

Financial Services Regulatory Framework in Relation to Financial Abuse

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services

Latitude Financial Services

Opening statement

Thursday 8 August 2024

Cassie Brice

General Manager, Customer Care

Latitude Financial

Check against delivery

Good afternoon Chair and Committee members. My name is Cassie Brice, I am the General Manager of Customer Care at Latitude Financial Services. With me today is Mark Brudenell, Latitude's Chief Risk Officer.

Latitude recognises financial abuse is a pervasive issue impacting individuals, households and communities across Australia. We are focussed on ensuring Latitude's customers have the support they need, when they need it – and, wherever possible, reducing the risk of harm before it occurs.

We provide a diverse range of support services to customers, which I will speak to today. While Latitude's responsibility is to its customers, a responsibility we take seriously, we also recognise this is an industry-wide challenge, requiring a comprehensive industry-wide response.

Latitude therefore welcomes greater collaboration, coordination and, where required, regulatory change in the financial industry.

We acknowledge the spotlight this Committee is shining on this critical issue and welcome the opportunity to appear before you today.

Importantly, we also recognise the courage and conviction of the victim-survivors who have shared their deeply traumatic stories and thank them for their strength in doing so.

By way of background, Latitude is an Australian ASX-listed non-bank lender that provides credit cards, personal loans and motor loans, serving the needs of around 2 million customers in Australia and New Zealand. Of Latitude's 2 million customers, around 25,000 are now in Hardship, some of which are a result of financial abuse.

Latitude has a range of policies and procedures to ensure our employees are well-equipped to support vulnerable customers, including those experiencing financial abuse and victim-survivors.

We have recently engaged a specialist community-based organisation to assess our policies and practices and to identify further opportunities for improvement – building on the wide support we now make available.

We also engage regularly with community groups such as Financial Counselling Australia and Way Forward to support individual customer cases, as well as exchange feedback on ways to improve our practices.

We also:

- Deliver Mandatory Vulnerable Customer training to all employees, and further specialist training to relevant frontline staff;
- Have a Vulnerable Customer Policy and a Vulnerable Customer Standard, which set out Latitude's approach, including how we interact with vulnerable customers;
- And a Vulnerable Customer Hub, which provides additional guidance for employees to deliver targeted support, including referring customers to a diverse range of external support services.

Let me conclude by re-stating Latitude's commitment to strengthening efforts to combat financial abuse in the financial industry, including greater collaboration among all stakeholders which will be required to effect meaningful and lasting change.

I look forward to answering the Committee's questions.

ENDS