



14 June 2024

Senator Deborah O'Neill
Chair, Parliamentary Joint Committee on
Corporations and Financial Services
PO Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra
Canberra ACT 2600
seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au

Westpac Place
Level 19, 275 Kent Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
www.westpac.com.au

Re: The Financial Services Regulatory Framework in Relation to Financial Abuse

Dear Senator,

Westpac welcomes the opportunity to write to the Committee regarding the financial services regulatory framework in relation to financial abuse.

Domestic and family violence (DFV), financial abuse and coercive control are urgent issues for the community, our people and our customers. Of those who seek support from DFV, 90 per cent are affected by financial abuse¹. Westpac has long been committed to addressing these issues, recognising that as one of Australia's largest companies we have an important role to play in helping create a positive social and economic impact.

We note the Australian Banking Association (ABA) has made a submission to the Committee on behalf the industry. As a member of the ABA, Westpac has contributed to and fully endorses the recommendations within the ABA submission. We urge the Committee to support the suggested regulatory changes, which would make a significant difference to our ability to support customers who are experiencing financial abuse.

To provide the Committee with additional and practical context, we would like to extend an invitation to the Committee to meet with Westpac's specialist Customer Vulnerability Team in Adelaide. We feel it would be of great benefit for the Committee to see first-hand how banks are supporting customers on the frontline, and to give the Committee a real-time overview of how our teams identify, prevent and respond to financial abuse cases day in, day out. This would provide the Committee with a practical experience of some of the challenges and inconsistencies our specialist support teams must navigate under current regulatory settings.

Westpac's ongoing detection and prevention measures

Westpac is continuing to invest in new detection and prevention measures to better protect customers from financial abuse. This includes:

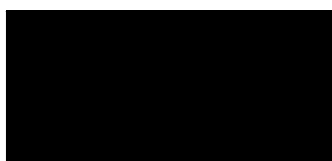
- **Proactive monitoring of Power of Attorney abuse:** Westpac introduced an added layer of transaction monitoring to alert on the early warning signs of misuse of a Power of Attorney.
- **Safeguarding against abusive transaction messages:** Westpac has implemented monitoring technology which blocks transactions containing inappropriate or offensive language in transaction descriptions in real-time. When detected, customers perpetrating the abuse are warned and exited where appropriate.
- **Safety by Design:** We are embedding safety into the development stage of new bank products and the review process for existing products. We've implemented mandatory customer training for any employees involved in product development.

¹ UNSW Report, 'Tackling Economic Financial Abuse Linked to Domestic Family Violence', <https://www.unsw.edu.au/arts-design-architecture/our-research/research-impact/case-studies/tackling-economic-financial-abuse-linked-to-domestic-family-violence>

- **Zero tolerance for abuse:** Westpac recently updated its Terms & Conditions for transaction and savings products, stipulating a zero-tolerance policy for customers who use the bank's products and services to engage in financial abuse or unacceptable account conduct.
- **Extra care support:** Westpac has a dedicated team, Priority Assist, to provide support to customers experiencing financial abuse or domestic violence. Additionally, all customer-facing employees complete online DFV training.
- **Protecting privacy:** Helping protect customers who report DFV, including through the creation of a separate transaction account that can only be seen by the account owner, changing online banking login details, and confidential communication methods agreed with customer.
- **Protecting financial assets:** Support offered through financial hardship relief, changes to arrangements on joint accounts requiring approval from both customers to withdraw funds, removing or changing online banking access, or cancelling credit cards.
- **Access to emergency funds:** To help ensure the safety of customers, assessed on a case-by-case basis by our specialist Priority Assist team.
- **Counselling:** Where appropriate, we may provide customers with information about support beyond banking such as independent counselling and DFV support services.

Should you wish to discuss further our invitation to visit our Customer Vulnerability Team, please contact: Ms Andrea Forbes, Head of Government Affairs and Policy ([REDACTED]), ([REDACTED]).

Yours faithfully,



Richard Collyer
Director – Government Affairs, Reputation Strategy & WIB Corporate Affairs