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Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to articulate and explain COSBOA's intent in all dealings, approach to achieving the organisational goals, and its commitment to advocating for the interests and needs of small businesses at every juncture and opportunity.

Statement of Intent

Small business in Australia is the backbone of the economy. We harness its diversity and provide its people with a voice distinct from big business. Some 42% of Australians are employed by a business with less than 20 employees (another 24% in business with less than 200).

COSBOA is unique. We are a cohort of family and small business industry associations who represent a broad spectrum of industry sectors. We are a community of industry leaders that can express issues, policy reform, and advocacy measures in the best interests of family and small business.

COSBOA's goal at the Government's Jobs + Skills Summit 2022 was to listen and guide the creation of an ideal policy environment, one in which small businesses are recognised, fully included and empowered to grow and thrive. Key policy considerations include access to an appropriately skilled workforce, ease of employment, flexible work environments, equal access to digital solutions and increased capacity for small business owners to skill and upskill.

Our intention was and is to work constructively and cooperatively, to use the opportunity as the catalyst for meaningful change for the betterment of the entire economy now and into the future.

Industrial Relations Reform

Small businesses need a system that enables flexibility in order to be more productive and to employ more people.

The current system is not flexible and easy to navigate for small business who don't have the in-house resources to interpret complex awards and/or negotiate EBAs with their workers and therefore, allow them to compete more effectively with big businesses for talent. As a result, small business owners are often forced to fall back on the Modern Award structures, which constrain their ability to negotiate other aspects of employment and provide many of the benefits, such as flexibility, to their employees and to enjoy the associated productivity benefits.

In a small business, the employer rarely is an expert on workplace relations. Many small businesses are run by an individual, a couple or a family and it is often the owners of the

small business who must navigate all the requirements without the teams of HR and legal staff at the disposal of larger organisations.

Small businesses seek a simpler system. The complex nature of Awards and the inhibitions to embark on any agreement due to the current processes and limitations of the BOOT, with one example being the requirement to consider the hypothetical employee, need to change.

This may include an option to build bespoke agreements that meet their unique needs and those of their employees. A system in which small businesses and their associations can, for example, develop a framework for agreements to suit their small businesses members. Adopting this could give small businesses access to the benefits enjoyed by their larger competitors, effectively addressing a longstanding competitive disadvantage.

Our Approach

COSBOA seeks to collaborate with Government, with employer groups and other key stakeholders to promote the small business perspective and to seek workable solutions.

For example, our MOU with the ACTU is intended to recognise one aspect of the many conversations to pursue our objective, that small business has the flexibility to be more productive and to employ more people. We have not agreed to any particular action, we have agreed to discuss topics and options. Our intention is to obtain productivity enhancing changes, rewards for employees and business while improving protection of both business and employees.

COSBOA is one of many who have competing ideas and needs as to the best improvements to the industrial reforms required to build the labour force of the future. Collaboration with an aim for consensus is required. COSBOA will, as we have always done, maintain a strong small business voice in this discussion, to hold out for reform that fully considers small business. This requires our representatives to work against the current system that is stacked against small business, by having conversations with many organisations such as ACTU, BCA and the Government who previously may not have understood the impact of their mandates on a small business. We will seek to educate, to inform and to influence.

COSBOA has a long and proud history of honest, real, practical, and powerful messages and will continue to be at the forefront of advocacy for the small business sector.

Position Statement

COSBOA does

- Support finding solutions which seek to simplify the current industrial relations system for small businesses and their employees.
- Support the autonomy of each small business to choose whether and how to engage in bespoke workplace agreements
- Support protection for each small business and each employee
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COSBOA does not

- Support the unionisation of small business
- Support compulsory sector-wide or industry bargaining including compulsory multi-employer bargaining
- Support pattern bargaining
- Support any measure that enables or would make strike action more likely within an organisation, within a sector, across sectors or across groups of businesses

COSBOA will work to address the following specific matters (not exhaustive):

- a single “all-hours or blended rate”
- Flexible part-time or full-time employment
- Permanent to Casual conversion process
- Stand-down provisions
- Unfair dismissal
- General protection provisions
- Written determinations from government agencies
- The BOOT

COSBOA

The Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia (COSBOA) is a member-based not-for-profit organisation exclusively representing the interests of small businesses.

The capability, representation and reach of COSBOA is defined by a mix of over 50 national and state-based association members. COSBOA’s strength is its capacity to harness its member’s views and to advance consensus across policy areas that are common to many.

Our member organisations work behind the COSBOA secretariat to assist us with policy development and to guide our advocacy – not just for small business but also for the benefit of the Australians they employ.

In this capacity, COSBOA makes submissions and representations to Government, including its agencies, on issues that affect small business and in pursuit of good policy.