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Huge opportunities waiting in the wings for Tasmania if government removes barriers on our hemp industry

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The Senate inquiry report provides a practical road map for change in Australia's position on hemp products, writes **Richard Colbeck**

For too long, hemp has been treated as a niche industry in Australia. The evidence gathered through the Senate inquiry into opportunities for the development of a hemp industry makes it clear that view is outdated.

What we found is that hemp represents a genuine opportunity to strengthen Australian agriculture, support manufacturing, create regional jobs and contribute to a more sustainable economy. The question is no longer whether hemp has potential.

The question is whether governments are prepared to remove the barriers preventing that potential from being realised.

When I initiated this inquiry in 2025, I wanted to better understand how hemp could contribute to Australian farming systems, soil health and the circular economy. Over the course of the inquiry, the committee heard from growers, processors, manufacturers, researchers and industry

representatives from around the country. We also visited businesses in Meander Valley and the Northern Midlands to see first-hand the innovation already occurring within the sector in Tasmania. The message was remarkably consistent.

Producers have demonstrated that hemp can be successfully grown and processed. Businesses have shown that hemp can be used in everything from building products and textiles to food and industrial applications. Researchers continue to identify new opportunities for the crop across agriculture, manufacturing and environmental management.

Yet despite this promise, the industry remains constrained.

The biggest challenge facing hemp is no longer proving its value. It is overcoming regulation that has failed to keep pace with industry development.

Growers and businesses repeatedly raised concerns about inconsistent rules between states and territories, duplicated compliance requirements and uncertainty for investors. Instead of focusing on expanding production, entering new markets or creating jobs, many businesses are spending valuable time and resources navigating a patchwork of regulatory frameworks.

Australia cannot seriously talk about improving productivity, growing regional industries and strengthening sovereign manufacturing capability while allowing unnecessary red tape to hold back sectors with clear economic potential.

The Senate inquiry report provides a practical road map for change.

It recommends simplifying and harmonising regulations, improving recognition of licences across jurisdictions, reducing administrative burdens on businesses, supporting export growth and increasing the use of hemp-based products through government procurement.

Importantly, the report also calls for the development of a national framework to improve co-ordination and provide greater certainty for growers, processors and investors.

These recommendations are not radical. They are commonsense reforms designed to allow an emerging industry to compete on a level playing field.

The benefits extend well beyond individual businesses.

For farmers, hemp offers an opportunity to diversify income streams and improve resilience.

For regional communities, it can support new processing facilities, manufacturing investment and local employment. For Australia more broadly, it represents an opportunity to build domestic supply chains and reduce reliance on imported products.

There are environmental benefits as well. Hemp has the potential to contribute to healthier farming systems, provide additional rotational options for producers and support the development of innovative products that align with growing consumer demand for sustainable materials.

At a time when policymakers are searching for industries that can deliver economic growth while supporting regional Australia, hemp deserves serious attention.

This is particularly relevant for Tasmania. Our state has become a leader in hemp production and value-added manufacturing. The expertise already exists. The businesses are already investing. The opportunity is already here.

What has been missing is a policy environment that gives the industry confidence to grow.

The inquiry has done the work of identifying the barriers and building a pathway forward. The evidence is clear and the recommendations are practical.

Now it is up to governments to act.

If Australia is serious about supporting farmers, strengthening regional economies and building future manufacturing capability, we should not allow unnecessary regulation and policy inertia to stand in the way.

The opportunity is there. The road



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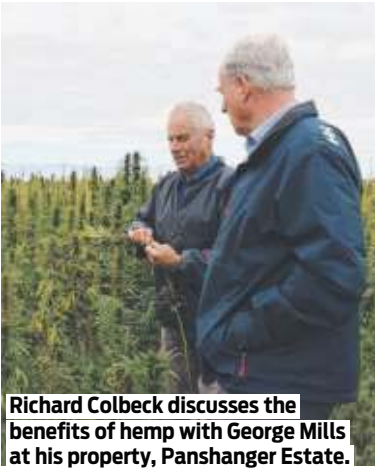
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map is on the table. It's time to unlock the full potential of Australia's hemp industry.

Richard Colbeck is a Liberal Senator for Tasmania



Richard Colbeck discusses the benefits of hemp with George Mills at his property, Panshanger Estate.