

27 February 2026

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Please find enclosed a submission from the Limestone Coast Local Government Association (LCLGA) to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth's inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and would welcome an invitation to give further evidence through participation in a public hearing should the opportunity arise.

For any questions about this submission please contact the LCLGA's Executive Officer Charlotte Edmunds on 0486 380 347 or eo@lclga.sa.gov.au

Yours sincerely,



Mayor Lynette Martin OAM
President
Limestone Coast Local Government Association



ABOUT THE LIMESTONE COAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Local Government in Limestone Coast has been working together for over 140 years. Since the first association of councils was formed in October 1885, Local Government across the region has helped build community and economic prosperity through cooperation.

The Limestone Coast Local Government Association is a regional subsidiary established pursuant to Section 43 of the Local Government Act 1999 by the:

- City of Mount Gambier;
- District Council of Grant;
- Kingston District Council;
- Naracoorte Lucindale Council;
- District Council of Robe;
- Tatiara District Council.

As the peak body representing Local Government in the Limestone Coast, the Limestone Coast Local Government Association (LCLGA) takes a lead to advocate on behalf of the region across a wide range of issues with the goal of continuing the 140-year history of collectively building strong, sustainable communities.

As the closest level of government to the people, local government plays a critical role in understanding the needs of local communities and advocating for the support required to deliver infrastructure and services to enable sustainable population growth, projected to reach over 85,000 by 2051. Councils within the Limestone Coast recognise the potential for economic growth to enable a highly productive and prosperous community that will continue to contribute significantly to the South Australian economy.

Our Vision for the Limestone Coast;

- Regional growth that is considered and sustainable.
- Communities that are supported with the services and infrastructure needed to thrive now and generations into the future.
- To maintain our competitive advantage and global reputation for the clean, green environment and the food and fibre that is produced from our resources
- A diverse economy that is resilient and balanced
- A highly attractive region in which to live, work, visit and invest.

We acknowledge and respect that in order to support a sustainable and diverse economy we must manage and protect our natural environment and resources, recognising that these unique natural assets underpin our economic and social prosperity.

ABOUT OUR REGION

The Limestone Coast describes a rich and diverse geographical region that covers over 21,000 square kilometres, currently home to almost 70,000 people and with a Gross Regional Product of \$5.1 billion.

The region covers two per cent of the state's landmass, is home to 3.6 per cent of South Australia's population and contributes over 30 per cent of the state's agricultural produce.

Fertile soils, water resources, a Mediterranean climate and the cold, clean waters of the southern ocean have enabled globally significant food, wine and fibre production in the region. The Limestone Coast economy has been built from the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors which continue to provide the region's largest economic output and employment.

To date, the protection of the Limestone Coast's valuable primary production land has resulted in the region becoming an agricultural powerhouse for the state including;

- soft and hard wood product- 37% of Australia's house frames, 25% of Australia's particle board and 48% of Australia's packaging and industrial grade timber
- more than 80% of Australia's Lucerne Seed
- approx. 900,000 sheep and lamb
- more than 54% of SA's cattle with the highest concentration of cattle per square km in Australia. Including one of the world's most elite Full-blood Wagyu breeding operations.
- produces nearly one-third of SA's quality wine
- Dairies collectively produce more than 300-million litres of milk and 49.2% of SA's production by value
- 45% of South Australian potatoes
- SA's largest commercial wild-catch fishery by value – Rock Lobster, producing more than 1,300 tonnes per year and supporting 1,300 jobs

Our primary producers are custodians of the land and sea they farm, ensuring practices are sustainable and viable for future generations.

Opportunities exist to grow modern manufacturing and value add to our primary produce, while increasing a visitor economy by leveraging demand for agritourism.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Situated between Adelaide and Melbourne, the Limestone Coast is one of South Australia's most distinctive and diverse tourism regions. From the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Naracoorte Caves to the volcanic craters of Mount Gambier, from pristine coastlines and fertile wine regions to historic inland towns, the region offers visitors a rare fusion of geology, culture, food, and community.

The region's visitor economy has grown strongly, with \$662 million in visitor expenditure recorded in 2024—representing a 57% increase since 2019 and supporting more than 3,200 jobs.

The region currently attracts 1,463m visitors, with 54% of these overnight, and 45% day trips. The Intrastate market accounts for approximately 49% of all overnight visits to the region, Adelaide (23%) and Regional SA (28%). The region receives 11.8% share of regional SA's intrastate overnight visitors, making them the fourth highest destination for this market across Regional SA.

International visitation represents a very small percentage of total visitation for the Limestone Coast— less than 4 per cent.

According to Tourism Australia's Future of Demand research, in 2024 84 percent of global travellers were interested in agritourism experience on a future international holiday to Australia, with the United Kingdom, China and the United States in the top three markets. Coinciding with the agritourism demand is Australia's top 10 export markets as of August 2025, with China ranked number 1, followed by the United States ranked 4 and United Kingdom ranked 9.

Furthermore, global tourism is experiencing remarkable growth, with national forecasts indicating a sustained upward trajectory for South Australia, predicting 4.7% annual growth through to 2029.

The diversity of the Limestone Coast's food and beverage sector including a well-established reputation for clean, green food and fibre combined with the potential for international visitation marks significant opportunity.

LIMESTONE COAST STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Limestone Coast's geology is unlike anywhere else in Australia. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Naracoorte Caves form one of the world's most important fossil sites, telling the story of Australia's prehistoric megafauna.

The region's volcanic heritage is expressed in Mount Gambier's Blue Lake/Warwar and Mount Schank/Parreen, along with a network of dormant volcanic craters. Coastal areas feature rugged cliffs, sweeping sandy beaches, and dramatic dune systems shaped by the Southern Ocean. Inland, internationally recognised wetlands such as Bool and Hacks Lagoons and Piccaninnie Ponds (a RAMSAR site) support rare and threatened flora and fauna, and are prized destinations for birdwatchers and divers.

In between these diverse natural assets is highly productive agricultural land, managed by intergenerational farming families – custodians of the land and sea they farm, ensuring the sustainability of resources for generations to come. Environmental stewardship is a cornerstone of the region's identity.

The region is internationally recognised for its food and wine, particularly the Coonawarra's Cabernet Sauvignon grown on the famed red terra rossa soils. Across six wine regions—Coonawarra, Padthaway, Wrattobully, Mount Benson, Robe, and Mount Gambier—over 40 cellar doors offer immersive tasting experiences.

The Southern Rock Lobster industry, centred in Port MacDonnell, supplies premium seafood to global markets, while Wagyu and Terra Rossa beef, dairy, lamb, grains, and horticultural products bolster the Limestone Coast's reputation as South Australia's "food bowl."

Despite the region's obvious strengths and opportunities, locally branded and marketed product is scarce. The vast majority of the food and fibre grown and processed in the Limestone Coast is sold from farm to processors and then consumers both domestically and into key overseas markets without capitalising on its regional providence when marketing.

Key opportunities include:

- Expansion of food, wine and drink experiences that showcase the region's provenance to international visitors such as:
 - Activate crayfish experiences - museum/experience/restaurant/pot pulling experience.
 - Farm gate/Farm to plate/Farm stay experiences
 - More immersive/personalised winery experiences
 - Cooking schools that hero local producers
 - Hands on experiences (e.g. Make your own blend)
 - Events that bring together all strengths of the region
 - Partnerships and packages between businesses (food/brewery/restaurants etc)
 - Development of food/wine beverage experiences for Groups/MICE travellers
 - Activate Sale Yard experiences
- Amplify storytelling around producers and linkages to landscape and culture
- Re-activation and amplification of the Regional Brand Mark and Regional Positioning through experience design and product marketing

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Mining and Energy developments including rare earths. From a tourism perspective, the impact on the environment (structure/integrity/visual appeal) which the region relies so heavily upon for its visitor experience will be significant. For agriculture, the impact will include compromising the strong primary production sector, with significant risks to soil, water, workforce and reputation of our region.

Mount Gambier Regional Airport is a District Council of Grant owned and maintained asset with planned expansion and capability to provide significant economic value-add opportunities through freight and cold storage, as well as increased passenger traffic. However, Federal

mandated passenger security screening would require installation of equipment and ongoing annual operating costs that, unless funded by Government, will make air services unviable.

Workforce shortages - The Limestone Coast has an unemployment rate of just 2.4 per cent. Existing agriculture industry and processing sector experiences significant workforce shortages compounded by housing supply issues.

Biosecurity - Biosecurity is fundamental to the success of South Australia's primary producers and to the health of the state's environment, economy, and regional communities. A well-resourced, coordinated, and effective biosecurity system is essential to sustaining productivity, protecting domestic and international market access, and supporting South Australia's contribution to national agricultural growth objectives.

THE ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT

- Strengthen the capability, scale, and sustainability of the Limestone Coast's workforce across all sectors, including by increasing the liveability of the regions to attract and retain working aged populations needed now and into the future
- Supporting rural and regional communities with the infrastructure and services needed including through strong partnerships with Local Government to:
 - Create a well-resourced, coordinated, and effective biosecurity system aligned with all levels of government
 - Increase and reform local road funding through the Supplementary Local Road Funding framework to provide adequate and predictable untied investment that reflects the true cost of maintaining freight and tourism critical local roads in South Australian regions
 - Significant increase in untied and non-competitive federal funding to local government
- Protecting the natural environment that supports sustainable primary production
- Better collaboration between all levels of government and across agencies including policy alignment to drive unique economic benefits from the ground-up
- Support local initiatives to upskill industry, drive product development and marketing
- Increase awareness amongst Australian urban populations about the importance of sustainable primary production for sovereign capability and food security as well as the economic benefits of export