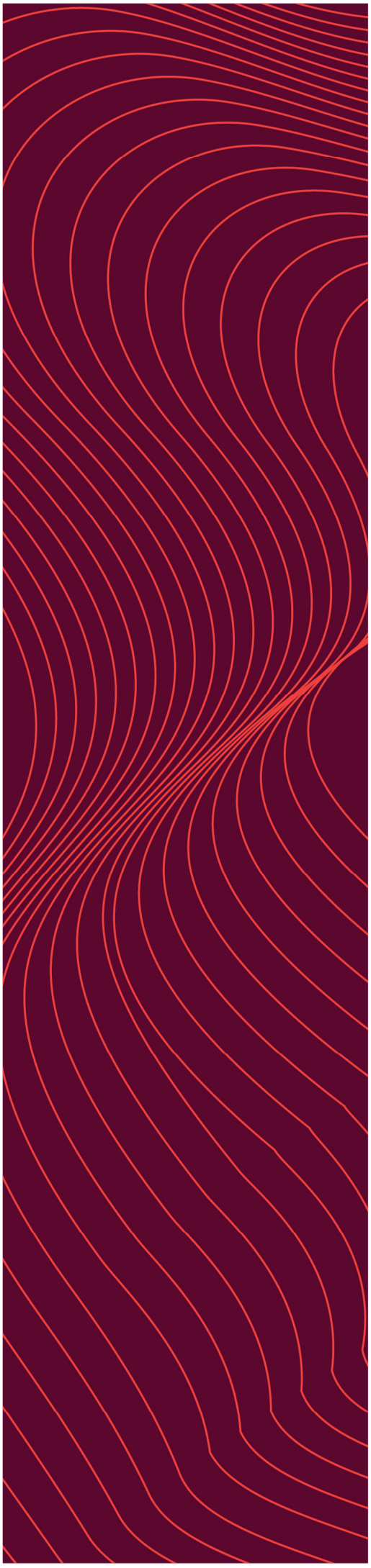
LATROBE CITY COUNCIL

Latrobe City Council's Submission to:

Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia

May 2026



Introduction

Latrobe City Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth's inquiry into creating sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia.

Latrobe City is located in the heart of Gippsland and offers a unique combination of rural and urban living, with access to coastal, alpine and nature-based environments. The municipality supports more than 35,000 jobs and generates approximately $18.1 billion in annual economic output, serving a population of over 79,000 residents.

As Gippsland's major economic and employment centre, Latrobe City plays a critical role in supporting Victoria's agricultural production, regional business activity and visitor economy. The region has strong foundations in food production, supported by fertile land, established industries and a skilled workforce, alongside strategic access to domestic and export markets.

However, the region is undergoing significant economic change following the closure of coal-fired power generation assets, including Hazelwood Power Station in 2017 and the planned closure of Yallourn W Power Station in 2028. These changes create both challenges and opportunities, reinforcing the need to leverage existing infrastructure, workforce capability and industry strengths to support new and emerging sectors.

Regional and rural communities continue to face structural barriers in accessing markets, scaling businesses and realising the full value of Australia's 'clean and green' reputation. Targeted and coordinated support is required to ensure regional economies can fully participate in, and benefit from, domestic and international opportunities.

Councillors have an opportunity to consider and request changes to this submission. Should any changes be requested, officers may seek to provide an addendum to this submission. Subject to Councillor feedback, endorsement of the submission will be sought at the 25 May 2026 Council Meeting.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Develop and fund place-based national marketing initiatives that promote regional production areas, including Gippsland, as premium 'clean and green' food and agriculture regions.
2. Strengthen regional participation in export promotion and trade initiatives, ensuring small and medium producers are actively included in national campaigns and trade missions.
3. Simplify and streamline certification, branding and labelling frameworks to reduce complexity and cost for regional small and medium businesses.
4. Provide targeted support to regional SMEs to meet export requirements, including advisory services, capability building and funding assistance.
5. Invest in consistent national and regional branding frameworks that build trust, provenance and recognition in international markets.
6. Invest in regional tourism infrastructure and agritourism experiences that connect visitors with local food and drink production.
7. Strengthen integration between tourism, hospitality and primary production sectors to enhance visitor experiences and support export growth.

Submission

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

Latrobe City Council supports stronger, more coordinated national marketing of Australia's 'clean and green' reputation, with a greater focus on showcasing regional production areas such as Gippsland.

Gippsland produces high-quality dairy, meat and horticultural products, underpinned by reliable water resources, fertile land and a skilled agricultural workforce. However, many regional producers lack the scale and resources to effectively promote their products in competitive domestic and global markets.

There is a clear opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to invest and leveraging existing place-based branding, such as Gippsland Food and Fibre's "Gippsland – The Trusted Province". These placed-based brands position regions like Gippsland as premium, sustainable food production areas, while also strengthening pathways for regional producers to participate in national export campaigns and trade missions (Recommendations 1 and 2).

These actions would improve market access, increase export value and ensure regional producers can fully capitalise on Australia's global reputation.

2. Identifying opportunities to promote and support Australian rural and regional small and medium businesses in domestic and international markets through enhanced branding, labelling and certification of products and services;

Small and medium-sized businesses are critical to Latrobe City's economy and to the broader diversification of regional Australia.

While many regional businesses produce high-quality goods and services, they face barriers in accessing and navigating certification, branding and export requirements. These processes are often complex, costly and fragmented, limiting the ability of businesses to scale and compete.

Targeted support is needed to simplify certification and labelling processes, provide practical assistance to SMEs to meet export standards, and establish consistent branding frameworks that build trust and recognition in international markets (Recommendations 3, 4 and 5).

Improving access to these tools would enable regional businesses to grow, compete internationally and contribute to long-term economic resilience.

3. Aligning tourism with food and drink experiences in rural and regional Australia to enhance Australian agriculture exports

Latrobe City Council recognises that agritourism and regional food promotion are well established across Gippsland, with organisations such as Destination Gippsland already playing a key role in marketing food, wine and visitor experiences.

However, current activity remains fragmented and largely focused on visitation outcomes, rather than being coordinated and scaled to drive broader economic and export outcomes.

There is a clear opportunity to build on this foundation through more structured, region-wide initiatives that strengthen the connection between tourism, food production and export markets (Recommendations 6 and 7). This includes aligning and leveraging existing place-based branding, such as Destination Gippsland's "All Kinds of Wonder". This should be complemented by stronger pathways for regional producers to participate in national export campaigns and trade missions (Recommendations 1 and 2).

This could include:

- Investment to establish a coordinated, bookable Gippsland food and drink trail network, linking producers, wineries, hospitality venues and tourism operators across the region;
- Sponsorship of a flagship Gippsland food and agriculture showcase event designed to attract domestic and international visitors, buyers and investors;
- Investment in agritourism infrastructure, including farm gate experiences, visitor facilities and transport connections; and
- Enabling stronger integration between tourism and trade programs, using visitor experiences as a pathway to build brand recognition and support export demand.

By moving beyond promotion to the delivery of structured, scalable experiences, Gippsland can better position itself as a premium food region, increase visitor expenditure, and strengthen pathways from tourism to export markets.

Conclusion

Latrobe City Council recognises the importance of coordinated national action to support sustainable economic growth in rural and regional Australia. With the right support, regions like Gippsland can play a greater role in strengthening Australia's agricultural exports, supporting small business growth and delivering long-term economic benefits.

Council welcomes continued engagement with the Commonwealth Government to ensure regional communities are well positioned to contribute to, and benefit from, these opportunities.

Council looks forward to continued engagement with the Commonwealth Government and industry as this work progresses and remains committed to supporting approaches that deliver sustainable environmental outcomes, economic resilience and long-term benefits for regional communities.

Please contact Latrobe City Council's Senior Strategy and Advocacy Advisor Kate Cumming, at Advocacy@latrobe.vic.gov.au or 0409 327 314, should you wish to discuss any of the content outlined in this submission in further detail.

Yours sincerely



Steven Piasente
Chief Executive Officer