



## **Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth Inquiry into Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia**

Submitted by: **Australian Restaurant & Café Association (ARCA)**

10 October 2025

**To:** Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth

### **About ARCA**

The Australian Restaurant & Cafe Association Ltd. (ARCA) is a member based not-for-profit Industry Association and is the strongest voice for the Restaurant & Cafe segment of the Accommodation & Foodservice Industry, representing a sector that employs 500,000 across over 54,000+ restaurants & cafes in Australia. Our members include many of the leading restaurants & cafes in Australia, which employ tens of thousands within the Restaurant & Cafe segment. The majority of the industry is considered small businesses with 99% of restaurants and cafes earning less than \$10 million in annual revenue and 91.4% earning less than \$2 million, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

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### **Executive Summary**

Restaurants and cafés are the front line of how Australians and international visitors experience the nation’s agricultural, food, and drink sectors. Regional produce, when served in regional venues, becomes not only a commodity but a story, an experience, and a cultural identity.

We believe there are significant opportunities to:

1. Enhance branding and certification to give regional goods and services stronger market recognition.
2. Better align food, drink, and hospitality with tourism, positioning regional Australia as a premium global destination.
3. Tell authentic stories through marketing campaigns that highlight real rural and regional businesses.
4. Provide incentives to consumers, producers, and operators that sustain long-term economic growth.

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### **1. Enhanced Branding & Certification**

#### **National Certification Scheme – “Taste of Australia”**

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- Establish a **federal certification framework** that verifies provenance, sustainability, and regional authenticity, but allows each region to showcase its distinct identity (e.g., “Taste of the Hunter Valley,” “Taste of Tasmania”).
- Inspired by Europe’s Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Italy’s DOC wine certification, this framework would protect regional names, prevent misuse, and add market value to certified products.

### **Regional Food & Drink Identity Marks**

- Develop **state and territory-based branding**, co-branded with the national mark. For example, “Clean & Green Tasmania,” “Paddock to Plate Victoria,” “Sun & Soil Queensland.”
- Certification should be available to both producers and hospitality venues that source a significant portion of inputs locally, embedding the provenance story across the supply chain.

### **Digital Provenance & Transparency**

- Encourage use of **QR codes** or blockchain-based provenance labels. Scanning a code on a wine bottle or café menu could reveal the farm, production methods, and environmental credentials.
- Builds consumer trust, aligns with global demand for transparency, and positions Australia as a leader in food authenticity.

### **Hospitality Endorsement Program**

- Restaurants and cafés can become certified “Regional Champions” if they source ≥60% of key ingredients from certified local suppliers.
- Creates a visible marker for consumers, much like the “Ocean Wise” sustainable seafood program in Canada.

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## **2. Aligning Tourism & Food Experiences**

### **Regional Food & Wine Trails**

- Build national consistency for food trails, integrating wine regions, craft breweries, cheese producers, and farm-to-table restaurants into **tourist itineraries**.
- Digital “passports” allow visitors to collect stamps at venues, unlocking rewards such as discounts or free tastings.
- Similar to the “Great Wine Capitals Global Network” model, this ties regional produce to international tourism standards.

### **Gastronomy & Agri-Tourism Incentives**

- Introduce a **hospitality and tourism package tax offset**, enabling operators who bundle experiences (farm tours + cooking classes + restaurant dining) to claim tax incentives.
- Encourages vertical integration of tourism and foodservice, ensuring value-add remains in rural communities.

## Signature Events & Festivals

- Scale up existing festivals such as **Orange Food Week, Tasting Australia, and Taste of Tasmania** into global destination events.
- Fund international marketing to position these events alongside global icons like Spain's San Sebastián Gastronomika or Italy's Salone del Gusto.

## Culinary Tourism Training

- Partner with TAFE and vocational providers to create training modules on **food tourism management**, so small operators can effectively package and promote their offerings.

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## 3. Marketing & Storytelling

### National Campaign – Authentic Voices

- Replace generic branding with **campaigns built around real producers and business owners**.
- Ads should feature farmers, café & restaurant owners, winemakers, and chefs explaining their craft, creating emotional connection and authenticity.

### Slogan Proposals

- **Tourism-Oriented:** *“Real Flavour. Real People. Regional Australia.”* – focuses on experience, people, and authenticity.
- **Export-Oriented:** *“Clean, Green & Grown Here.”* – highlights sustainability and product integrity for international buyers.

### Digital Storytelling Hub

- A government-backed online portal with:
  - High-quality video profiles of regional producers and restaurateurs.
  - Interactive itineraries (map-based) for domestic and international visitors.
  - Booking tools linking directly to certified venues and events.
- Could mirror Tourism New Zealand's “100% Pure Stories” platform, where digital content drives both brand and visitation.

### Social Media Partnerships

- Fund influencer partnerships with chefs, restaurateurs, and food writers to highlight regional experiences.
- Short-form video (TikTok, Instagram Reels) is critical for attracting younger domestic and international tourists.

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## 4. Incentives & Support

### Tourism–Hospitality Vouchers

- A co-funded scheme where domestic tourists receive **regional hospitality vouchers** for use at certified cafés, restaurants, or tours.
- Japan's “Go To Travel” program boosted rural tourism by 60% during its rollout,

proving vouchers stimulate spending in regional economies.

### **Export Readiness & Branding Grants**

- Assist regional SMEs with funding to:
  - Upgrade packaging to meet international standards.
  - Undertake certification and provenance systems.
  - Develop digital marketing campaigns targeted at export markets.

### **Local Procurement Policies**

- Introduce tax deductions or recognition awards for metropolitan restaurants and hotels that buy directly from regional suppliers.
- Encourages supply chain resilience and strengthens producer-to-restaurant connections.

### **Regional Collaboration Platforms**

- Create regional clusters (food, wine, tourism, events) with joint marketing budgets.
- Modelled on Spain's Basque Culinary Center, where local producers and chefs collaborate to build an internationally recognised food identity.

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## **5. International Case Studies**

### **New Zealand – “100% Pure”**

- Integrated tourism and agrifood marketing. By branding the entire nation as clean and green, New Zealand increased wine exports by 300% in 15 years while boosting eco-tourism.

### **Spain – Basque Country**

- Food-led tourism anchored by Michelin-starred restaurants and farm-to-table dining increased tourism spend per visitor by 20%.
- A focus on authenticity, storytelling, and culinary innovation lifted both exports and domestic prosperity.

### **Canada – Quebec Food Routes**

- Regional labelling tied to curated tourist “routes” linking cheesemakers, cideries, and bistros created a distinctive identity for Quebecois produce in both domestic and export markets.

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## **Conclusion**

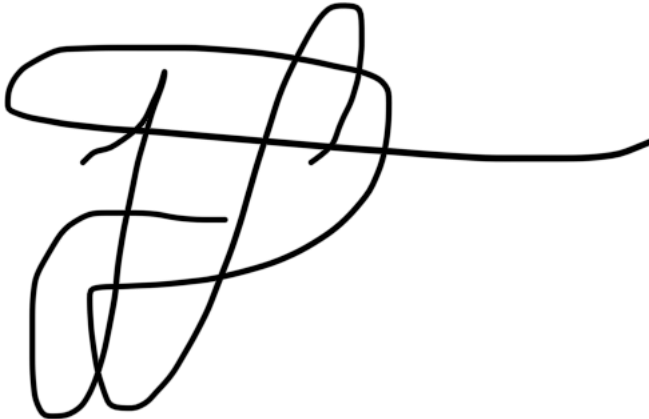
Rural and regional Australia are more than suppliers of raw materials—they are cultural destinations, brand anchors, and custodians of Australia's food identity. To achieve sustainable growth, Australia must:

1. Certify and protect provenance.
2. Align hospitality and tourism with food and agriculture.
3. Tell authentic stories featuring real regional businesses.
4. Provide incentives that drive consumer and operator participation.

By implementing these strategies, Australia can secure long-term economic growth in regional areas while positioning itself as the world's most trusted source of clean, green, authentic food and drink experiences.

**ARCA is committed to working with the Committee, Tourism Australia, Austrade, and regional operators to deliver these outcomes.**

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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