

April 16, 2021

NSW Department of Primary Industries

Proposed Agritourism and Small-Scale Agriculture Planning Reforms

Regional Development Australia Southern Inland (RDASI) would like to thank the Department of Primary Industries of the NSW Government for the opportunity to comment on the subject of agritourism and small-scale agriculture planning reforms for NSW farms.

RDASI is part of a national network of 52 Regional Development Australia Boards across Australia and one of 14 in NSW. RDASI is a Federally funded non-government body encompassing seven Local Government Areas – Wingecarribee, Goulburn Mulwaree, Yass Valley, Snowy Monaro, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang and Upper Lachlan.

Our role is to promote economic development in the region by identifying opportunities for business development and linking businesses and community organisations with government grants, programs and infrastructure investments, creating jobs and encouraging prosperity for the region's population.

RDASI welcomes recognition of the challenges facing commercial producers and farmers who want to set up an agritourism business to diversify their income streams to support the recovery and resilience of their landholdings and their regional economies. To this respect, diversification capabilities can be the critical safety-net for small scale producers during times of crisis.

Five of the seven Local Government Areas within the Southern Inland region were severely impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires.

The agricultural industry is key to our region, with wool, cattle and sheep contributing 57% of the total value of agricultural production in the Southern Inland region and 34% of NSW's cherry production coming from the region.

The agricultural industry also has a significant input into various other industries such as food manufacturing and freight, with the Southern Inland region having the busiest freight corridor in Australia.

The region's tourism industry has also been affected by the impact of COVID-19. From a tourism perspective, 4.7 million people visited the Southern Inland region in 2019-20 (pre COVID-19), spending more than \$1 billion through over 2,300 tourism businesses. Importantly, these businesses also add to the social and cultural fabric of the region that can be enjoyed by residents, so the impact of COVID-19 on tourism has been particularly felt.

Furthermore, whilst most of the region has benefitted from recent rain, many areas are still technically 'in drought' even as they recover from the drought of recent years. Therefore, it is hoped that the proposed changes to the planning system will contribute significantly to sustainable recovery and provide new contingencies against future weather events.

As a result of the combined impacts of drought, bushfires and COVID-19, RDASI believes that agritourism, the tourism-related experience that connects agricultural products, people or places with visitors to a farm and representing the confluence of agriculture and tourism, needs to be protected, supported and expanded in a sustainable and innovative manner.

We, therefore, welcome the proposed changes which aim to reduce the confusion involved in activity definitions (e.g. 'farm stay') and the complexity and cost of obtaining planning approval for agritourism and small-scale agricultural development and to increase consistency in new development approvals more broadly.

However, RDASI acknowledges that delivery of the proposed changes will take place at a local government level and the service delivery being provided to landholders in terms of facilitating an understanding of existing development standards, to enable exempt and complying developments to proceed, within the new approval pathways, will be critical.

To manage expectations at a local level, Councils will be required to explain their current Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) to landholders and advise, where necessary, that they are working with the Department to facilitate approvals through an amending State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP).

RDASI believes that each Council will need to ensure clear access to planners who can clearly advise on exempt and complying development criteria and to nominate a dedicated agricultural support officer, someone who can provide detailed understanding and support for planners, advise them on agricultural matters and provide feedback back to the NSW Government about planning processes and improvements needed.

For its part, RDASI is committed to assisting business owners within its region to implement innovative activities on their farms, including agritourism, and stands ready to support the implementation of the proposed changes to the planning system through stakeholder liaison, business development, skills matching, job creation, facilitating access to funding, advocacy and communications support.

Yours sincerely,



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