

# Keeping supplies moving during COVID-19 and beyond

By NEV POWER, Chair – National COVID-19 Coordination Commission

## Who are we?

The Prime Minister announced the establishment of the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) on 25 March 2020. Our role is to coordinate advice to government on actions to anticipate and mitigate the economic and social impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

We have five Commissioners engaging with specific sectors relevant to their expertise, to manage immediate issues and to help position them for recovery. Our role is to provide a channel for business, industry and the not-for-profit sector to raise issues with government or connect with other groups to find solutions. Paul Little, the former managing director of Toll Holdings, is leading the Commission's work on transport, logistics and supply chains.

The impact of COVID-19 is significant, and it will take business, government and all of us working together to recover. We have engaged with more than a thousand stakeholders in the business, industry and not-for-profit sectors and received countless insights and offers of support.

## What's our progress to date?

During the initial stages of the crisis, we worked with industry and the government to address supply chain issues, including food and grocery supplies, particularly in regional and remote areas.

We responded to requests for assistance to unlock resources, break through bottlenecks and fix problems, and engaged with stakeholders on a wide



“ *The Commission has two key roles: to help minimise and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 on jobs and businesses, and to facilitate the fastest possible recovery of lives and livelihoods.* ”

variety of issues. I received invaluable advice and recommendations from the Freight & Trade Alliance (FTA) and Australian Peak Shippers Association (APSA) on behalf of its 380 members.

The Commission has worked closely with government and industry stakeholders to overcome and, as far as possible, implement solutions to the concerns raised by FTA and APSA. For example, we've helped navigate transport restrictions and restrictions at ports.

We also supported the establishment of the International Freight Assistance Mechanism, which ensures high-value Australian agricultural exports reach recovering markets, with the inward return journeys bringing back vital medical supplies and equipment. The mechanism has committed to support more than 500 flights to the Middle East, Asia and the USA, transporting Australian seafood, dairy and pork.

There has been a lot of work on supermarket supply chains to get food supplies into the regions and remote communities, and we've connected laid-off airline staff with work in the health sector.

The NCCC has also worked to bring in essential personal protective equipment from overseas, both through usual procurement channels and Andrew Forrest's Minderoo Foundation.

## What's next?

The Prime Minister has agreed a three-step plan and a national framework to achieve a COVID-safe economy and society.

The Commission is encouraging all Australian businesses to reconfigure and adjust and come up with a COVID-safe plan. All businesses will need to be able to reassure their staff and customers that they are managing the risk of coronavirus.

We have created an online planning tool to help business develop a plan to keep their workers, customers and the community safe as they reopen or increase their activities. The tool complements the Safe Work Australia online hub, which remains the definitive source of information for businesses to understand their work health and safety obligations. I recommend all FTA and APSA members take advantage of these resources.

We are currently identifying a set of priorities aimed at supporting a quick return to economic activity and growth. As part of this work Paul Little has been looking at the disruptions in supply chains and opportunities for investment in transport infrastructure.

It's been heartening to see the community spirit, commercial camaraderie and ingenuity in this sector's response to COVID-19.

The role that you all play – as importers, exporters, stevedores, air cargo terminal and transport operators, licensed depots, physical handlers of cargo, freight forwarders and customs brokers – has been and will continue to be essential to Australia's prosperity.

Thank you for ensuring that goods continue to flow onto Australian shelves, letters and parcels continue to reach our post boxes, and Australian producers can continue to export their goods.

I look forward to working to support you in the recovery phase and thank you for your enduring efforts during this challenging time.