



**CARBON
ZERO**

Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia



October 2025

Prepared By :

Carbon Zero
Initiative Ltd

Prepared for:

Joint Standing Committee on
Trade and Investment Growth

ABN: 67 668 881 543



carbonzero.org.au/contact

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth

Executive Summary

The Carbon Zero Initiative (CZI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry.

CZI's current focus is on ensuring that Australia's rapidly growing data centre (DC) sector—a projected \$26 billion investment by 2030 and a major future energy consumer—is harnessed as a driver of rural and regional growth.

By co-locating data centres with Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), we can create new regional industries that:

- Anchor clean energy investment in regional areas;
- Provide local jobs and training pathways in digital and energy sectors;
- Build co-branded “Clean Cloud” certification that enhances Australia's “clean and green” reputation across agriculture, food, drink, and tourism;
- Ensure regional communities share directly in the benefits of Australia's digital economy.

We recommend embedding digital infrastructure and renewable energy co-investment into Australia's broader clean and green brand narrative, alongside agriculture, food and drink exports.



Response to Terms of Reference

1. Improving marketing efforts to promote Australia's 'clean and green' agriculture, food and drink sectors

- The Clean Cloud brand offers a powerful complement to agriculture's "clean and green" story. In a world where supply chains, traceability, and exports rely on digital services, Australia can market its food and drink exports as not only produced cleanly, but also marketed, traced, and transacted through carbon-free digital infrastructure.
- This "farm-to-digital-to-fork" branding opportunity positions Australia uniquely in global markets where consumers and regulators demand carbon transparency.

Recommendation: Develop a joint marketing strategy where agricultural exports carry dual certification:

- Clean & Green Agriculture (food production), and
- Clean Cloud (digital traceability, carbon-free data systems).

2. Identifying opportunities to support rural and regional SMEs through branding, labelling and certification

- SMEs in regional Australia can benefit from a Clean Cloud Certification Scheme, linking their products and services to digital systems powered by renewable energy in REZs.
- This would give regional exporters a unique selling point in premium markets—particularly in Asia and Europe—where both sustainable food provenance and low-carbon digital logistics are prized.
- Edge data centres located near REZs can act as local hubs, providing SMEs with low-latency services, digital traceability tools, and shared certification platforms.

Recommendation: Pilot Clean Cloud + Clean Agriculture co-certification in one REZ region, aligned with agricultural SMEs exporting to Asia-Pacific markets.

Response to Terms of Reference (cont'd)

3. Aligning tourism with food and drink experiences in rural and regional Australia

- Regional tourism experiences can showcase not only farm-to-table production, but also the carbon-free digital backbone underpinning exports, logistics, and storytelling.

Just as vineyard tours showcase terroir, Clean Cloud regional data hubs can become part of a story—demonstrating how rural communities power global digital services sustainably.

Recommendation: Incorporate Clean Cloud storytelling into regional tourism marketing, highlighting regions as both renewable energy exporters and digital sustainability leaders.

Additional Observations

- **Data centre (DC) demand is growing fast: projected to use 8–15% of Australia’s electricity by 2030. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity.**
- **Without policy alignment, demand will be met by coal and gas; with alignment, DC demand can underpin renewable energy investment, creating enduring regional industries.**
- **International precedents: The EU and Germany are introducing binding standards on data centres (waste heat reuse, renewable sourcing, efficiency). Australia should seize first-mover advantage in branding “Clean Cloud”.**
- **Community benefits: CIS-funded Regional Enhancement Funds (REFs) tied to REZs could support local infrastructure, training, and tourism aligned with both clean energy and clean agriculture branding.**



Recommendations to the Committee

1. Expand “Clean and Green” branding to include Clean Cloud certification for digital infrastructure supporting exports.
2. Support REZ-linked edge data centres that co-locate with renewable energy and regional SMEs.
3. Pilot co-certification programs (Clean Cloud + Clean Agriculture) in select REZ regions to enhance exports.
4. Incorporate Clean Cloud storytelling into tourism campaigns to showcase regions as both sustainable producers and digital economy leaders.
5. Embed Clean Cloud in trade promotion strategies, giving Australian exports a distinctive “digital sustainability” edge in global markets.

Conclusion

Australia’s rural and regional exports—food, drink, tourism—already carry a premium “clean and green” reputation. By aligning the digital infrastructure that underpins these exports with renewable energy and regional communities, we can expand that reputation into the digital age.

The Clean Cloud vision ensures that Australia’s digital economy not only grows sustainably, but also strengthens regional jobs, exports, and communities.



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