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17 October 2025

Committee Secretariat
Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
By email: jsctig@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee

Re: Inquiry into Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission as part of the Committee's inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. I write on behalf of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM), which is the peak association representing professionals in the mining and METS sectors.

AusIMM exists to ensure our sector delivers broad economic and social benefit, especially through the work of professionals active across technical, engineering, environmental, social and management disciplines. The historical role our sector has played in developing and sustaining the nation's regional economies is well understood. Our objective in this submission is not to canvass this legacy, but rather to highlight where and how the sector will contribute to future economic development as the demand for Australian materials, value-added products and 'know how' evolves.

As the voice for resources professionals, AusIMM's submission highlights three key opportunities to leverage the generational change taking place across our industry as the basis for durable, diverse and sustainable regional economies:

1. **Regional industrial hubs**: Deliver a nationally coordinated, regionally adapted approach to leverage mineral production, processing and manufacturing as the anchor for broader training, industrial, research and development ecosystems.

2. **Product integrity and sustainable supply chains:** Invest to lift environmental, social and governance capability across industries and

implement credible industry-led certification frameworks to support Australia's competitive position as a 'clean and green' producer and service provider.

3. **Professional skills and industry capability:** Invest in regional centres of excellence that combine vocational and higher education, advanced research and industry-led activities to demonstrate and scale new industrial capability.

These three priorities, and the specific recommendations we table overleaf, reflect outcomes from our policy, research and industry engagement that AusIMM has led over many years. Of note, our 2025 Policy Forums consider professional pathways, critical minerals research and development priorities and post-mining land use.

Our recommendations also reflect findings from a longitudinal research initiative delivered with the Queensland Government to investigate key environmental, social and governance drivers, identify opportunities for regional economic integration and lift relevant capability across the minerals value chain.

AusIMM was established in 1893 and operates under Royal Charter to advance the resources sector for the benefit of the community. Our 15,000 members work across more than 110 countries in disciplines including engineering, processing, logistics, environmental management, governance and regional planning. Drawn from across industry, government and academia, our members design, operate and manage the systems that underpin sustainable regional economies.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further insights to the Committee on the matters raised in this short submission. I encourage the Secretariat and Committee to liaise directly with our Senior Manager, Government Relations, Harry Turner, who can be reached at [redacted]

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Stephen Durkin FAusIMM
Chief Executive Officer

AusIMM

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Develop a national framework for regional hubs that are:

- Informed by long-term economic plans to build on existing local industry, infrastructure, supply chains, workforce capability and community priorities.
- Operated under collaborative governance structures to connect industry, government and non-government partners.
- Focused on aligning local, state and federal investments to deliver common user facilities and critical energy, communications and transport infrastructure.
- Mandated to align stakeholder objectives and deliver long term regional planning and economic diversification outcomes for regional communities.
- Led by regional coordination agencies with authority to identify opportunities for mining and non-mining project integration, engage decision-makers, and support commercial parties to navigate local, state and federal approvals.

Key outcome from Queensland ESG Capability Partnership, Professional Pathways Forum and Whitepaper, Post-Mining Land Use Forum.

Recommendation 2: Support industry-led certification frameworks to demonstrate social, environmental and technical credentials in new markets.

- Australia's reputation for high quality, sustainably produced materials and products is a key competitive advantage in accessing new markets.
- Demonstrating beneficial environmental, social and governance practices is also essential to build local support for new projects and industries.
- End-use consumers of Australian minerals, materials and METS services rely on sophisticated industry-developed sourcing, certification and sustainability frameworks when they make procurement decisions.
- Government can help domestic producers, manufacturers and service providers access new markets by delivering certification schemes that consolidate and draw on existing industry-specific codes and standards.
- Government can also support economic diversification by embedding cross-jurisdictional supply chains, which will enhance the business case for new local industry – in practice, this means promoting local producers in overseas markets, negotiating offtake agreements at the government-to-government level and securing minimum pricing arrangement for Australian producers.

Key outcome from Queensland ESG Capability Partnership, Post-Mining Land Use Policy Forum, and Critical Minerals Research and Development Forum.

Recommendation 3: Invest in training and higher education alongside microdetails and modular professional development offerings, to build workforce and industrial capability on a regional 'centre of excellence' basis.

- Regional universities are facing significant financial pressures, with course and faculty closures mooted in several mining regions.

- Building new industrial capability, particularly to capture midstream and downstream opportunities, demands niche skillsets – that relies on higher education courses and research programs with low enrolments, but high value.

- Universities should be supported to deliver courses and research programs that are embedded in local industry and reflect long-term economic plans.

- The resources sector supports new course models including associate degrees and advanced diplomas, which allow VET-trained workers to move into advanced professional roles, while also being commercially sustainable.

- Micro-credentials, short courses and industry-led professional development are also key to enhance mobility across sectors and along industrial value chains.

Key outcome from Professional Pathways Forum, Whitepaper and Higher Education Governance consultation.

Recommendation 4: Enhance workforce mobility by aligning state and federal certification frameworks for key technical professionals.

- AusIMM plays a leading role in expanding industry capability through our professional development, standards and recognition frameworks, including courses and microcredentials to support professionals moving across industries and along the mining value chain.

- Statutory frameworks for disciplines including engineering, geomechanics and environmental science are proliferating but poorly integrated across state and national borders.

- A national harmonisation project would ensure regional and rural communities can access the advanced professional skillsets needed to deliver new projects.

- National harmonisation would also allow Australia to take a lead position on the global stage, encouraging alignment towards a common (Australian) standard and support mining and METS providers to access new markets.

Key outcome from Professional Pathways Forum and Whitepaper process, and Critical Minerals Research and Development Forum.

Recommendation 5: Adopt a 'life of mine' approach to provide stable, enduring economic benefit for commodity-dependent communities.

- Rural and regional communities with commodity-based economies are exposed to both structural and cyclical disruption.
- Regional communities seek sustainable development outcomes through direct involvement in decision making and governance processes.
- The resources sector is rapidly developing new technological solutions to remediate and prepare sites for beneficial and productive post-mining use, including for advanced manufacturing, energy generation and storage.
- The role for government is to invest in demonstration projects, establish approvals frameworks that account for post-mining land use, and engage commercial proponents to allocate risks across the project lifecycle.
- This is another area where national harmonisation and coordination would deliver maximum impact for established and emerging industries.

Key outcome from Queensland ESG Capability Partnership, Post-Mining Land Use Policy Forum.

Recommendation 6: Expand trade and export opportunities by coordinating industry and government initiatives.

- Geopolitical and supply chain disruptions are coalescing to fundamentally change demand for Australian minerals, materials and services.
- The disruption presents opportunities for Australia to increase value-added domestic production through targeted research and development, investments in regional industrial capability and promotion in new markets.
- Peak industry bodies including AusIMM already play a lead role promoting key Australian industries on the global stage.
- Trade diversification initiatives will have greater impact where government and industry coordinate efforts to showcase industrial capability, attract investment and connect regional economies to global supply chains.

Key outcome from AusIMM Australian Mining Week London and AusIMM Thought Leadership Series.

DISCUSSION

Why regional hubs?

Sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia depends on the strength of local industries and the professionals who sustain them. The resources sector has a foundational role to play in many rural and regional communities, driving local investment and providing the anchor point for diversified industrial ecosystems that take advantage of local endowments, workforces, infrastructure and value chains.

AusIMM's Policy Forums initiative has convened government, research, mining and non-mining leaders around Australia to identify the key enablers for sustainable economic development that leverages the capability of our resources sector.

Our research and engagement show clear opportunities to enhance the long-term contribution of Australia's mining and METS sectors to regional prosperity by:

- Supporting more balanced regional development and economic diversification.
- Expanding logistics and processing capacity to capture more value onshore.
- Establishing consistent standards to reinforce Australia's global reputation.
- Building a skilled workforce across both technical and emerging disciplines.

Meeting these challenges requires coordination between government, industry and the education sector. Regional investment must be matched with professional standards, accredited training and transparent certification frameworks that support safe, efficient and high-quality production.

The concept of regional hubs, embodied in the establishment of regional coordination or concierge authorities, has emerged as one of the clearest mechanisms for delivering sustainable economic growth across our policy work. Key benefits include:

- Integration of producers, processors, logistics and training in shared precincts.
- Lower costs and stronger competitiveness through shared infrastructure.
- Place-based planning that aligns workforce, infrastructure and export capacity.
- A clear framework to attract private investment and coordinate public funding.
- Embedding economic diversification and regional community benefit as a strategic driver for overarching planning and project-specific decision making.

In practice, these bodies can be led by either local, state or federal government. The critical factor from a 'constitutional' perspective is that regional authorities have a clear mandate to coordinate investments, approvals and other activities across all levels of government, between distinct regulatory frameworks (e.g. for environment, safety, cultural heritage and infrastructure) and with the participation of government, commercial and community partners.

Experience from regional precincts such as Gladstone and the Hunter shows how shared infrastructure, coordinated workforce planning and consistent high professional standards can deliver lasting regional benefits. Both regions have broadened their economic base from traditional resource extraction to advanced manufacturing, energy and export-focused processing.

Investing in professional capability to establish, expand and embed new industry

Structured trade promotion, investment missions and regional showcase events will enhance Australia's market presence, expand export opportunities and attract new forms of private and international capital. Positioning regional hubs in this way will also reinforce Australia's reputation for clean and sustainable production while generating measurable regional benefits through increased visitation, investment and enduring commercial partnerships.

Underwriting this impact, however, is the capability of our industry and the 'know-how' of the professionals who lead it. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that AusIMM's professional community spans more than 110 countries, with international delegations to domestic technical summits tripling in the past three years.

Major industry events such as the Global Resources Innovation Expo and International Mining and Resources Conference demonstrate the demand for Australian mining and METS expertise.

The reality is that Australian industry now needs to develop new capability to take advantage of the trade and industrial opportunities presented by a clean energy transition, rapidly developing agricultural, chemical, defence and other industries, and an increasingly contested geopolitical environment.

Collaborating with industry, VET providers and universities will be necessary to deliver a comprehensive skillset for the future of our sector, and to ensure the resources sector delivers for the regional communities in which it operates. This means new course models, industry-embedded research and development, and advanced, modular technical training to equip professionals with the skills they need to move across industries and along the minerals value chain.

AusIMM also plays a leading role developing and upholding professional and technical standards to assure quality, accountability and industry capability. These frameworks underwrite the credibility of our sector on the global stage.

This model of professional certification and recognition can be adapted to strengthen regional industries by:

- Providing consistent, verifiable standards for professional practice.
- Supporting the delivery of trusted, high-quality products and services.

Government can play a key role working with industry bodies to deliver national harmonisation, and ensure industry is operating towards highest common standards.

Building confidence among buyers, investors and international partners

A coordinated national framework can oversee implementation and evaluation to ensure certification, workforce and infrastructure initiatives operate cohesively. This will enable government and industry to share insights across regions, track measurable progress and target investment where it delivers the greatest impact. Success can be measured through:

- The number of regional industry hubs established and operational.
- Growth in certified, value-added exports from regional areas.
- Increased regional processing and logistics capacity.
- Greater small to medium enterprise participation in certification and quality programs.
- Uptake of accredited professional training and continuing development.
- Improved regional employment and workforce retention rates.

Placing regional economic development at the centre of industry policy

Embedding regional development at the centre of plans to extend Australia's industrial capability is essential to support the nation's long-term prosperity. As the resources sector moves into midstream and downstream processing, refining and manufacturing, we can support resilient and diverse communities whose socio-economic conditions are shielded from the vicissitudes of individual commodity markets

This approach requires a model of shared governance that connects local, state and federal government with regional industries, education and training providers, non-government organisations, traditional owners and community representatives.

A central focus for regional engagement must be to identify and measure progress against long-term development goals defined by local communities, with an emphasis on capability development, benefit maximization and economic diversification.