

“COSBOA supports Policy not Parties”

A comparison table of small business policies between the major parties

Below is listed COSBOA policy position & statements from the major parties where available and applicable to COSBOA’s election priorities.
This may change as we get closer to the election.

COSBOA	Coalition	Labor
Worker shortages – skilled migration		
<p>We want better engagement with industry associations to determine skilled migration lists to make them fit for purpose</p> <p>Work to reduce the cost to small business, complexity of applications, time required to process, and timelines for departmental approval</p> <p>Temporarily remove restrictions on number of work hours and work location for migrants (e.g., international students, spouses).</p>	<p>Ensure that skilled stream places account for around 70% of the migration program in 2022-23</p> <p>Continue to deliver faster, cheaper skills assessments.</p>	<p>Reform the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme’s Seasonal Worker Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure Federal Government meets upfront travel costs for workers - Allow participants to bring family members to live and work in Australia - Establish dedicated Agriculture visa stream (four-year visa).
<p>COSBOA Commentary</p> <p>Coalition policy acknowledges the challenges in the assessment process but indicates no change to the current situation; in fact, migration numbers would remain the same. 6/10</p> <p>Labor policy addresses only workers from the Pacific with no mention of skilled migration from other regions of the world. 5.5/10</p>		
Worker shortages – workforce development, skills, and productivity		
<p>We want to allow those who wish to engage with more work to do so by removing barriers such as negative impacts on tax, access to benefits, and pension</p> <p>Place more emphasis on completion rates and continued education for trainees</p> <p>Tax incentives for small businesses and sole traders to train employees</p>	<p>Skills and Training Boost (20% bonus tax deduction for businesses investing in external training)</p> <p>Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements and Completing Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidies extended for 3 months. This was a COVID support measure which has been extended an additional 3 months to support small business as they transition back to a new COVID normal.</p>	<p>Fee Free TAFE Plan for industries with skills shortages (465,000 fee-free places over 4 years, of which 45,000 would be new places - industries mentioned include ‘trades and construction, resources, digital and cyber security, new energy, advanced manufacturing, hospitality, tourism, childcare, aged care, disability care, nursing, and community services)</p> <p>\$50 million to boost technology on TAFE campuses</p>

<p>For incentives to go beyond one industry/ skills area – e.g., have incentives for management skills, not just digital skills</p> <p>Continue industry led skills reform where small business is consulted on strategy, workforce, as well as product development.</p>	<p>\$2.8 billion for a streamlined Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System from 1 Jul 22</p> <p>\$3.7 billion to support 800,000 training places over 5 years (if states agree to a new funding deal)</p> <p>\$49.5 million to expand the JobTrainer program (if states match funding) for 15,000 places to support aged care sector.</p>	<p>Ensure at least 70% of Commonwealth VET funding is for TAFE</p> <p>Establish a body called Jobs and Skills Australia to replace the National Skills Commission that would work with employers, unions, and the VET sector on workforce planning</p> <p>Deliver a new national skills agreement working in partnership with states and territories</p> <p>Commit to greater industry participation in the skills and training sector to encourage better collaboration and outcomes.</p>
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COSBOA Commentary:
The Coalition policy of bonus tax deduction for skills and training is excellent but it is important that non-employing business owners can themselves access this scheme to upskill the business owner. The Boosting & Completing Apprenticeship schemes are excellent but should be extended beyond just 3 months – this doesn’t enable small businesses to plan for the future. Policy relies too heavily on states matching funds which may lead to a discrepancy between states. Skills and training boosts are welcomed but are a medium-long term solution – it doesn’t address the critical shortages our members are experiencing now. **7/10**

Labor policy addresses more areas of need for the medium-long term skills-based solution, and the acknowledges the different skills small business needs to grow and innovate, not just the hard hats. Although it suggests consultation with employers, more detail is needed on the Jobs and Skills Australia and “new” national skills agreement schemes to understand the long-term implications. **7.5/10**

Both parties recognise the hard work by industries to improve the sector through VET skills reform, which is positive.

Costs of doing business – supply chain costs / inflation

<p>This is an immediate problem for all small businesses.</p> <p>Address the criticality of supply chain issues and the impact they are having on small business’ input costs.</p>	<p>\$200 million Supply Chain Resiliency Initiative as part of the Regional Accelerator Program announced in the 22-23 Budget (grants for manufacturing businesses to address a supply chain vulnerability for an eligible critical product/ input, e.g, chips)</p> <p>\$2.5 billion modern manufacturing strategy (e.g., modern manufacturing initiative to help manufacturing businesses scale-up, manufacturing modernisation fund round two).</p>	<p>A \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund which designed to build supply chain resilience across the economy. It will fund projects across a range of industries to expand manufacturing self-sufficiency.</p> <p>Includes \$1 billion advanced manufacturing fund to support manufacturing businesses of all sizes</p> <p>Fund additional industry grants across Australia to build supply chain resilience</p> <p>Start-up Year, which would offer income contingent loans to 2,000 final year students and recent graduates to support their participation in accredited accelerator programs.</p>
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COSBOA Commentary:

Coalition policy importantly acknowledges the criticality of the supply chain and addresses vulnerabilities which does assist all small businesses, also addresses the need to transition regional areas back to Australian manufacturing however the determination of an “eligible” critical product is out of the hands of small business. For them, all supply chain inputs are critical. **8.5/10**

Labor’s policy doesn’t acknowledge the supply chain issues facing all small businesses; there is more of a focus on manufacturing sector. More detail is needed on how industry grants would work - often supply chain issues are horizontal and across industries. **7/10**

Costs of doing business – energy prices

We want a coherent plan for energy and to decrease the price of energy where that can be achieved.

\$60 million Powering Business program to support businesses in energy intensive industries to lower their energy bills

\$17.9 million to the Business Energy Advice program

Consumer data right for energy data

Work to reduce power prices by banning late penalty payments, big stick legislation requiring energy companies to pass on savings, a default market offer, setting up reference price, investments in microgrids, Snowy 2.0, new gas-fired power station in Hunter Valley.

Powering Australia plan:

Will lower household power bills by \$275 a year in 2025 and \$378 in 2030

Will lower power bills for SMEs by 18% in 2025 and 26% in 2030 according to modelling undertaken by Reputex

\$20 billion to upgrade the grid so it can handle more renewable power, \$100 million for 85 solar banks across the country (allowing renters to use solar), 400 community batteries, capacity mechanism

Will match the Coalition’s commitment to a \$60 million Powering Business program to support businesses in energy intensive industries to lower their energy bills.

COSBOA Commentary:

Coalition policy supports small businesses as they reduce their own energy bills and empowers through advice, addresses disparity between big and small & better info (CDR) so they can make decisions best for their business. **9/10**

Labor policy addresses the system as a whole as opposed to small businesses specifically - we assume community batteries are available to small business, but can’t be sure. **7/10**

Costs of doing business – merchant fees

We want to have a mandate for least cost routing as (the default).

Mandate that all debit cards work on more than one network (multi-network debit cards)

Create a dual network provision in mobile wallets

Bring the authority to legislate the payments systems framework into the Treasury Portfolio so that the Government can directly create outcomes for small businesses in this area to reduce the cost to small businesses of doing business, specifically including the ability to modernise payments system legislation to accommodate new systems like BNPL and digital wallets.

Mandate least cost routing (or similar) as soon as they come to office, with a clear timeline for implementation.

COSBOA Commentary:

Coalition policy through the Farrell review has started the hard work of modernising the payment system and incorporating BNPL and digital wallets into the system to make it fairer (which is complex and will take time) but fees are another immediate problem. In their election policies they haven't specifically address the need to reduce fees which small businesses are paying. **7.5/10**

Labor policy hasn't addressed the complexity of the payments system but they have explicitly indicated that they will mandate least cost routing which is exactly what COSBOA has asked for. **9/10**

Industrial relations

We want to Insert a Model Schedule into modern awards relevant to small businesses to enable them to develop a BOOT with their employees

Codesign with industry associations to assist with a Model Schedule fit for purpose for their industry

Support Industry groups to continue educating and assisting their small business members with their award

All stakeholders (employer & employee groups) come to the table to find a solution to wage underpayment, recognising that underpayment is anticompetitive & agree on a way forward on criminalising underpayments

We also support the continuation of the current process for wage determination.

Establish a dedicated small business unit in the Fair Work Commission to help small business navigate their workplace obligations. This measure is designed to specifically support small business to deal with fair work issues, acknowledging that they are often less resourced in HR, and will benefit from someone who understands business being able to advise and support them on through any of these processes.

Pass the reforms in the IR Omnibus Bill (includes BOOT reform, Greenfields agreement, ability for part-timers to work overtime at regular wage, criminalisation of wage theft).

Make wage theft a criminal offence

Use relationship with unions and industry to deliver better outcomes with settings that are simpler, more accessible and fair

Work with COSBOA and the ACTU to develop simpler and more certain workplace relations environments for small businesses

Enshrine secure work as an objective of the Fair Work Act

Enshrine "same job, same pay" into law.

COSBOA Commentary:

Coalition policy is light on detail but builds on the work from 2021's Omnibus Bill. It's also pleasing as it indicates they will pick up where the Omnibus Bill left off (where COSBOA was taking the lead) and this addresses COSBOA's calls to simplify the system. However, a FWC small business unit would be helpful but is more of a band-aid solution to the real issue; that the system is simply too complex for a small business to navigate themselves. COSBOA agrees to harsher penalties for those underpaying wages as it is anti-competitive.

7/10

Labor also wants to criminalise wage theft (which COSBOA supports) but the "same job, same pay" policy is very concerning – COSBOA sees this as a way to add more complexity to the system, not improve it. Secure work is complex and employment may not be suitable in all circumstances. Labor doesn't acknowledge how, in the last few years, the landscape has evolved. Though vague, the goal of simplicity is commendable. **5.5/10**

Competition		
<p>We want unfair contract terms to be enhanced and sanctions increased for those who scam and exploit small business people</p> <p>Fund a campaign to encourage Australians to support local small businesses</p> <p>More funding for the ACCC</p> <p>We want to update Section 50 of the ACCC Mergers Guidelines so the burden of proof rests with future scenarios, not what has happened in the past</p> <p>Mandate that all mergers over a certain threshold to seek approval from the ACCC</p> <p>Give the ACCC power to impose greater conditions on acquisitions to protect competition in the market.</p>	<p>\$10.4 million to enhance and redesign the Payment Times Reporting Register</p> <p>Legislate enhanced protections against unfair contract terms</p> <p>Create stronger penalties for breaches under the Franchise Code of Conduct</p> <p>\$4.3 million for a new Franchise Disclosure Register.</p>	<p>Create a mechanism to mandate 30-day payments</p> <p>Legislate enhanced protections against unfair contract terms</p> <p>Allow the ACCC to issue civil penalties against businesses issuing unfair contract terms.</p>
<p>COSBOA Commentary:</p> <p>Both parties recognise that slow payment times is unfair and a way that big businesses retains control and money over small businesses in their supply chain! Coalition policy wants to increase funding for Payment Times Reporting Register but according to data from Xero this has yet to have <i>any</i> impact on real payment times. There <i>is</i> a focus on Franchise structures in these policies – what about other small business who have to deal with anticompetitive behaviour every day? ACCC needs more funding to support competitive environments when it comes to mergers and acquisitions. 6.5/10</p> <p>Labor has a stronger stance on payment times with a mandating rather than reporting mechanism and realises the important role ACCC plays in creating a competitive environment. 7.5/10</p> <p>The unfair contract terms legislation has been ready for months and it has been a failure of parliament to pass these laws. No one gets points for this announcement.</p>		
Better regulation and tax reform		
<p>We want to extend the Instant Asset Write Off. We want to incentivise investment through tax reforms so small business can keep more of their earnings and address debt levels</p> <p>Modernise the superannuation guarantee legislation to recognise digitised superannuation reporting and payment systems, update the employer reporting of SGC</p>	<p>Lower the GDP uplift rate for PAYG and GST from 10% to 2%</p> <p>Extend the Instant Asset Write Off until 30 June 2023 at which point it will again be reviewed in advance of the 2023 Budget.</p> <p>No new taxes on small businesses</p>	<p>Support the continuation of measures in this year’s budget and the previously legislated Instant Asset Write Off</p> <p>Drive a genuine collaboration with small businesses and government to reduce the time small businesses spend doing taxes, cut paperwork and target support.</p>

<p>Recognise the payment date as the date the funds leave the small business' bank account</p> <p>Work with industry associations and trusted advisors to understand how sole traders in different sectors of the economy function</p> <p>Improve the ANZSIC code system to better reflect small businesses of all sizes</p> <p>Fund the ABS to do more research into the nature of sole traders and micro businesses.</p>	<p>Extend capacity of businesses w/ turnover under \$5 billion to offset losses against previously taxed profits to generate refund (until 22-23)</p> <p>Automate ATO reporting requirements, including the calculation of tax instalments and facilitating pre-filling of state payroll tax returns, saving small businesses time and money.</p> <p>Continue the implementation of Single Touch Payroll</p> <p>Continue to modernise the business registers</p> <p>Continue to advocate and push for the adoption of e-invoicing by setting the standard with Government contracts.</p>	
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COSBOA Commentary:
Coalition policy is clear about not creating any new taxes for small businesses, but what about sole traders (at last count 707,971 (ABS 2021))? They have not been mentioned. It does recognise the important role of RegTech and digitisation to support small businesses in meeting reporting requirements. In the last few years, Liberal policies like STP and modernising business registers, whilst challenging to establish, are good policy. They assist with reducing anticompetitive behaviour such wage underpayment and phoenixing. But what is very disappointing is the that the Instant Asset Write Off scheme is not to be continued. **6.5/10**

Labor policy here is very vague and doesn't speak to the importance of regulation reform in the current environment, nor the cost of compliance While Labor is committed to continuing already legislated reforms, the Coalition has shown better leadership and initiative in this area, therefore receives a higher score. **4/10**

Digitisation

<p>COSBOA wants government to address the growing problem of cybersecurity for small business and to implement an awareness and education program which addresses the disconnect between small business and the good work of the ACSC.</p> <p>Small businesses are too busy keeping their heads above water to implement cyber security practices.</p>	<p>Technology Investment Boost (20% bonus tax deduction for investing in new technology for digitisation, cybersecurity, etc.)</p> <p>24/7 cyber security hotline at the Australian Cyber Security Centre.</p>	<p>Establish a National Anti-Scam Centre that would bring together law enforcement, banks, telecommunications providers and consumer advocates to harden national defences protecting consumers and small businesses</p> <p>Task a Minister with direct portfolio responsibility for the protection of consumers and businesses online.</p>
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COSBOA Commentary:
Coalition policy is clear about how investment and implementation of digitisation is important for the future of small business but doesn't address the core issue – accompanying digitisation is the threat of cyber attacks. **6/10**

Labor policy on the other hand addresses the impact of cyber attacks but not the importance of digitisation, which is important for small business to become more efficient and grow. **6/10**

Equal points!

Disaster Preparedness		
<p>We want programs to educate, develop skills and the preparedness of small businesses to deal with disasters.</p>	<p>Have only announced support for previous disasters, e.g.: \$6 billion for NSW and QLD floods \$2.8 billion to 2019-20 bushfire recovery</p> <p>Directed ASBFEO to conduct a national review into Natural Disaster and Preparedness for the Government to use as a foundation to address future planning and preparation coordination and requirements for small businesses across the nation.</p>	<p>Work closely with states, territories, industry groups and communities to end the uncertainty that surrounds when and the extent of support small businesses are able to access in a crisis</p> <p>Continue the Disaster Funding Arrangements with state governments</p> <p>If matched by state and territory governments, invest \$400 million annually in disaster prevention and resilience (e.g, flood levees, sea walls, cyclone shelters, evacuation centres, fire breaks, telecommunications improvements)</p> <p>Assist with spiraling insurance premiums by reducing risk of damage.</p>
<p>COSBOA Commentary: Coalition policy follows the current policy of paying to fix the problem after the disaster, rather than building resilience, acknowledging the cause, and preparing small business communities to develop the skills to deal disasters beforehand. However, they do have a good track record of providing support with programs such as JobKeeper. 5/10</p> <p>Labor policy is much more detailed and recognises the need to bring all parties together to codesign and plan for the future. Their policy, although more detail is needed, also acknowledges the role insurance plays in this policy area. 7/10</p>		
Mental health and other support		
<p>We want acknowledgement and mental health support for small business owners who have been significantly challenged by natural disasters and the pandemic.</p>	<p>\$4.6 million for free mental health support to small businesses in partnership with Beyond Blue</p> <p>\$2.1 million to extend the free Small Business Debt Helpline</p> <p>\$61 to extend the Rural Financial Counselling Service.</p>	<p>Deliver on initiatives already budgeted by the Coalition including \$4.6 million for free mental health support to small businesses in partnership with Beyond Belue, \$2.1 million to extend the free Small Business Debt Helpline, and continuing the Rural Financial Counselling Service.</p> <p>Reinstate 50% Medicare loading for telehealth psychiatry mental health consultations</p> <p>Expand network of Headspace mental health services.</p>
<p>COSBOA Commentary: Coalition policy builds on the work they've established over the past months and years, working with trusted counsellors, helplines, and the excellent team at Beyond Blue. 9/10 Mental health initiatives have bi-partisan support with Labor having promised to continue the good work done by the Coalition. The Coalition gets .5 points more for taking the initiative. 8.5/10</p>		

Procurement

Small businesses should be given fair and equitable access to government contracts.

Disaggregate major contracts into smaller contract opportunities to allow greater access to SMEs

Authorise the Department of Defence to directly purchase and tender from SMEs for procurements up to \$500,000

Extend Supplier Pay on Time or Pay Interest Policy to all government contracts.

Buy Australian Plan:

Establish Future Made in Australia Office backed up by laws to lock in key elements of Commonwealth Procurement Rules to support local industry

Decode and simplify procurement processes to make it easier for small businesses to get government work

Increase the threshold where agencies can directly engage SMEs from \$200,000 to \$500,000

Make it easier for small businesses to gain membership within panel arrangements

Where possible, source at least 4% of research and development in government funded agencies worth over 50 million from small businesses

Continue the procurement linked payment times and 5-day small business invoice framework.

COSBOA Commentary:

Coalition policy will give more small businesses access to government contracts by creating the expectation that they should be broken into smaller parts to make more funds available for small businesses to apply. Also recognises the increasing use of small businesses by the Department of Defence in particular. **8/10**

Labor policy has a focus on local procurement which also benefits small business and recognises the complexity. **8/10**

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Procurement:

Other

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