

Luke Mortimer | 28th Apr 2014 10:00 AM

REGIONAL Development Australia Northern Rivers has told the Federal Government the "high Australian dollar, a propensity for small land holdings, an ageing workforce and lack of high speed internet" are preventing farmers from increasing profit and productivity.

It also said improving infrastructure and maintaining the region's "clean and green" image is crucial to the success of local agricultural industries.

RDA raised the points in a submission to the government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper on April 17.

The submission included a raft of recommendations and was strongly in favour of a speedy implementation of commercial-grade broadband.

"Investment in enabling infrastructure, including transport routes and commercial-grade broadband will improve access to domestic and international markets and assist farmers to improve profitability and reach new export markets," the submission said.

"Innovation in responding to market opportunities should be encouraged, and existing Commonwealth schemes such as AusIndustry's R and D Tax Incentive should be resourced, so they can be promoted more actively to small agricultural producers."

The submission spruiked the "invaluable role" of agricultural cooperatives, such as Norco, in spurring economic development across the region. It also spoke about a tendency for local farmers to diversify for additional income.

"Responding to market opportunities, some Northern Rivers farmers have accessed less traditional markets, such as dry-land rice, pecans and organic produce, and moved into value-adding on farm, including nut oils, mueslis, artisan cheeses, chilli-based condiments, marinated olives, tea tree products and bison grazing," the submission stated.

#### Farming Facts

The Northern Rivers is a base for 7,710 agricultural businesses.

It has 89% of land mass zoned for agricultural production.

Grazing is the primary agricultural land use.

The region's 1,637 horticultural businesses made up almost 30% of the total number in NSW.

The region produces 100% of NSW macadamias, 98.5% of cane sugar, 96.8% of blueberries, 82% of bananas, 65% of fresh tomatoes and 32% of soybeans.