

INQUIRY INTO BENEFICIAL AND PRODUCTIVE POST- MINING LAND USE

Organisation: Biortica Agimed & Green Farmers

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Submission for Medicinal Cannabis Growers in Upper Hunter, New South Wales

Biortica Agrimed | Green Farmers

Introduction

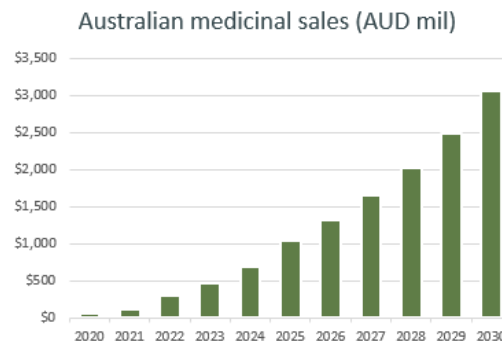
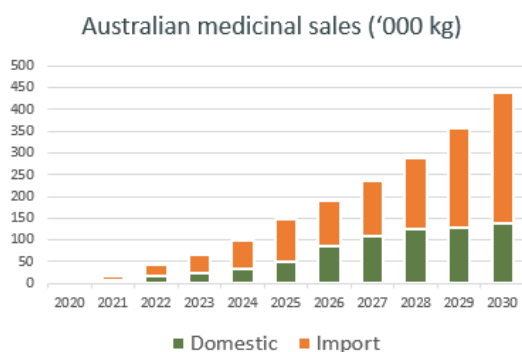
Medicinal cannabis is currently legal in Australia, providing an existing framework that does not require further legislative changes to support its cultivation. This submission highlights the economic, cultural, and technological opportunities associated with medicinal cannabis growing in the Upper Hunter region, along with the critical need to reskill and provide secure employment for the local workforce transitioning from the coal industry.

Economic Opportunities

Medicinal cannabis cultivation presents significant economic benefits for the Upper Hunter area. The industry has the potential to create numerous jobs, from cultivation and harvesting to processing and distribution. These opportunities can revitalize local economies, particularly in rural areas where traditional industries may be declining. Additionally, the medicinal cannabis industry can attract investment, both domestically and internationally, bolstering regional economic growth.

The 2023 Update to the Hunter Regional Economic Development Strategy emphasizes the region's focus on diversifying its economic base, particularly as traditional industries such as coal mining phase out. By promoting advanced manufacturing and high-tech horticulture, the medicinal cannabis industry can align with these strategic goals, supporting sustainable economic development.

The future growth and economic benefit from the medicinal cannabis market does not require any further legislative changes. The market has continued to grow at an estimated CAGR of 43% per annum and currently 80% of all medicinal cannabis is supplied by import material from Canada, South Africa, and Colombia to name a few. This presents an opportunity to meet existing demand from locally produced medicinal cannabis.



Workforce Reskilling and Employment Security

As the coal industry winds down its operations in the Upper Hunter region, there is an urgent need to reskill the existing workforce to ensure secure employment opportunities. The medicinal cannabis industry offers a viable solution, providing new jobs that require various skill sets, from agricultural techniques to advanced manufacturing and biotechnology. By investing in training programs and educational initiatives, we can equip the local workforce with the necessary skills to thrive in this emerging industry, ensuring long-term employment security and economic stability.

Additionally, the Inquiry into Beneficial and Productive Post-Mining Land Use emphasizes the need to reskill and retrain current workforces to adapt to new industries. This aligns perfectly with the objectives of the medicinal cannabis industry, which can provide immediate and future employment opportunities for those affected by the coal industry's decline.

Cultural Support

The Upper Hunter region has a strong agricultural heritage and a community that is increasingly supportive of innovative farming practices. Medicinal cannabis fits well within this context, as it leverages the area's existing expertise in agriculture. Community acceptance and cultural support are critical for the successful integration of new crops and industries. The people of Upper Hunter have shown an openness to new agricultural ventures, which bodes well for the acceptance and success of medicinal cannabis cultivation.

High-Tech Horticulture and Advanced Manufacturing

Medicinal cannabis cultivation in the Upper Hunter region offers a unique opportunity to scale up high-tech horticulture practices. The industry requires advanced growing techniques, including controlled environment agriculture (CEA), which can lead to innovations in horticultural practices. These advancements can spill over into other agricultural sectors, further benefiting the region.

Moreover, the processing and manufacturing of medicinal cannabis products necessitate sophisticated technology and processes. Establishing these facilities in the Upper Hunter can position the region as a leader in advanced manufacturing within the agricultural sector. This can also create high-skill jobs and foster a knowledge-based economy, further diversifying the economic base of the region.

The Hunter Regional Plan 2041 also emphasizes the development of high-tech industries and the importance of innovation hubs, such as the Williamstown Special Activation Precinct and the Hunter Hydrogen Hub. The inclusion of medicinal cannabis cultivation aligns with these broader regional development goals, supporting sustainable and technologically advanced industry growth.



Conclusion

In summary, medicinal cannabis cultivation in the Upper Hunter region is not only viable within the existing legislative framework but also presents substantial economic and technological opportunities. The cultural support for agricultural innovation in the area enhances the potential for success. By leveraging high-tech horticulture and advanced manufacturing, the Upper Hunter can become a leader in the medicinal cannabis industry, benefiting the local community and economy.

Biortica Agrimed and Green Farmers (a wholly owned subsidiary specializing in the cultivation of medicinal cannabis) Australia's leading B2B medicinal cannabis company. With our single largest site located in New South Wales already and a strategy to expand the footprint to displace the 80% of imported medicinal cannabis the business is committed to expanding cultivation capacity and adding further supporting services around future facilities. The opportunity to develop a 'cannabis industrial park' of the future that cultivates, processes, stores and distributes medicinal cannabis from a central location will see a multiplier effect of 3-4.5 times the economic benefit from cultivation alone.

Furthermore, as the coal industry phases out, the medicinal cannabis sector offers a critical pathway for reskilling the workforce and providing secure employment, ensuring the economic sustainability and prosperity of the Upper Hunter region. This aligns with the broader goals of the Hunter Regional Economic Development Strategy and the Inquiry into Beneficial and Productive Post-Mining Land Use.

Biortica has both the commercial and financial capacity as a market leader to play a significant role in any strategy for the Hunter Region.