

Western Australia Agritourism Association Incorporated
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17 October 2025



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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth Inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia

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Executive Summary

The Western Australia Agritourism Association Incorporated (WAAA) is a member-driven, not-for-profit organisation established to champion the growth and development of the agritourism sector across Western Australia. We welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth.

Agritourism is a significant and rapidly growing sector, contributing to a \$20.3 billion spend in Australia in 2024. Western Australia is a standout performer, capturing 14% of these trips; a figure that significantly outperforms its 9.5% share of the overall national tourism market. This demonstrates not just potential, but proven strength.

Our central position is this: Agritourism is not merely an industry to be supported; it is the most potent catalyst for achieving sustainable economic growth in regional Australia. It is the living embodiment of the 'clean and green' brand, the most authentic form of regional branding, and the natural nexus where agriculture, food, and tourism converge. It transforms passive consumers into active, high-spending advocates for Australian produce.

This submission will demonstrate that by addressing several key structural barriers; namely regulatory ambiguity, the regional digital divide, and access to capital, the Committee can unlock the full potential of this dynamic sector. Doing so will drive trade, create resilient regional economies, and build a sustainable future for Australia's family farms.

We commend the Committee for undertaking this vital inquiry and offer our expertise as a collaborative partner in achieving its objectives.

1. Improving Domestic and International Marketing Efforts (Term of Reference 1)

Position: Agritourism is the most powerful and authentic marketing tool for Australia's 'clean and green' agricultural brand. It transitions the slogan from an abstract concept into a tangible, verifiable, and memorable visitor experience.

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1.1. From Abstract to Authentic: International and domestic consumers are increasingly seeking authenticity and a connection to the source of their food. A 'clean and green' label is a good start, but an immersive experience on a working farm; seeing sustainable practices firsthand, meeting the farming family, and tasting produce at its source, is an indelible endorsement. This experience creates a powerful "halo effect," building trust and brand loyalty that extends from the farm gate to the supermarket aisle, both in Australia and abroad.

1.2. Meeting Proven Demand: The demand for these authentic experiences is not speculative. National data from Tourism Research Australia (TRA) shows that travellers who engage in agritourism are a high-value segment. They are more active, stay longer (accounting for 18% of total visitor nights), and spend more (14% of total tourism spend) than the average tourist. They are actively seeking the very 'clean and green' story that our regional operators live every day.

1.3. Targeting High-Value Markets: The data clearly identifies our key international markets for agritourism as the United Kingdom, China, and the United States. These markets contributed \$1.8 billion in 2024. Furthermore, the business events market represents a significant opportunity. Business travellers who engage in agritourism are more than twice as likely to have a stop over in Western Australia. These visitors are often key decision-makers and influencers, and their positive experiences have a significant ripple effect.

Recommendation: Government marketing efforts, including those by Tourism Australia and Austrade, should strategically feature authentic agritourism experiences as the "proof point" for Australia's 'clean and green' promise. This involves shifting focus from generic regional imagery to compelling, story-driven content that profiles the farmers, producers, and unique on-farm experiences that define our agricultural identity.

2. Enhanced Branding, Labelling and Certification for SMEs (Term of Reference 2)

Position: While valuable, enhanced branding, labelling, and certification are secondary to addressing the foundational barriers that prevent regional small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from innovating and scaling their operations. The most powerful brand is a high-quality, accessible visitor experience.

2.1. Foundations First: For many of our members, the primary constraints on growth are not a lack of brand identity, but a lack of essential infrastructure and a clear regulatory pathway. A business cannot build a national brand if it struggles with unreliable internet, cannot get a timely permit for a new cellar door or farm-stay accommodation, or is unable to secure appropriate public liability insurance.

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2.2. The Regional ‘Digital Divide’: A critical barrier to branding and market access is the “digital divide.” Modern travellers discover, book, and share their experiences online. However, many parts of regional WA suffer from poor internet connectivity. This creates a “digital expectation gap” for visitors and severely hampers an operator’s ability to use modern digital marketing tools, manage online bookings, or even process electronic payments reliably. This infrastructure deficit is the single greatest impediment to SMEs reaching wider domestic and international markets.

2.3. Enabling Investment, Not Just Logos: Support for regional SMEs must focus on enabling them to invest in the quality of their core product—the visitor experience. This includes support for navigating complex planning approvals, accessing capital for value-adding infrastructure (e.g., commercial kitchens, accommodation, processing facilities), and mitigating prohibitive insurance costs. When the foundational business is strong, the brand will follow.

Recommendation: We recommend a strategic shift in support for regional SMEs, prioritising investment in enabling infrastructure. This includes:

- A federal commitment to bridging the regional digital divide by investing in reliable, high-speed internet as essential economic infrastructure.
- The creation of targeted grants and low-interest loan programs specifically for farm diversification and the development of agritourism infrastructure.

3. Aligning Tourism with Food and Drink Experiences (Term of Reference 3)

Position: The alignment between tourism and our world-class food and drink sector is already happening, and its name is agritourism. The sector is the natural and most effective vehicle for this convergence, turning agricultural regions into premier tourism destinations and driving export demand.

3.1. A Proven Economic Driver: The alignment is not theoretical; it is already generating significant economic activity. The \$20.3 billion spent by travellers on trips involving agritourism is a direct injection into regional economies, supporting local jobs and businesses. The success of Australia’s wine regions, which contribute \$10 billion to the national agritourism sector, serves as a powerful model. This demonstrates how integrating an agricultural product with a high-quality visitor experience creates a globally competitive tourism offering.

3.2. Western Australia as a Leader: As noted, Western Australia already captures a disproportionately high share of the national agritourism market (14%). From the world-renowned wineries of Margaret River to the unique truffle hunts in Manjimup and the iconic pearl farms of Broome, WA operators are already leaders in aligning agricultural production with exceptional visitor experiences. This provides a strong foundation for further, targeted growth.

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3.3. The Challenge of ‘Regulatory Lag’: The primary obstacle to deepening this alignment is “regulatory lag.” Current planning and licensing frameworks were often designed for traditional, single-purpose agriculture and are ill-equipped to handle diversified businesses that may include accommodation, food service, and retail. This regulatory ambiguity creates uncertainty, stifles innovation, and represents a significant handbrake on growth for operators wishing to develop the very food and drink experiences this inquiry seeks to promote.

Recommendation: We urge the Committee to recommend the development of a National Agritourism Strategy. To be effective, this strategy must be co-designed by state and local governments in collaboration with peak industry bodies, such as WAAA and our counterparts in other states, who provide essential on-the-ground expertise. This partnership is critical to creating clear, consistent, and enabling regulatory frameworks that are fit-for-purpose, removing the ambiguity that currently hinders farmers and producers from investing in value-adding tourism experiences.

4. Conclusion

The Western Australia Agritourism Association believes that agritourism is the key to unlocking the next wave of sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. It authenticates our marketing, empowers our regional SMEs, and is the most powerful vehicle for aligning our tourism and agricultural sectors.

The opportunity is immense, but it requires a strategic focus on removing the real-world barriers our operators face. By investing in digital infrastructure and creating clear, supportive regulatory pathways, the Australian Government can empower a generation of rural entrepreneurs to build resilient businesses, create vibrant regional economies, and showcase the very best of Australia’s ‘clean and green’ character to the world.

WAAA and its members stand ready to assist the Committee and the Australian Government in this important work.