On 20-22 November 2015, the South Australian Cabinet visited the Limestone Coast region. Over three days, Ministers travelled across the region to speak to locals about the issues that concerned them most.

This document summarises the issues raised with the Government by the local community during this time. Issues identified spanned a range of topics, affecting a large diversity of people.

The following issues, listed by topic, were raised during the Limestone Coast Country Cabinet:

**Transport, roads and infrastructure**

*Infrastructure*

- In order to realise its growth potential and to enable the development of new value-added manufacturing enterprises, the region is seeking to establish an infrastructure plan with a 20-year horizon that will enable all parties to coordinate their efforts more effectively.

- Existing electricity supply in some parts of the region is felt to be an impediment to the establishment of new production and processing facilities for a number of industries.

- Clarity is sought regarding the future of vacant land at the Millicent railway station.

- The community has ongoing concern about the future of the South East Drainage Network.

- There is an opportunity to upgrade the Mt Gambier airport.

*Roads and Transport*

- The forestry industry is seeking support from the State Government regarding the use of high performance vehicles to increase load size. It is reported that transporting larger loads would reduce transport costs, improving the forestry industry’s competitiveness, and decrease the number of trucks on the road.
There is concern about the lack of shoulders on many of the region’s roads. This issue is particularly problematic due to the large number of trucks on the region’s roads associated with the forestry industry.

The freight corridor to Portland is reported to need upgrading, particularly with the increased tonnage being transported by the forestry industry.

Increased volumes of freight from Adelaide being transported along the Coorong section of the Princes Highway are impacting road conditions.

A number of roads in the region are reported as needing to be upgraded e.g. the Beachport Road, Rods Bay to Cape Jaffa and Cape Jaffa to Robe.

Confirmation is sought from the State Government as to whether or not the second stage of the Penola Bypass will be constructed.

Differences in road regulations between South Australia and Victoria are an issue, with large volumes of cross-border traffic in the region.

Health and wellbeing

There is significant community concern that the community is losing specialist medical service providers who are residents in the area. The community wants local specialists, not fly-in fly-out providers from Adelaide. Some local people are reported to be travelling to Victoria for particular services that are no longer offered locally.

Kingston Hospital needs upgrading to accommodate the needs of the area’s ageing population. There is concern that not being able to provide aged care services locally threatens the town’s ability to attract new retiree residents, who it hopes would move to the area and increase the population.

The region does not have a dedicated Aboriginal health liaison officer.

Local governments of the region would like greater involvement in planning for social infrastructure.

There is concern about the ability of children with autism to access support services in the region. Most services are only open during school hours and children are not permitted to leave school to attend appointments.

Mental health and drug and alcohol services

There is widespread concern about the lack of residential mental health services in the region.
• There is also concern in the community about drug and alcohol services, particularly following the recent closure of a residential facility in Naracoorte.

• Better access to outreach mental health services is needed, particularly in the drought-affected northern area of the region. People in the drought-affected area are in need of support, but many services do not have sufficient capacity to cover this area adequately.

Education

• The University of South Australia’s (USA) Mount Gambier campus is widely seen as a significant asset for the region and it is hoped that it will help to retain local young people in the region.

• The business community in the region would like to see the campus utilised to build the region’s R&D capability.

• Local vocational training needs to focus more on getting young people job-ready and to connect young people more effectively with employment opportunities. It is felt that a lot could be achieved by the local council, state government and the local business community working together to address this issue.

• Clarity is sought regarding the future of Millicent TAFE. Public consultation by TAFE in September 2015 about the future of the campus has created some anxiety that the range of course offerings will decrease or the campus may be sold. It is believed that underutilisation at the site could be addressed through innovative uses, such as evening classes.

Economic Development

Desire to increase Mount Gambier’s Population

• Increasing Mount Gambier’s population significantly is widely regarded as being critical to local maintaining services, such as health and education. Population growth would also provide a workforce to grow local industries and a larger population would enable the region’s cultural industries to develop and thereby also increase tourism.

Growth potential and skills shortages in the forestry industry

• Significant growth potential is reported in the region’s forestry industry through expanded production and the development of new products, such as cellulose.

• Skills shortages are a key challenge to realising the forestry industry’s growth potential. It is reported that 300 new jobs were created in the industry this year and another 300 are anticipated next year and it is difficult to find people suitably qualified to fill new positions.
• Skills shortages are also reported to be a challenge to the developing new products, including cellulose.

• There is low transferability of skills between industries that are shrinking, such as manufacturing, and the growing forestry industry. Training is critical to ensure local people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment can secure jobs in forestry.

• It is reported that a significant issue facing the forestry industry is an incorrect perception that the industry is in a precarious state following recent forest sales by the State Government. The industry is looking for support to change this perception, as it is affecting the industry’s ability to attract new employees, which is hampering its growth potential.

**Increasing the region’s R&D capability**

• There is reported to be significant potential to expand research and development in the region’s forestry, agribusiness, food and wine industries.

• The region has sufficient scale and diversity within its industries, that R&D programs could be run effectively and productively. This would not only provide opportunity for innovation and increased production locally, but would also enable the development of products and services that could be exported nationally and internationally.

• The University SA campus in Mount Gambier is regarded as a significant potential site for the development of new R&D enterprises, but a concerted effort and associated investment is required to build the necessary capability in the region.

• Particular opportunities are reported to exist in relation to forestry, land and water management, automation in the dairy industry and the development of new value-added export products.

**New Value-Added Industries**

• Further support is sought from the State Government for the development of new value-added enterprises, following the successful development of Midfields’ powdered milk production facility.

• There are reported to be a number of other opportunities for businesses to develop new products and facilities in the region and to realise opportunities arising from South Australia’s relationship with Shandong, China.

• The region currently exports wagyu beef, crayfish and wine to Shandong. With assistance and support from the State Government, it is believed many more value-added products could be produced in the region.
Support for SMEs

- Most business in the region are SMEs. Support is sought to build their capacity to innovate, diversify and value-add, for example through entrepreneur programs.

Tourism

- Support is sought from the State Government to develop a regional tourism strategy and the development of a distinct brand for the region.

- A particular focus of the region’s tourism growth strategy should be to attract more people travelling on the Great Ocean road to extend their journey to include the Limestone Coast.

- Mount Gambier has very little high-end accommodation and the council is looking to attract new accommodation providers to the area.

- It is believed that developing Kingston’s tourism offering is one way of attracting new residents, particularly retirees.

- There is a desire to increase off-peak tourism in the Robe area, including increasing winter tourism by attracting mountain bikers. The ongoing development of a mountain biking network has had some success and support is sought to further develop the area into a mountain biking tourist destination.

- It is reported that there is potential to host small conferences (up to 200 people) and weddings in Robe and there are a number of potential sites for facilities to be upgraded or developed. Some of the best potential sites are on Crown Land.

- Support is sought from the State Government to develop the Naracoorte Caves into a major tourist destination for the region and the state. The caves are South Australia’s only World Heritage site and there is significant potential for the caves to attract many more visitors to the area.

- Road signage is important self-drive tourists and could be improved across the region.

Environment

South East Drainage Network

- Community concern about the Drainage Network has not changed since the recent Citizens’ Panel report.

- It is reported that many local people would not be able to afford any increased levy to pay for maintenance.
• A significant problem with drainage infrastructure is that many bridges in the network cannot support vehicles above three tonnes or wider than 4.5 metres. This means many farmers have to drive long distances to transport machinery between paddocks, as they cannot use some of the bridges.

Coastal Protection

• District Council of Robe reports that while the marine parks process was implemented very well, it did not protect any high value coastal cliff faces. The Council has implemented protection for a section of cliff face in the town, which the Council believes could become a showpiece for excellence in coastal cliff face protection.

• Storm surges and sea level rises are a concern in the Robe area.

• It is reported that higher resolution Lidar data would be very helpful for coastal protection and local government planning generally.

Coal Seam Gas

• The community is concerned about the prospect of coal seam gas mining in the region.

• Of particular concern is the prospect of drilling through the region’s aquifer to access the gas below. Many agricultural and horticultural operations are dependent on water from the aquifer for irrigation.

• The community is extremely concerned about the risk of contamination of the aquifer from exploration and also about how mining infrastructure would be maintained during and post-mining to protect the aquifer.

Robe Golf Club Expansion

• Robe Golf Club is seeking support to resolve longstanding environmental issues associated with extending the golf course from fourteen holes to eighteen. The Club has purchased land for the extension, but for the past nine years it has been unable to progress the work due to the inability to get approval to clear native vegetation.

Waste Management

• Waste management in the upper Limestone Coast is an issue. There is a need for a landfill to be established in the northern part of the region. A previous proposal in the Tatiara area was not approved due to planning regulations.

Heritage Preservation

• There is concern that the State Government is giving a low priority to heritage issues and is considering selling a number of heritage-listed properties.