To Whom it May Concern,

Re: Planning and Design Code: Productive Economy Policy Discussion Paper

Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland (RDAMR) is the key strategic economic development agency for the Murraylands and Riverland region and a major component of our role is to promote and facilitate growth. We do this by bringing together the efforts of all levels of government and the business community through advocacy, facilitation and delivery of economic development projects. We build alliances with many other organisations who are also seeking to improve the economic outcomes for our region.

The Murraylands and Riverland region spans 36,000 square kilometres, is home to approximately 70,600 people and some 6,120 businesses. Our major economic output is primary production which accounts for 34% of our gross regional product and contributed $3.7 billion to the South Australian economy in 2017. The region boasts several core strengths including:

- its proximity and access to the Murray River and underground water;
- fertile, flat and affordable land;
- a stable climate with strong biosecurity credentials; and
- access to Adelaide and East Coast markets.

Our vision for the region is to become “a vibrant resilient region that capitalises on change, embraces economic development and prosperity, and provides an inspirational living, investment and working environment”. This vision is in line with what the South Australian Government has set out to achieve by developing a introducing the new planning and design code.

Businesses are taking advantage of our regions core strengths with more than $800 million in capital investments planned for this financial year, through both private and government funding, new business operations and expansion of existing business. Business confidence in our region is high.

We need to promote our region as a place for South Australian’s to live and work and the State Planning Policy is vital in helping us achieve this and to further unlock economic opportunity in our region.

Specifically, we offer the following observations and comments to the key policy area themes and proposed recommendations for the Code.
Theme 1: Supporting and growing key industries

- Primary industries
- Mining and exploration
- Tourism

As reflected in the economic statistics cited earlier, primary production is the lifeblood of the Murraylands and Riverland region. We support the Government’s position that land use planning should include strategies and policies that are flexible to support the diversification of compatible activities, encourage innovative land use planning and management, assist in implementing adjustment strategies, add value to activities, and respond to the effects of climate change. An example of this in action in our region is the Horticultural netting initiative.

This policy area should also consider how planning legislation can further support and generate economic growth. An example could be the establishment of innovation zones that allow trials under a reduced red tape regime to achieve a proof of concept to then support further uptake by the broader industry.

Tourism is also a significant economic driver for the region and we are pleased to see the Government acknowledge the importance of infrastructure development to support the visitor economy and enhancing our nature-based tourism assets. We support planning policy to encourage nature-based tourism and recreation that is compatible with, and at an appropriate scale for conserving the natural values of that landscape. The region is rich in nature-based tourism assets including the Murray River and the Coorong National Park. These underpin a vibrant tourism industry and provide community amenity to those that choose to live in our region.

The Code’s policies, zoning provisions and development regulations need to be aligned to industry needs to ensure economic development is not hampered by unnecessary red tape, which is currently the case.

Theme 2: Linking people to jobs, goods and services

- Centres, retail and mixed activity
- Employment lands (industry, manufacturing and commercial)

The Murraylands and Riverland has a significant food manufacturing industry as primary producers seek to move up the value chain and gain more return for their produce. The close proximity to major transport routes gives excellent access to key markets and planning policy should support the further expansion of this industry in the regions as a more cost-effective option than urban locations. The added benefit is providing employment opportunities in region which supports population growth aspirations.

RDAMR would like to see Integrated Planning policy positively facilitate the development of regional enterprises to enhance existing industry which want to expand to meet demand. Eg expansion of regional buildings/shedding which could include the establishment of a temporary concrete plant to cost effectively supply materials to the build which are not available locally.

Building stronger regions
Theme 3: Providing infrastructure to enhance our liveability

- Renewable Energy
- Adaptive Reuse
- Infrastructure

The proposed changes to policy regarding renewable energy is vital in this rapidly changing environment. There are significant renewable energy developments at varying stages throughout the region and these require careful management to ensure co-existence with primary production activities is achieved, impacts from their construction and operations is minimised, and mechanisms are in place for industry to gain from uptake of the renewable energy technologies.

Energy security provides business confidence to our primary producers to allow continued innovation and investment in this important sector. Energy is required to deliver a secure source of water. We support the intent to ensure renewable energy technologies support a stable energy market and continued supply and do not adversely affect the amenity of regional communities.

The inclusion of gas as an energy source should be considered in this policy theme.

Infrastructure is the back bone of regional economic development and it is essential that if regions are to prosper, we must have adequate transport, water, communications and energy infrastructure to support our population, and businesses. Mobile phone connectivity is a key impediment in regions and needs to be addressed.

Transport infrastructure plays a vital role in the economic performance of our primary industries. In our region alone freight transport movements associated with the movement of primary produce alone from farm to the first point of processing or sale are estimated to equate to 300 semitrailers per day (or 175 B-Doubles per day), 365 days a year.

Connecting produce to markets relies on access to safe, efficient and reliable freight pathways. This policy theme is vital to underpinning our region’s economic performance into the future. In addition, in our bid to attract the required workforce to our region we need to enable safe, efficient and reliable transport pathways from our residential centres to the place of work.

Theme 4: Facilitating innovation and enabling investment

- Collaboration and clustering
- e-Commerce and the sharing economy

We support the concept of precinct level clustering of related economic activities boosts productivity of businesses including unlocking economies of scope and scale. We recommend that the Government provides this thinking to the Murray River Corridor and declares this as an economic zone or innovation precinct with planning reform to suit. The application of special zones is justified to unlock the potential of the Murray River Corridor.

Building stronger regions
In closing, we thank the State Planning Commission for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Productive Economy Policy Discussion Paper.

We look forward to hearing the outcomes of this consultation.

If you have any queries, please don’t hesitate to contact me on (08) [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely,

Jo Podoljak
Chief Executive Officer