences
- Creating alignment between tourism marketing and Australia's agricultural export positioning

However, to be credible in international markets, whether this be for food and drink, agriculture or tourism sectors, sustainability claims must be backed by recognised, third-party verification systems. International visitors, particularly from key markets like Europe and North America, increasingly expect proof of sustainability commitments rather than marketing statements alone.

Rather than starting from scratch, government should leverage existing frameworks and recognise accredited operators to provide immediate credibility and market presence.

ATIC's recommendation for *Improving Domestic and International Marketing Efforts* is to prioritise third-party accreditation, leverage existing sustainable programs in domestic and international marketing activity and have stronger marketing links that integrate food, drink and tourism.

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1.1. Prioritise Third-Party Accreditation

Effective marketing of Australia's 'clean and green' credentials requires credible third-party verification. International markets increasingly demand transparency and proof of sustainability claims, particularly following increased awareness of 'greenwashing' practices globally. However, such accreditation must be:

- **Affordable:** Pricing that doesn't exclude small regional operators who form the backbone of authentic regional experiences
- **Accessible:** Available to businesses regardless of location, including through digital delivery models that reach remote areas
- **Achievable:** Standards that reflect the operational realities of SMEs in regional areas, recognising resource constraints while maintaining credibility

Third-party accreditation systems like the QTF provide the credibility needed for international marketing while maintaining accessibility for regional SMEs through affordable, achievable standards.

Unlike government regulation, which can be rigid, slow to adapt, and resource-intensive for both business and regulators, third-party systems offer flexibility and responsiveness to industry needs. Industry-led accreditation is built with direct input from operators, ensuring that standards are practical, relevant and evolve alongside market expectations and emerging global benchmarks.

Third-party accreditation also avoids creating additional layers of red tape or compliance costs that could stifle smaller operators. Instead, it delivers an enabling framework that rewards proactive businesses, fosters innovation, and drives continual improvement. Because it is voluntary yet market-driven, it encourages businesses to lift their practices not out of obligation but through clear market benefits – including stronger consumer trust, improved competitiveness in international markets, and alignment with global sustainability standards.

By prioritising third-party, industry-led accreditation, Australia can demonstrate integrity and leadership in sustainability while empowering regional and small businesses to participate fully in international supply chains without the burden of one-size-fits-all regulation.

1.2. Leverage Existing Programs for Marketing

There is opportunity for Australia to strengthen the link between tourism marketing and agricultural exports, particularly around wine regions, seafood trails and food provenance experiences to actively reinforce Australia's agricultural export story.

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When developing these collaborative marketing campaigns that promote ‘clean and green’ Australia, the government should prioritise experiences that participate in established sustainable tourism programs like the QTF's SUST accreditation. This approach:

- Builds on existing investment in sustainability programs
- Provides immediate market-ready certified experiences
- Supports businesses that have already demonstrated commitment to sustainability
- Ensures marketing claims are backed by verified practices

International marketing effectiveness requires consistency and scale. Rather than starting from scratch, leveraging existing certified operators provides immediate credibility and market presence.

Furthermore, prioritising existing certified operators in marketing campaigns ensures immediate availability of verified sustainable experiences while supporting businesses already committed to best practices.

The QTF's online platform provides a ready-made database of certified sustainable operators that could be leveraged for targeted marketing campaigns, particularly in international markets where digital discovery is increasingly important.

There are existing examples where state government have used third-party accreditation programs such as the QTF to recognise businesses and prioritise them in marketing efforts e.g. Best of Queensland.

2. SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN RURAL AND REGIONAL SMES

Enhanced branding, labelling and recognition of products and services depends first on credible verification frameworks. These frameworks not only recognise sustainability efforts but also create the foundation for marketing Australia’s ‘clean and green’ brand domestically and internationally.

Small and medium enterprises form the backbone of regional tourism in Australia, representing over 85% of tourism businesses. They provide authentic, locally-owned experiences that differentiate Australian tourism and trade in international markets and are critical in the delivery of economic growth in regional and rural areas.

Sustainability across the food and drink, agriculture and tourism sectors is more than being ‘clean and green’, it is the process of actively managing a business’s economic, environmental, cultural and social impacts to deliver benefits for businesses, visitors, communities and the environment. Importantly, sustainability is a process of continuous improvement, rather than a fixed end point.

For Australian tourism businesses, which are predominately SMEs, sustainable tourism means adopting practical, affordable measures that build resilience, reduce negative

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impacts and creating positive contributions to local communities, economies and visitor experiences.

There are existing verification frameworks (such as accreditation and certification programs) that recognise SMEs that have met an industry standard in areas of sustainability. These programs are voluntary, industry developed and an effective way for businesses to be recognised for their sustainability efforts. Rather than duplicating efforts or introducing new compliance burdens, these existing programs should be recognised and leveraged as the foundation for strategies to drive sustainable economic growth.

Furthermore, these programs can offer the necessary support tools to develop the sustainability efforts of an SME.

Without first investing in the development and sustainability of food and drink, agriculture and tourism businesses, any effort to promote Australia as ‘clean and green’ will fall short. Therefore, it is important that regional SMEs are provided with the tools to develop their product and support sustainability efforts so that they can be positioned to benefit from any marketing initiatives introduced through the economic growth strategy.

It is recognised that regional SMEs face unique challenges that differ significantly from their urban counterparts, particularly when it comes to developing their business. These include:

- Geographic isolation: Limited access to training, verification bodies, and professional development opportunities
- Seasonal operations: Many regional businesses operate seasonally, requiring flexible training and verification systems
- Resource constraints: Smaller businesses have limited time and financial resources for complex compliance systems
- Skills shortages: Regional areas often struggle with workforce development and retention
- Digital connectivity: Inconsistent internet infrastructure can limit access to online systems and marketing platforms

Beyond these operational barriers, rural SMEs also contend with compounded pressures from natural disasters, workforce shortages, limited digital connectivity, and regulatory burdens.

Regional SMEs are highly exposed to cyclones, floods, droughts and bushfires, making business resilience a critical focus for any strategy aimed at sustainable economic growth. Tailored support programs — including business continuity planning, risk management and product development — are essential to help agritourism and tourism operators withstand and recover from natural disasters, while strengthening their product offerings and long-term sustainability. To be effective, these programs must

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also be affordable, accessible and achievable, addressing the unique challenges of rural and regional locations.

Workforce policy is particularly critical for the sustainability of regional SMEs across both agriculture and tourism. Working Holiday Makers play a significant role in supporting regional businesses — not only through their participation and consumption as visitors, but also as a vital labour force across these industries.

Visa settings that better support seasonal and skilled labour movement would strengthen the capacity of regional areas to attract and retain workers, ensuring businesses can meet demand during peak tourism and harvest periods, thus supporting business sustainability and continuity.

Policy also needs to consider aviation as another key contributor to the markets perception of a destination's sustainability. Whether it relates to the import/export of food, drink and agriculture, or for travel purposes, aviation will play an important role in Australia's sustainability, specifically through its adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF).

ATIC supports onshore production of SAF and the transition to SAF in Australian aviation, however, there is a potential for this to come at a significant cost to the consumer due to higher fuel costs.

Regional SMEs represent enormous economic potential; however they require tailored support that recognises their unique operational challenges and opportunities, while avoiding the burden of additional verification or regulatory requirements.

Within the visitor economy, they are often the most authentic tourism experiences available, closely connected to local communities, agricultural practices, and natural environments that international visitors increasingly seek. Supporting these businesses is crucial not only for regional economic development but for maintaining Australia's competitive position in international markets.

By formally recognising industry-led accreditation programs such as the QTF within national branding and labelling strategies, Australia can ensure that regional SMEs are visible in domestic and international markets. This approach avoids unnecessary duplication and costs, while also equipping businesses with the tools they need to succeed in their sustainability efforts.

To Support Australian Rural and Regional SMEs ATIC recommends that government avoid regulatory duplication by formally recognising existing industry verification programs, such as the QTF, and using them as delivery mechanisms for new SME development initiatives. In addition, policy should support Working Holiday Maker settings that encourage labour dispersal into regional areas, and establish a national framework for sustainable and affordable aviation fuel that aligns with the needs of SMEs.

2.1. Avoid Regulatory Duplication

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The food and drink, agriculture and visitor economy already operates under established verification frameworks (e.g. accreditation and certification programs) that have been established by industry for industry, such as ATIC's *SUST program* within the QTF but also within other sectors such as Freshcares program *Sustainable Winegrowing Australia*. These programs already provide business with a framework to benchmark and receive recognition for their sustainability across every aspect of the triple bottom line, using global best practice criteria.

Introducing additional regulatory requirements and programs for any sector would:

- Create unnecessary compliance burdens for regional SMEs
- Duplicate existing investment in established programs
- Confuse international markets with competing standards
- Potentially exclude smaller operators who cannot manage multiple accreditations

By recognising existing programs such as the QTF, and others specific to the foods and drink or agriculture sector, government initiatives can reduce potential duplication for SMEs while leveraging established industry infrastructure and credibility built over years of operation.

2.2. Recognition of Existing Industry Programs

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Australia's economy, contributing significantly to employment, innovation, and economic growth, however they face many challenges in operations, resourcing and development. For the tourism sector specifically, it is crucial not to introduce new verification systems that would:

- Strain limited resources of regional businesses already managing complex agricultural and tourism compliance requirements
- Create barriers to entry for new agritourism operators who may be transitioning from pure agricultural operations
- Undermine investment already made in existing programs by established operators
- Force businesses to choose between competing verification systems, potentially fragmenting the market

Regional SMEs have consistently demonstrated their preference for accreditation systems that are practical, accessible, affordable, and directly relevant to their operations. The QTF's success in regional areas demonstrates the effectiveness of our programs designed with SME constraints and needs in mind.

It is important that any initiative maintains recognition of existing programs like the QTF and prevent resource duplication for regional SMEs while supporting businesses that have already invested in professional development and quality assurance.

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2.3. Business Development Through QTF

Demand for agritourism is expected to reach \$18.6 billion by 2030 at around 5% per annum growth², representing a massive opportunity for regional SMEs. This growth is driven by increasing consumer interest in food provenance, authentic experiences, and connection with rural communities. The QTF provides an established framework for developing agritourism experiences through:

- Quality standards that ensure visitor safety and satisfaction while respecting agricultural operations
- Accreditation that provides marketing credibility in both domestic and international markets
- Flexible delivery models that accommodate seasonal farming and tourism cycles

The QTF's established framework provides immediate opportunities for business to diversify income through tourism while maintaining operational flexibility and market credibility.

The QTF's digital delivery model specifically addresses the unique challenges of regional businesses, providing solutions for:

- Limited access to training providers: Online modules available 24/7 eliminate travel requirements to urban centres
- Time constraints during peak seasons: Self-paced learning allows completion during quieter operational periods
- Cost barriers: Eliminates travel, accommodation, and lost revenue costs associated with off-site training
- Flexible learning: Accommodates the irregular schedules common in seasonal tourism operations

There is an opportunity to further support the development of businesses through the sector specific programs, training and e-learning through the QTF. This can include the development of new programs and e-learning courses in the QTF that address agritourism requirements directly, but also support of existing programs such as Sustainability, Emissions Reduction Accessibility, Business Continuity and Risk Management, which strengthen the overall sustainability of the sector.

2.4. Support working holiday makers to disperse to regional areas across multiple industries

The Working Holiday Maker (WHM) program is not purely a cultural exchange. It delivers multiple practical outcomes, including the attraction of high-yield visitors who travel throughout Australia (particularly in regional areas), contributing to labour supply in regional tourism and agricultural sectors, and strengthening international people-to-people links.

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WHMs can help meet labour needs in regional destinations during peak visitation periods. These are often temporary, casual roles rather than long-term positions — roles that may not otherwise attract local applicants due to their seasonal or transient nature.

For example, consider the town of Birdsville in Queensland (population ~110). During the three-day Big Red Bash in July, attendance can reach about 10,000. The local workforce alone would be insufficient to support visitor services at that scale. In such contexts, WHMs can provide essential capacity, contributing positively to the local economy.

That said, there are important constraints under the current visa regime. To obtain a second or third Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa, holders must complete a prescribed period of specified work, and only certain industries and locations count toward that requirement. Tourism and hospitality, for example, only count in Northern Australia or remote and very remote areas, unless other reforms apply.

Recent changes under the Australia–UK Free Trade Agreement further adjust these rules: from 1 July 2024, UK passport holders applying for a second or third WHM visa no longer need to meet the specified work requirement.

It is ATICs recommendation to amend subclass 417 to allow second- and third-year WHMs to undertake eligible work in a broader range of industries across all regional areas (not just in specified zones) to promote mobility across regions.

2.5. Support a policy framework on sustainable and affordable Sustainable Aviation Fuel

The Australian food and drink, agriculture and tourism industries rely heavily on both domestic and international aviation. International visitors travelling to Australia, as well as domestic visitors exploring our diverse regions, depend on air transport. Aviation also plays a critical role in the success of Australia’s food, drink and agricultural industries. Our exports rely on international flights to reach overseas markets and regional aviation connects agricultural producers with processing hubs and domestic distribution centres.

The availability of SAFs in Australia is therefore essential for:

- **International competitiveness:** Ensuring Australia remains an attractive and accessible destination as global aviation increasingly adopts sustainable fuel standards, while also safeguarding the competitiveness of Australia’s premium food, drink and agricultural exports which rely on air freight to reach international markets.
- **Domestic growth:** Supporting the expansion of domestic travel while meeting environmental responsibilities and enabling regional agricultural producers to efficiently access domestic processing hubs and consumer markets via reliable aviation networks.

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- **Industry sustainability:** Enabling the aviation, tourism, food and agriculture sectors to meet carbon reduction commitments and contribute to Australia's net-zero targets, ensuring that both visitor and export markets can continue to grow sustainably.
- **Economic resilience:** Future-proofing our industries against potential carbon pricing mechanisms and international environmental regulations, while securing the role of aviation in supporting regional communities that depend on tourism and agricultural supply chains.

SAF also provides regional production opportunities – such as sugarcane by-products in Queensland, agricultural waste streams in Victoria and New South Wales, and algae-based projects in Western Australia – which represent not only pathways to SAF supply but also regional economic growth engines.

Whilst supportive of SAF, ATIC is concerned with the impact of domestic aviation costs on Australia's competitiveness.

We anticipate the transition to SAF would further increase fuel costs in the short to medium term. Consequently, we recommend the Australian Government to support the development of SAF production and increase local supply to lower SAF costs in the long term through:

- Strategic investment in SAF research, development, and production facilities
- Supportive regulatory frameworks that encourage SAF adoption
- Policy measures to mitigate the cost impact on regional aviation

A successful transition to Australian made SAF is dependent on policy frameworks that support sustainability, supply certainty and affordability. We believe that supporting local SAF production, with appropriate regional cost mitigation measures, is essential for the sustainable future of Australian tourism.

3. ALIGNING TOURISM WITH FOOD AND DRINK EXPERIENCES TO ENHANCE AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS

The intersection of tourism and agriculture represents one of Australia's most significant opportunities for economic growth, particularly in regional areas. This alignment serves multiple strategic purposes that extend far beyond immediate tourism revenue:

- **Export Market Development:**
International visitors who experience high-quality Australian food and beverages during their travels become potential long-term customers and brand ambassadors in their home markets. This is particularly valuable for premium products where building trust and brand recognition are crucial for export success.

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- **Brand Building and Authentication:**
On-farm experiences provide unparalleled opportunities to tell authentic stories about Australian agriculture. In an era where consumers increasingly care about food provenance, environmental practices, and ethical production, direct farm experiences create emotional connections that translate into brand loyalty and premium pricing in export markets.
- **Market Intelligence:**
- **Agritourism provides direct access to international consumer preferences and feedback.** Producers can observe visitor reactions, gather insights about international market expectations, and adapt products based on real-world international consumer input—intelligence that would be expensive to gather through traditional market research.
- **Relationship Building:**
Many agricultural exports rely on long-term relationships with international distributors, retailers, and consumers. Tourism experiences create opportunities for face-to-face relationship building that can be leveraged for export partnerships. This is particularly valuable in Asian markets where relationship building is crucial for business success.
- **Premium Positioning:**
Tourism experiences inherently position products as premium offerings. Visitors who have positive on-farm experiences associate the products with quality, authenticity, and positive memories, supporting premium pricing strategies in export markets.

Tourists are increasingly looking for genuine and hands-on farm experiences. They want to understand where their food comes from, participate in farm activities, and connect with rural life. This trend creates unprecedented opportunities to align tourism experiences with export market development.

Internationally acclaimed examples are already available that demonstrate the benefits of this alignment, these include:

- **Penfolds, South Australia.** An iconic wine brand with a global reputation that runs immersive visitor experiences at its Magill Estate.
- **Freycinet Marine Park, Tasmania.** Oyster harvester from 'clean sustainable waters' that offer tours, tastings and a farm experience.
- **Buderim Ginger/The Ginger Factory, Queensland.** A major exporter of ginger products that runs the Ginger Factory offering tours, tastings, exhibits and shopping experience.

These examples demonstrate how tourism can serve as a powerful catalyst for agricultural exports by creating experiential marketing opportunities and building brand loyalty. Visitors who have positive on-farm experiences associate the products with quality, authenticity, and positive memories, supporting premium pricing strategies in export markets.

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To Align Tourism with Food and Drink Experiences to Enhance Agricultural Exports
ATICs recommends targeted investment in agritourism development through the QTF — funding new sector-specific modules, business programs, and e-learning that build the skills, capacity, and credibility of agritourism operators, including Indigenous-owned businesses.

3.1. Fund Agritourism Development Within QTF

Demand for agritourism is expected to reach \$18.6 billion by 2030 at around 5% per annum growth, representing a massive opportunity for regional SMEs. This growth is driven by increasing consumer interest in food provenance, authentic experiences, and connection with rural communities.

Importantly, Indigenous-led agritourism and bush food enterprises provide a distinctive strength for both domestic and international markets. Experiences centred on native foods, traditional harvesting, and cultural storytelling not only diversify agritourism but also differentiate Australia globally. Supporting Indigenous participation in agritourism ensures cultural knowledge is respected and creates new opportunities for First Nations-owned businesses.

The most effective approach to aligning tourism with agriculture is to fund the development of comprehensive agritourism programs within established frameworks rather than creating competing systems. Specifically:

- **Dedicated Agritourism QTF Module:** Comprehensive training covering food safety, visitor management, storytelling, product development, and export market positioning
- **Export-Focused Content:** Training modules specifically designed to help operators connect on-farm experiences to export narratives and international market development. Examples could include:
 - **Converting Agricultural Operations:** Practical guidance on safely and effectively opening farming operations to visitors
 - **Food Safety and Regulatory Compliance:** Comprehensive coverage of food safety requirements for farm visits and product sampling
 - **International Market Positioning:** Training on how to position Australian agricultural products for different international markets
 - **Digital Marketing for Agritourism:** Specific skills for marketing farm experiences to both domestic and international visitors
 - **Sustainable Farming as Tourism:** Training on communicating environmental and social sustainability practices to visitors
 - **Export Storytelling:** Developing compelling narratives that connect farm experiences to export market positioning
- **Quality Assurance:** Accreditation standards that ensure agritourism experiences meet international visitor expectations while maintaining agricultural operation integrity

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- International Market Preparation: Training that prepares operators to host international buyers, trade delegations, and food industry professionals

Funding agritourism development within the established QTF framework provides immediate scalability while ensuring quality standards that support both tourism and export objectives.

Furthermore, specialised e-learning courses within the QTF platform provide cost-effective, accessible training that directly addresses the skills gap between agricultural production and tourism delivery.

ATIC therefore recommends government fund agritourism development within QTF, including dedicated modules, export-focused training, and e-learning programs to accelerate the growth of this \$18.6 billion opportunity.

CONCLUSION

The Australian tourism industry, through organisations like ATIC and programs like the Quality Tourism Framework, has already developed sophisticated systems for supporting regional SMEs and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Rather than creating new systems, the most effective approach is to recognise, fund, and enhance existing programs that have demonstrated success.

The agritourism opportunity represents a significant chance to align tourism with agricultural exports while supporting regional economic development. However, this opportunity will only be fully realised if policy approaches:

- Build on existing industry infrastructure
- Maintain affordability and accessibility for SMEs
- Avoid regulatory duplication
- Recognise the specialised needs of regional tourism businesses
- Support local SAF production, with appropriate regional cost mitigation measures
- Encourage Indigenous participation in agritourism
- Align visa and workforce policy to regional realities

ATIC looks forward to working with the Committee and the broader government to implement these recommendations and support sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia.

This submission represents the collective position of ATIC and reflects our commitment to supporting sustainable tourism development in rural and regional Australia.

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