

Submission

Federal Government Inquiry – Sustainable Economic
Growth in Rural and Regional Australia

October 2025





Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and
Investment Growth

- Title: Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
- Inquiry Topic: Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia
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- Organisation: Murrindindi Shire Council
- Date: 17 October 2025
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Executive Summary

Murrindindi Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth's inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. As a local government authority in Victoria's High Country, Murrindindi Shire is home to a diverse and resilient economy underpinned by agriculture, tourism, and small business innovation.

Our submission highlights the region's strengths and outlines practical recommendations aligned with the inquiry's Terms of Reference. Murrindindi's clean environment, strong agricultural base, and growing visitor economy position our communities as key contributors to Australia's 'clean and green' brand. However, to fully realise this potential, targeted Federal support is needed to address structural barriers, enhance digital connectivity and unlock opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Key recommendations include:

- 1. Promoting Australia's 'Clean and Green' Agriculture, Food and Drink Sectors**
 - Invest in national branding campaigns that highlight regional producers and their sustainability credentials.
 - Expand certification schemes to better support small-scale and diversified farms.
 - Fund digital marketing and export readiness programs to help producers reach broader markets.
 - Introduce dedicated funding streams for small-scale producers with lower project thresholds.
 - Provide technical assistance to help SMEs develop strong applications and implement energy-efficient upgrades.
- 2. Supporting Rural and Regional SMEs through Branding, Labelling and Certification**
 - Streamline certification pathways with subsidised audit and compliance support for SMEs.
 - Co-invest in regional branding and digital infrastructure to enhance visibility and competitiveness.
 - Offer grants for participation in trade shows to support market access and business development.
 - Support place-based branding initiatives to build regional identity and consumer awareness.
- 3. Aligning Tourism with Food and Drink Experiences**
 - Fund cross-sector collaboration between tourism and agriculture to create integrated visitor experiences.
 - Invest in agritourism infrastructure, including signage, trails, and visitor centres.
 - Support regional events that showcase local food, drink, and culture to attract visitors and stimulate local economies.
- 4. Strengthening Climate Resilience and Emergency Preparedness**
 - Support regional councils to implement climate adaptation strategies, including heatwave planning and bushfire recovery.
 - Fund infrastructure upgrades that improve resilience to extreme weather events.
 - Provide grants for emergency-resilient communications and energy systems in rural communities.



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5. Supporting Regional Education and Workforce Development

- Invest in a Regional University Study Hub in Murrindindi Shire to improve access to tertiary education.
- Support vocational training aligned with local industry needs.
- Fund partnerships between schools and local businesses to build career pathways.

These recommendations are supported by a series of local case studies that demonstrate best practice in regional development, including:

- A. The “Put Murrindindi on Your Table” campaign promoting local produce.
- B. Discover Dindi’s seasonal marketing and visitor servicing initiatives.
- C. The Farmers2Founders Grains Pre-Accelerator Program supporting innovation in agriculture.
- D. Helico Australia’s expansion through the Timber Transition Fund, creating skilled jobs and diversifying the local economy.
- E. The Eildon Hotel redevelopment under the Enabling Tourism Fund, addressing accommodation gaps and enhancing the visitor economy.
- F. Murrindindi Shire Council’s on two occasions presented a compelling funding bid for a Tertiary Education Hub, which was not supported, representing a missed opportunity to improve access to higher education and retain young people in regional Victoria.

Murrindindi Shire Council is committed to working collaboratively with all levels of government to ensure that rural and regional communities are empowered to thrive. We believe that with the right policy settings and investment, regions like ours can lead Australia’s next wave of sustainable economic growth.



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Introduction

Murrindindi Shire Council is a local government authority located in Victoria's High Country, encompassing a diverse landscape of agricultural plains, forested ranges, and vibrant townships. We are pleased to present this submission on behalf of Council in support of the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth's inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia.

Murrindindi Shire Council plays a pivotal role in fostering regional prosperity through strategic planning, business support, tourism development, and community engagement. Our Economic Development Strategy (EDS) is underpinned by a commitment to building resilient, inclusive, and future-focused communities. The Strategy identifies priority areas including agriculture and food production, visitor economy, business support, and sustainable futures—each aligned with the broader goals of regional growth and national competitiveness.

Murrindindi's economy is characterised by a strong agricultural base, with agriculture, forestry and fishing contributing over 20% of regional output and nearly a quarter of local employment. Tourism also plays a vital role, with over 1.1 million visitors recorded in 2022, generating significant economic activity across accommodation, food services, and local experiences. Our region's clean environment, rich cultural heritage, and high-quality produce position us well to contribute to Australia's 'clean and green' brand in both domestic and international markets.

We welcome this inquiry and strongly support its objectives. The Terms of Reference reflect key opportunities for Murrindindi Shire, particularly in enhancing product branding and certification, aligning tourism with food and drink experiences, and promoting our region's strengths to global audiences. We believe that with targeted federal support and collaborative partnerships, rural and regional communities like ours can thrive and lead Australia's next wave of sustainable economic growth.



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Response to Terms of Reference

1. Promoting Australia's 'Clean and Green' Agriculture, Food and Drink Sectors

Murrindindi Shire is uniquely positioned to contribute to Australia's reputation for clean and green agricultural production. The region's pristine environment, low-density farming practices, and commitment to sustainability underpin its agricultural identity.

Feedback from the Murrindindi Food and Wine Network highlights a critical gap in support for smaller operators seeking opportunities to improve their business practices. A recent example is the Victorian Government's Energy Innovation Fund (EIF) while commendable, its current structure may unintentionally exclude SMEs due to high capital thresholds and complex eligibility criteria.

Current initiatives include:

- "Put Murrindindi on Your Table" campaign, which promotes local produce during peak seasons such as Christmas.
- Energy Smart Farming webinars and Carbon Farming programs, which support climate-resilient practices.
- Drought Resilient Farming Practices Grants and Forestry Transition Fund projects that encourage sustainable land use.

Opportunities exist to further elevate Murrindindi's clean and green credentials through:

- Enhanced storytelling and branding that highlights the region's environmental stewardship.
- Certification programs that validate sustainable practices and provide market differentiation.

Recommendations for Federal Support:

- Invest in national branding campaigns that highlight regional producers and their sustainability credentials.
- Expand certification schemes to better support small-scale and diversified farms.
- Fund digital marketing and export readiness programs to help producers reach broader markets.
- Introduce dedicated funding streams for small-scale producers with lower project thresholds.
- Provide technical assistance to help SMEs develop strong applications and implement energy-efficient upgrades.

2. Supporting Rural and Regional SMEs through Branding, Labelling and Certification

Murrindindi's SMEs are central to its economic vitality. Programs such as the Food and Beverage Accelerator (FaBA) and Farmers2Founders Grains Pre-Accelerator have helped local businesses innovate and scale.

The *Discover Dindi* brand has been instrumental in promoting local tourism and agribusinesses. Seasonal campaigns, influencer collaborations, and digital asset capture have significantly increased visibility and engagement.



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As part of Victoria's High Country we partner with Tourism North East (TNE) to promote locations and products within the Shire. TNE activities are supported by the Victorian State Government, member councils as well as the Alpine Resorts Victoria.

Challenges remain:

- Many SMEs lack the resources to navigate complex certification processes.
- Limited access to tailored branding support and market intelligence.
- Limited understanding of the potential for regional place-based branding or awareness of locations by wider community.
- Inadequate digital connectivity in some rural areas limits access to online certification tools, e-commerce platforms, and digital marketing channels.

Recommendations for Federal Support:

- Streamline certification pathways with subsidised audit and compliance support for SMEs.
- Co-invest in regional branding and digital infrastructure to enhance visibility and competitiveness.
- Offer grants for participation in trade shows to support market access and business development.
- Support place-based branding initiatives to build regional identity and consumer awareness.

3. Aligning Tourism with Food and Drink Experiences

Tourism and agribusiness are increasingly intertwined in Murrindindi. Initiatives such as the *Wine Tourism and Cellar Door Grants*, *Great Victorian Bike Ride* activations, and *Ride Murrindindi* campaign have successfully paired local produce with visitor experience.

Regional events like the *Murrindindi Harvest Celebration*, *Marysville Winter Fire and Ice Festival*, and *Goulburn Fishing Festival* showcase local food, wine, and culture while driving visitation helped position Murrindindi as a destination for nature-based and culinary tourism.

Digital marketing efforts, including influencer campaigns and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) have helped position Murrindindi as a destination of nature-based and culinary tourism.

Recommendations for Federal Support:

- Fund cross-sector collaboration between tourism and agriculture to create integrated visitor experiences.
- Invest in agritourism infrastructure, including signage, trails, and visitor centres.
- Support regional events that showcase local food, drink, and culture to attract visitors and stimulate local economies.

Other recommendations for Federal Support include

4. Strengthening Climate Resilience and Emergency Preparedness

- Support regional councils to implement climate adaptation strategies, including heatwave planning and bushfire recovery.
- Fund infrastructure upgrades that improve resilience to extreme weather events.
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5. Supporting Regional Education and Workforce Development

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Case Studies and Local Examples

Case Study A: “Put Murrindindi on Your Table” Campaign

Overview:

Launched in November 2024, the “Put Murrindindi on Your Table” campaign was a seasonal initiative aimed at promoting locally grown and produced food during the Christmas period. The campaign featured digital and print advertising, social media promotions, and community engagement activities to encourage residents and visitors to support local producers.

Impact:

- Increased visibility for local food businesses.
- Strengthened community pride and regional identity.
- Supported economic resilience during a peak retail season.

Best Practice Elements:

- Strategic timing aligned with consumer behaviour.
- Multi-channel marketing approach.
- Strong collaboration between Council, producers, and retailers.

Relevance to Inquiry:

This campaign exemplifies how locally created regional branding and storytelling can elevate Australia’s ‘clean and green’ agricultural image and stimulate local economies.



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Case Study B: Discover Dindi Seasonal Marketing and Visitor Servicing

Overview:

The Discover Dindi - Council Marketing Update - July 2025 outlines a comprehensive approach to regional tourism marketing through seasonal campaigns, influencer partnerships, and digital asset development.

Key Activities:

- Influencer campaigns with Elise's Travel Diary and Nick Harrison Travel, generating over 100,000 views and thousands of engagements.
- SEO and website optimisation to improve visibility of local attractions.
- Print collateral including township guides and visitor maps, with over 7,000 copies distributed.

Impact:

- Facebook reach of 2.3 million and engagement rate of 12.47%.
- Enhanced visitor experience and increased tourism spend.
- Improved digital presence for local businesses via ATDW listings.

Best Practice Elements:

- Data-driven marketing.
- Integration of digital and traditional media.
- Strategic partnerships with Tourism North East and Visit Victoria.

Relevance to Inquiry:

Demonstrates how aligning tourism with food and drink experiences can boost regional exports and enhance Australia's global brand.



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Case Study C: Farmers2Founders Grains Pre-Accelerator Program

Overview:

Delivered in January 2024, the Farmers2Founders Grains Pre-Accelerator Program supported local grain producers in Murrindindi Shire to develop innovative business models and prepare for market expansion.

Program Features:

- Training in product development, branding, and market access.
- Mentorship and networking opportunities.
- Integration with broader agricultural innovation initiatives.

Impact:

- Empowered producers to diversify and scale operations.
- Fostered entrepreneurial culture in the agricultural sector.
- Strengthened regional supply chains.

Best Practice Elements:

- Targeted support for SMEs.
- Focus on innovation and sustainability.
- Alignment with national food and fibre priorities.

Relevance to Inquiry:

Illustrates how government investment in capability-building can unlock growth for rural SMEs and enhance product certification and branding.



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Case Study D: Helico Australia – Timber Transition Fund

Overview:

Helico Australia, a nationally recognised helicopter service centre based in Alexandra, received \$789,766 through the Forestry Transition Fund to expand its operations from a converted shearing shed into a purpose-built maintenance facility and national headquarters.

Key Activities:

- Construction of three new hangars and associated office and training spaces.
- Creation of nine full-time jobs.
- Development of training rooms and study areas to support apprenticeships and skill development.

Impact:

- Strengthened local advanced manufacturing sector.
- Provided career pathways for young people, including partnerships with Alexandra Secondary College.
- Supported regional economic diversification following the end of native timber harvesting.

Best Practice Elements:

- Strategic alignment with the Shaping Murrindindi's Future Context Analysis and Economic Development Strategy.
- Strong community engagement and talent development.
- High-impact infrastructure investment with measurable economic outcomes.

Relevance to Inquiry: Helico's expansion demonstrates how targeted Government funding can enable regional businesses to grow, diversify, and contribute to sustainable economic development.



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Case Study E: Eildon Hotel Proposal – Enabling Tourism Fund

Overview:

The Eildon Hotel site, closed since 2018, is being redeveloped into a high-end accommodation offering under the Enabling Tourism Fund. The project is led by Reddrop Group and supported by Murrindindi Shire Council.

Key Activities:

- Repositioning the site as a 5-star hotel and resort.
- Planning and permitting supported by the Enabling Tourism Fund.
- Alignment with the Lake Eildon Masterplan and Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan.

Impact:

- Addresses a major gap in the regional accommodation market.
- Supports growth in the local visitor economy.
- Creates employment opportunities and enhances tourism infrastructure.

Best Practice Elements:

- Strategic alignment with regional tourism strategies.
- Public-private collaboration to unlock underutilised assets.
- Focus on high-yield tourism and year-round visitation.

Relevance to Inquiry: This initiative exemplifies how government investment can catalyse tourism development, support regional branding, and enhance food and drink experiences through integrated hospitality offerings.



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Case Study F: Tertiary Education Hub – A Missed Opportunity for Regional Victoria

Overview:

In 2023 and 2024, Murrindindi Shire Council submitted grant applications to establish a Tertiary Education Hub in Yea under the Federal Government's Regional University Study Hubs Program. The proposal aimed to provide local access to higher education for school leavers and adult learners, addressing barriers such as geographic isolation and cost of relocation.

Key Activities:

- Development of a supported learning space with high-speed internet, mentoring, and educational resources.
- Collaboration with Country University Centres and a local Community Working Group.
- Alignment with national education priorities and regional workforce needs.

Impact (Had It Been Funded):

- Increased tertiary participation rates in Murrindindi.
- Improved youth retention and local career pathways.
- Strengthened regional resilience and economic development.

Best Practice Elements:

- Evidence-based location selection (Yea ranked in top 10 priority sites nationally).
- Strong community engagement and cross-sector collaboration.
- Focus on equity, inclusion, and long-term regional growth.

Relevance to Inquiry:

This case highlights the critical role of education infrastructure in supporting sustainable economic growth. The unsupported compelling bid underscores the need for targeted federal investment to ensure regional communities are not left behind in access to tertiary education and workforce development.



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Recommendations

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Appendices

- [Murrindindi Shire Economic Development Strategy](#)
- [Murrindindi Local Development Strategy](#)
- Murrindindi Food and Wine Inc - [Murrindindi Food and Wine Inc - welcome -](#)
[Murrindindi Food and Wine Inc](#)
-