



Australian Government

30 September 2022



Australian
**Small Business and
Family Enterprise**
Ombudsman

Committee Secretariat
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

via email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022 [Provisions]

Small businesses consistently struggle to adequately protect their operations from natural disasters. The *Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022 [Provisions]* will support improvements to insurance availability and affordability, and strengthen the resilience of disaster-prone communities. We have worked extensively with small business through our recent work on natural disaster preparedness and resilience, and as such offer the following comments.

- 1. Local engagement is vital to successful resilience building.** Communities facing regular severe weather events are experienced in managing the risks they face and resulting impacts. Resilience and risk reduction initiatives should embrace local knowledge and experience, and build on existing local initiatives. Supporting local initiatives like 'Cyclone Saturday' in northern Queensland through the Small Business Friendly Councils initiative would contribute to community-specific resilience.
- 2. Critical infrastructure needs to be 'disaster proofed'.** Small business owners consistently report failure of infrastructure in a disaster. Small businesses which invest in digital record keeping to improve resilience often find networks are down for extended periods of time due to a range of factors, often beyond the telecommunications carrier's control. Resilience investments should ensure that critical infrastructure is fit for purpose and appropriately hardened to minimise the effects of natural disasters on communities.
- 3. Consideration should be given to resilience actions that will increase insurance availability and affordability.** Insurance affordability and availability is increasingly challenging for small business, particularly those seeking natural disaster cover. Investing in greater resilience measures for at-risk communities is a key aspect to improving insurance affordability and availability. While resilience investments are not the "silver bullet" to solving all insurance issues, they are an important part of the solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Connor Downes

The Hon. Bruce Billson
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman

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