



28 October 1999

JOINT COMMUNIQUE FROM COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND TERRITORY SMALL BUSINESS MINISTERS

The Small Business Ministerial Council (SBMC) met for the first time in Darwin today.

This is an important occasion for small business raising the status of cross government consultation and debate of small business issues and concerns.

The Council discussed a number of key issues affecting small business including, small business assistance programs, micro businesses, electronic commerce, regulatory best practice, and the Goods and Services tax (GST).

Establishment of the Small Business Ministerial Council

The Small Business Ministerial Council replaces the Commonwealth Government's National Small Business Summit initiative and has responsibility for small business issues previously assigned to the Industry, Technology and Regional Development Ministerial Council. It was agreed that the Charter of the Council be reviewed after three years.

Assistance to Small Business

Papers were tabled by each jurisdiction outlining current small business assistance programs. Ministers noted that there is potential for considerable overlap between programs administered by the Commonwealth and the States/Territories.

Ministers agreed that they should work towards eliminating potential duplication. There should also be consultation between the Commonwealth and respective State/Territory jurisdictions on new programs. The Council also agreed to request that the National Executive of Small Business Agencies (NESBA) analyse papers tabled by each jurisdiction with a view to identifying good practice and potential gaps.

Electronic Commerce

Ministers reaffirmed their support for the Business Entry Point (BEP) initiative and committed their agencies to BEP as a portal to government on-line services and to contribute actively to the content of the BEP.

Following Minister Reith's launch of the online Australian Business Number (ABN) registration form, Ministers supported the implementation of the ABN and agreed to work towards the ABN being utilised by the Commonwealth and States/Territories as the unique business identifier.

Regulatory Best Practice

Ministers agreed to continue to exchange information on regulatory best practice and promote widely (including through the BEP) the outcomes of each jurisdiction's regulatory reviews.

The Council also endorsed and agreed to publish two documents that have been developed to assist regulatory agencies on how to effectively consult and communicate with small business on regulatory changes.

Ministers agreed to give the Committee on Regulatory Review (CRR) a mandate to undertake further work on this issue.

GST Compliance and Transition

Ministers reaffirmed the need to raise awareness amongst small and medium sized enterprises of the business implications of the new tax system. The Ministers further acknowledged the work already undertaken by the Australian Taxation Office and the GST Start-Up Assistance Office in this regard.

Minister Reith agreed to write to the Treasurer and suggest that the GST Start-Up Assistance office contact States and Territories to develop and implement appropriate options for facilitating assistance to SMEs with the transition to the GST.

Mr Reith also confirmed that business information material be made available to the States and Territories.

Forward Work Program

Ministers discussed other emerging issues that will be used to develop a forward work program for the Council. These issues included indigenous economic and business development, encouraging growth and export potential of small business, and encouraging skills development in regional areas.

South Australia has volunteered to host the year 2000 meeting.

Attendance included the federal Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Peter Reith; the New South Wales Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Sandra Nori; the Queensland Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Stephen Robertson; the Western Australian Deputy Premier and Minister for Small Business, Hendy Cowan; the Victorian Minister for Small Business, Marsha Thomson and the Northern Territory Minister for Industries and Business, Tim Baldwin and the Tasmanian Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Premier and Minister for State Development, Steven Kons.

The ACT Chief Minister (Kate Carnell) and the South Australian Minister for Industry and Trade (Iain Evans) were represented by a senior official from each jurisdiction. Apologies were received from the New Zealand Minister for Enterprise and Commerce (Max Bradford).

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