

Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018

Report No. 5, 56th Parliament Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee May 2018

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ATSIDNQ	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland
Bill	Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
committee	Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
department	Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors
DSA	Disability Services Act 2006
Disability Services and Other Legislation Amendment Act	Disability Services and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2016
FLP	Fundamental legislative principle
IGA	Intergovernmental Agreement on Nationally Consistent Worker Screening and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
Minister	Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
OQPC	Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel
Police Service Administration Act	Police Service Administration Act 1990
POQA	Parliament of Queensland Act 2001
QDAC	Queensland Disability Advisory Council
Standing Orders	Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly
WWCC	Working with children check (also known as the blue card check)

Note: All Acts are Queensland Acts, unless specified otherwise.

Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee's examination of the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018.

The committee's task was to consider the policy to be achieved by the legislation and the application of fundamental legislative principles – that is, to consider whether the Bill has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals, and to the institution of Parliament.

On behalf of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who made written submissions on the Bill. I also thank our Parliamentary Service staff and the department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors for their assistance with our consideration of the Bill.

I commend this report to the House.

Alerse.

Aaron Harper MP Chair

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018 be passed.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Role of the committee

The Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly.¹ The committee's areas of portfolio responsibility are:

- Health and Ambulance Services
- Communities, Women, Youth and Child Safety
- Domestic and Family Violence Prevention, and
- Disability Services and Seniors.

The committee is responsible for examining each Bill in its portfolio areas to consider the:

- policy to be given effect by the legislation, and
- application of fundamental legislative principles.²

Further information about the committee's work can be found on its <u>webpage</u>.

1.2 Bill referral

On 20 March 2018, the Hon Coralee O'Rourke MP, Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors introduced the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018 (Bill) into the Legislative Assembly. The Bill was referred to the committee on 20 March 2018, with the committee required to report to the Legislative Assembly by 8 May 2018.

1.3 Inquiry process

On 27 March 2018, the committee invited stakeholders and subscribers to make written submissions on the Bill. The committee accepted four submissions. The submitters are listed at Appendix A.

On 23 March and 16 April 2018, the committee received public oral briefings about the Bill from the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. The departmental officers who provided those briefings are listed at Appendix B.

On 16 April 2018, the committee held a public hearing to hear evidence from Age and Disability Advocacy Australia in relation to their submission. The witnesses who appeared at the hearing are listed at Appendix C.

The committee also invited the Queensland Family and Child Commission and Queensland Advocacy Incorporated to appear at the hearing to discuss their submissions, however both organisations declined the invitation. Queensland Advocacy Incorporated provided an addendum to their submission on 13 April 2018 which the committee subsequently accepted and published.

The submissions, correspondence from the department and transcripts of the briefings and hearing are available on the committee's webpage.

¹ The Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee (the committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 15 February 2018 under the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001, s 88 and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly (Standing Order 194).

² Schedule 6, Standing Rules and Orders.

1.4 Policy objectives of the Bill

According to the explanatory notes, the objectives of the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018 are to amend:

- the Police Services Administration Act 1990 to enable Queensland to participate in national information-sharing obligations for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) worker screening under the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Framework and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Nationally Consistent Worker Screening and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and
- the *Disability Services Act 2006* to clarify beyond doubt screening requirements for sole traders during the transition period until full scheme implementation of the NDIS in Queensland.³

The National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Framework was agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 9 December 2016. Under the framework, all jurisdictions agreed to a nationally-consistent approach to worker screening, including the assessment of an expanded range of criminal history information.⁴ The Commonwealth will be responsible for the development of national policy settings for the screening of workers, and the states and territory governments will remain responsible for operating worker screening units under state based legislation.

At the briefing on 23 March 2018, departmental officers explained to the committee that the Bill is the first stage of legislative amendments that are necessary to prepare Queensland for full scheme operation of the NDIS, one of the most significant social policy reforms undertaken in Australia:

The NDIS is the new way of providing support for Australians with disability, their families and their carers. That includes people whose disability is an intellectual, sensory or physical impairment or a psychiatric condition. The NDIS supports people with a permanent and significant disability to participate in all aspects of life. Under the NDIS, people who meet the eligibility criteria will have access to reasonable and necessary supports that enable them to achieve their goals and aspirations, including for social and economic participation. Disability services will be provided over a person's lifetime where they need it.

A key tenet of the NDIS is that participants will have choice and control over their disability supports, including being able to choose who provides that support, how that support is delivered and managed and, importantly, paying for those supports. Participants purchase those supports and pay for those supports themselves through their package. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a robust and consistent quality and safeguards arrangement under the scheme.⁵

Full scheme implementation commences in Queensland on 1 July 2019.

The amendments proposed in the Bill meet the obligations under the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework to share an expanded range of criminal history information as part of a nationally-consistent worker screening system.⁶

The expanded range of criminal history information proposed to be shared for the screening of disability support workers is consistent with the information shared currently for working with children checks (WWCCs).⁷ In effect, for assessing an application for a 'yellow card' the police will be able to

³ Explanatory notes, p 2.

⁴ Explanatory notes, p 1.

⁵ Helen Ferguson, Department, *Public briefing transcript*, 23 March 2018, p 1.

⁶ Helen Ferguson, Department, *Public briefing transcript*, 23 March 2018, p 2.

⁷ Explanatory notes, p 2.

² Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

share with interstate disability-related employment screening bodies the same expanded range of criminal history information they currently share with interstate screening bodies for a WWCC for an application to obtain a 'blue card' to work with children. The expanded range of criminal history information includes information on:

- spent convictions⁸ for offences committed in Queensland and elsewhere
- charges against the person for offences alleged to have been committed in Queensland and elsewhere, including pending charges
- information about a charge or conviction, including non-conviction charge information, and
- convictions that have expired under the *Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1986.*

1.5 Consultation on the Bill

Departmental officers advised the committee that the development of this Bill built upon consultation undertaken by the Commonwealth in relation to the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework:

Between February and April 2015, the Commonwealth undertook an extensive consultation process on the framework, including face-to-face consultation, 16 public meetings in capital cities and regional locations in each state and territory, written submissions and an online discussion forum. The Commonwealth also took specific targeted consultation on a consultation paper relating only to worker screening. The Queensland Disability Advisory Council was also consulted on the changes in this bill by the department.⁹

The explanatory notes explain that the Queensland Disability Advisory Council (QDAC) has a key role in providing advice to the Queensland Government and the Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors. The notes also state that members of QDAC were broadly supportive of the policy objectives of the Bill but cautioned the need to ensure there are appropriate risk assessment frameworks in place to ensure worker screening is focused on identifying individuals who pose a risk of harm to people with disability.¹⁰

The department did not undertake broader consultation on the Bill given that the proposed amendments would expand the range of criminal history information being shared for disability-related worker screening consistent with the current approach adopted for WWCCs and the framework endorsed by COAG.

The submitters to the committee's inquiry into the Bill raised no concerns about the department's consultation processes.

Feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland

The committee sought feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland (ATSIDNQ), through Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia), about aspects of the Bill and the potential impacts it might have on the availability of disability support services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The ATSIDNQ is a network of over 800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families, carers and supporters.

^{8 &#}x27;Spent convictions' are convictions for which the rehabilitation period has expired. Spent convictions would not normally be able to be disclosed under the *Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1986* which operates to prevent a person disclosing a conviction of another person where the rehabilitation period has expired.

⁹ Elizabeth Bianchi, Department, *Public briefing transcript*, 23 March 2018, p 3.

¹⁰ Explanatory notes, p 4.

The committee sought its feedback in response to the following questions:

Can the ADA (or its members) provide the committee any additional information or perspectives on the role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities themselves might play in the assessment of yellow card applications?

For example, regarding applications for yellow cards to provide disability services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and in circumstances where carers (providers) might otherwise not be available within a community, is that community best placed to consider any issues of past criminal histories, particularly where they are long distant?

The questions were raised for discussion at a meeting of ATSIDNQ Local Champions on 20 April 2018. Their response to the committee made the following points which are supportive of the policy intent of the Bill:

- workforce screening processes should not be adapted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- safeguards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability need to be of the highest standards
- one Local Champion, an Aboriginal man with a disability, made comment that he applied for a yellow card himself and whilst he felt it was a long process, he also felt reassured that the process was in place and the yellow cards weren't just handed out to anyone
- new providers of disability services are popping up all over Queensland. Many of these services have been established by organisations that see an opportunity to make easy money. It is important to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability from services that are not focused on improving the lives and wellbeing of people with disability, and
- economic participation, employment and workforce shortages should not overshadow the risks associated with allowing/pushing an unsuitable person into the role of providing care and support to a vulnerable person with a disability.¹¹

The committee notes that the ATSIDNQ was unable to engage with regional, rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the topics raised by the committee, in the limited time frame available.

1.6 Should the Bill be passed?

Standing Order 132(1) requires the committee to determine whether or not to recommend that the Bill be passed.

After examining the Bill, including the policy objectives which it will achieve and consideration of the information provided by the department and from submitters, the committee recommends that the Bill be passed.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill 2018 be passed.

¹¹ ADA Australia, *Correspondence*, 24 April 2018.

2 Examination of the Bill

This section discusses issues raised during the committee's examination of the Bill. The submissions to the committee were generally supportive of the Bill and its objectives, and raised no concerns about specific clauses.

The Bill comprises three parts:

Part 1 – Preliminary (Clauses 1 & 2)

Part 2 – Amendment of Disability Services Act 2006 (clauses 3 to 34), and

Part 3 – Amendment of Police Service Administration Act 1990 (clauses 34 to 40).

2.1 Part 1 – Preliminary

Clause 2 provides that Part 3 commences on a day to be fixed by proclamation.

2.2 Part 2 – Amendment of *Disability Services Act 2006* (clauses 3 to 34)

The proposed amendments to the *Disability Services Act 2006* are aimed at ensuring that the requirements in the Act for registered providers of disability support services equally apply to individual who provide those same services, and that consistent screening takes place during the transition period.

Clause 4 inserts a new definition for 'sole trader'. Sole traders are individuals who are self-employed, NDIS-registered providers who personally provide disability services, as distinct from employees of entities that are registered providers.

Clauses 4 & 5 clarify that the yellow card application provisions apply unequivocally to sole traders.

Clause 13 provides that a person who is a sole trader must not provide disability services unless the person has a current yellow card, a current blue card that has not been suspended and they have applied for a yellow card exemption, or they have applied for the renewal of their yellow card but their application has not been decided. A maximum penalty of 250 penalty points¹² (\$31,537.50) applies if a sole trader breaches this provision.

Clauses 16 & 17 require a sole trader to disclose any changes in their criminal history to the chief Executive of the department. A maximum penalty of 100 penalty units (\$12,615) applies to breaches of this requirement.

Comments from submissions

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated submitted that the enhanced worker screening provisions should apply to all workers, irrespective of the way in which they are employed or engaged.¹³ The department in its advice to the committee noted that the intent of the Bill is to clarify beyond doubt that the screening requirements under the Disability Services Act apply to sole traders and all other service providers operating in Queensland during the NDIS transition period, and that these changes will ensure that consistent screening takes place regardless of whether a person delivering disability services is self-employed or engaged by a service provider.¹⁴

The author of Submission No 1 proposed an exemption for family members providing disability support.¹⁵ In its advice to the committee, the department clarified that there are existing exemptions

¹² The Penalties and Sentences (Penalty Unit Value) Amendment Regulation 2017 provides that the value of a penalty unit is \$126.15.

¹³ Queensland Advocacy Incorporated, Submission 2, p 3.

¹⁴ Department, *Correspondence*, 13 March 2018, p 3.

¹⁵ Name withheld, Submission 1, p 1.

under the *Disability Services Act 2006* from yellow card screening requirements for relatives of people with disability, and that these exemptions are not affected by the Bill.¹⁶

The effect of the existing s 46 of the Act is that a volunteer is not required to obtain a yellow card for the purpose of assisting the care of their relative. In addition, yellow card screening under the Act is only required if the person is engaged by a funded non-government service provider or an NDIS-registered provider.¹⁷ A person who signs an Individual Funding Agreement with the department or who is responsible for the funding must provide a suitable criminal history check to the department, and this could, in some circumstances, include a parent who is managing the funding for their child.¹⁸

2.3 Part 3 – Amendment of Police Service Administration Act 1990 (clauses 34 to 40)

The clauses of Part 3 expand the existing legislative framework contained in the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* that allows the sharing of the expanded criminal history information for WWCCs to disability-related employment screening.

Clause 36 inserts a new definition in section 1.4 (Definitions) for disability-related employment screening, for part 10, division 1B and refers to section 10.2S.

Clause 39 amends section 10.2T to allow the police commissioner to share expanded criminal history information with disability-related worker screening units, as well as child-related worker screening units.

Clause 40 inserts a transitional provision in the form of a new Part 11 Division 11 to provide that the police commissioner's power to share a person's criminal history to an interstate screening unit or approved agency for disability-related employment screening extends to charges for an offence alleged to have been committed before the commencement of the amending Act.

Comments from submissions

The Queensland Family & Child Commission submission is supportive of the Bill to enable Queensland to participate in national information-sharing obligations for NDIS worker screening.¹⁹

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia noted in their submission that the Bill will enable Queensland to progress its commitment to nationally-consistent worker screening under the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Framework, and consider the introduction of comprehensive and nationally consistent worker screening to be an important element in ensuring the safety of NDIS recipients.²⁰

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated noted that it provided feedback to the Department of Social Services (Commonwealth) when consultation was undertaken in 2017 about the proposed arrangement for worker screening at full scheme NDIS. At that time, they agreed with the importance of a nationally consistent approach to worker screening.²¹

¹⁶ Department, *Correspondence*, 13 March 2018, p 7.

¹⁷ Department, *Correspondence*, 13 March 2018, p 7.

¹⁸ Department, *Correspondence*, 13 March 2018, p 8.

¹⁹ Queensland family & Child Commission, Submission 3, p 1.

²⁰ ADA Australia, Submission 2, p 1.

²¹ Queensland Advocacy Incorporated, Submission 2, p 2.

3 Compliance with the *Legislative Standards Act 1992*

3.1 Fundamental legislative principles

Section 4 of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* states that 'fundamental legislative principles' are the 'principles relating to legislation that underlie a parliamentary democracy based on the rule of law'. The principles include that legislation has sufficient regard to the:

- rights and liberties of individuals, and
- institution of Parliament.

The committee has examined the application of the fundamental legislative principles to the Bill. The committee brings the following to the attention of the Legislative Assembly.

3.1.1 Rights and liberties of individuals

Section 4(2)(a) of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* requires that legislation has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals.

3.1.1.1 Clauses 13, 16 & 17 – Offences and penalties

Clause 13 inserts new section 67A in the *Disability Services Act 2006*, which will prohibit a sole trader from providing disability services unless they hold a current positive notice (yellow card) or exemption notice, except in specified circumstances. A breach attracts a maximum penalty of 250 penalty units.

Clause 16 amends section 75 to require a sole trader to disclose to the chief executive any change in their police information. Failure to do so attracts a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units.

Similarly, clause 17 amends section 77 to provide that a sole trader, not currently engaged by a service provider, must, before providing disability services as a service provider, first disclose to the chief executive any change in their police information. Again, a failure to do so attracts a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units.

These amendments raise fundamental legislative principle issues relating to the rights and liberties of individuals (section 4(2)(a) *Legislative Standards Act 1992*).

The explanatory notes state:

These offences are necessary to ensure that the safety of people with disability is safeguarded and prioritised. The provisions recognise a sole trader operates independently without the opportunity for oversight which arises from an employment relationship. Therefore, it is appropriate that it give rise to an offence if a sole trader does not comply with these requirements.

Consequences imposed by legislation should be proportionate and relevant to the actions to which the consequences are applied by the legislation. The Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel (OQPC) Notebook states: ²²

The desirable attitude should be to maximise the reasonableness, appropriateness and proportionality of the legislative provisions devised to give effect to policy.

Regarding the penalties under these three provisions, the explanatory notes offer this justification:²³

...they are proportionate to the penalties applied in comparable provisions of the [Disability Services Act 2006]. New section 67A is consistent with the existing offence and penalty that [apply] to service providers who engage an individual in contravention of the [Act]. The penalties

Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel, Fundamental Legislative Principles: The OQPC Notebook, p 120.

²³ Explanatory notes, p 3.

for sole traders under amended sections 75 and 77 are consistent with existing penalties, under those sections, that apply to engaged persons who fail to disclose a change in police information to their employer (the service provider).

A penalty should be proportionate to the offence. The OQPC Notebook states: ²⁴

Legislation should provide a higher penalty for an offence of greater seriousness than for a lesser offence. Penalties within legislation should be consistent with each other.

Committee comment

The committee considers that the offences appear to be appropriate to give effect to the objectives of the Bill regarding worker screening and criminal history information.

On balance, the offences and associated penalties in the Bill are considered by the committee to be proportionate and relevant to the objectives of the Bill, and proportionate to the existing penalties in the Bill for similar offences.

3.1.1.2 Part 3 of the Bill clauses 36 - 40 - right to privacy of personal information

Part 3 of the Bill (including clauses 36 - 40) effects amendments to the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* to enable Queensland to participate in national information-sharing obligations for worker screening under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Framework. More specifically, these amendments will enable the Queensland Police Service to supply information regarding charges and spent convictions to interstate screening units. The provisions will override restrictions in the *Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1986*.

These amendments raise fundamental legislative principle issues relating to the rights and liberties of individuals (section 4(2)(a) *Legislative Standards Act 1992*), particularly regarding the right to privacy of personal information.

The explanatory notes recognise the issues of fundamental legislative principle involved, noting that these amendments:²⁵

...may breach the fundamental legislative principle that legislation should have sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals. Specifically, individuals' rights to rehabilitation, privacy, paid employment and the freedom to participate in the community as volunteers are potentially affected. These rights are particularly affected when the expanded criminal history information relates to pending charges, which are yet to be dealt with by a court.

The explanatory notes state that the potential breaches are justified:²⁶

...given the information is being made available to worker screening units for the purposes of employment screening of people working with people with disability. Worker screening units have specialist expertise in assessing such information and the purpose is to safeguard persons vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Committee comment

The committee considers that, on balance, the breaches of privacy are justified given the objectives of the amendments to enhance the protection of often vulnerable persons.

²⁴ Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel, Fundamental Legislative Principles: The OQPC Notebook, p 120.

²⁵ Explanatory notes, p 4.

²⁶ Explanatory notes, p 4.

⁸ Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

3.1.1.3 Clause 33 - retrospective provisions

Clause 33 deals with transitional provisions for the amendments in the Bill relating to the *Disability Services Act 2006*. Clause 33 inserts a new section 342 which provides that any prescribed notice or exemption notice issued to a sole trader prior to commencement remains valid.

Potential FLP issues

On its face, this proposed amendment potentially breaches the fundamental legislative principle that legislation should not adversely affect rights and liberties, or impose obligations, retrospectively.

Section 4(3)(g) of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* provides that legislation should not adversely affect rights and liberties, or impose obligations retrospectively. Strong argument is required to justify an adverse effect on rights and liberties, or imposition of obligations, retrospectively.²⁷

The explanatory notes state:²⁸

... because clarifying amendments are being made, it is necessary to remove any doubt about the validity of yellow card screening decisions (including positive or negative notices) which have been made in relation to sole traders prior to the commencement of these legislative amendments. This provides certainty and fairness for sole traders who have undergone criminal history screening under the DSA. Importantly, the Bill does not impose any obligations retrospectively but merely ensures that decisions that have been made remain valid.

Committee comment

The committee considers that the transitional provisions of the Bill appear appropriate to ensure certainty regarding ongoing processes, and that any retrospective operation appears justified, and does not adversely affect individual rights and obligations.

3.2 Explanatory notes

Part 4 of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* requires that explanatory notes be circulated when a Bill is introduced into the Legislative Assembly, and sets out the information the explanatory notes should contain.

Explanatory notes were tabled with the introduction of the Bill. The explanatory notes are fairly detailed and contain the information required by Part 4 of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* and a reasonable level of background information and commentary to aid understanding of the Bill's aims and origins.

Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel, Fundamental Legislative Principles: The OQPC Notebook, p 55.

²⁸ Explanatory notes, p 4.

Appendix A – Submitters

Sub #	Submitter
001	Name withheld
002	Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI) - Including addendum dated 13 April 2018
003	Queensland Family & Child Commission
004	Age and Disability Advocacy Australia (trading as ADA Australia)

Appendix B – Officials at public departmental briefings

Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors

- Ms Helen Ferguson, Senior Executive Director, Policy and Legislation
- Ms Elizabeth Bianchi, Acting Director, Legal Policy and Legislation Strategy

Appendix C – Witnesses at public hearing, 16 April 2018

Age and Disability Advocacy Australia

- Mr Geoff Rowe, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Anna Harrington, Policy Officer