



NICK MCBRIDE MP
MEMBER FOR MACKILLOP

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Protecting the Limestone Coast while planning for Australia's future

Nick McBride MP, Member for MacKillop

The Limestone Coast is not just another region on a map. It is one of South Australia's most productive agricultural and food-producing landscapes, generating billions of dollars each year, supporting thousands of jobs and underpinning food security well beyond our state's borders. In regions like ours, agriculture is the backbone of the economy and community life.

That is why proposals for rare-earth exploration and potential strip-mining in and around the Koppamurra–Wrattontully region have raised strong and legitimate concerns. These concerns are not ideological or anti-development. They reflect a practical question: how do we balance the national need for critical minerals with the long-term value of prime agricultural land that has sustained families and communities for generations?

A key issue is the underlying economic viability of rare-earth projects. While rehabilitation may be mandated, there is a real risk that tight commercial margins could result in remediation becoming a compliance exercise rather than a genuine restoration of productive farmland. Global geopolitical pressures, including strategic agreements with the United States, may also be accelerating rare-earth development in ways that undervalue agriculture's enduring contribution to food and fibre production in this region.

I recognise Australia's responsibility to diversify critical mineral supply chains, but I stand with landowners and constituents calling for a modern, fair and transparent approach to exploration and mining. That is why I support the five key outcomes advanced by the Limestone Coast Sustainable Futures group as the basis for sensible policy reform.

First, South Australia's Mining Act must be modernised. Designed decades ago, it does not adequately reflect today's realities of productive private farmland, complex water systems and established communities. Reform must deliver stronger protections for landholders, better oversight and fair compensation, while still providing certainty for responsible miners.

Second, we need an agricultural blueprint that recognises not all land is equal. High-value cropping, grazing, forestry and viticultural land delivers multi-generational returns. Policy decisions should transparently compare the long-term economic, social and environmental value of agriculture with projected mining benefits, with high thresholds where agriculture delivers greater value.



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Third, transparency must replace secrecy. Confidentiality and gag clauses erode trust and divide communities. Landholders, Traditional Owners and communities must be free to speak openly, with transparent consultation and public reporting the norm.

Fourth, rigorous local science must inform decisions before disturbance occurs. The Limestone Coast has world-class research assets, including SARDI's Struan Research Centre and the Kybybolite precinct. Local evidence must carry more weight than modelling from unrelated landscapes. If realistic remediation outcomes cannot be demonstrated upfront, approval should not proceed.

Finally, agriculture needs a strong, independent voice. Other states have recognised this through roles such as an Agricultural Commissioner. While personally, I am not yet convinced that this is the way forward, I do believe we should have a conversation around the best way to ensure food production, water security and farmland protection are properly weighed in government decisions.

Critical minerals matter for clean energy, manufacturing and national security, but regional communities should not bear a disproportionate burden, particularly when they already deliver proven, renewable and intergenerational economic value. Agriculture in the Limestone Coast is not speculative; it is enduring.

These five outcomes are practical and balanced. They do not stop development, but ensure it proceeds only where it genuinely makes sense and protects long-term regional prosperity.

As the Member for MacKillop, I will continue to advocate for farmers, landholders, Traditional Owners, researchers and local businesses. Decisions made in Adelaide or Canberra must reflect the lived realities of regional South Australia and respect the unique value of places like the Limestone Coast.

Our community deserves transparency, evidence-based policy and rules that put agriculture, water and long-term resilience at the centre of decision-making.

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