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Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development  
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Canberra ACT 2600

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## ARA SUBMISSION: IMPLICATIONS OF SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS ON THE NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE ROAD NETWORK

The Australian Retailers Association (ARA) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport in relation to its inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network.

The ARA is the oldest, largest and most diverse national retail body, representing a \$400 billion sector that employs 1.3 million Australians – making retail the largest private sector employer in the country. As Australia's peak retail body, representing more than 120,000 retail shop fronts and online stores, the ARA informs, advocates, educates, protects and unifies our independent, national and international retail community.

We represent the full spectrum of Australian retail, from our largest national and international retailers to our small and medium sized members, who make up 95% of our membership. We have members in all states and territories, across all categories - from food to fashion, hairdressing to hardware, and everything in between.

The ARA appeared before the House Standing Committee on Agriculture on 26 May 2023 in relation to its inquiry into Australia's food security. In that appearance, we stated our belief that a resilient road network is critical to ensuring food security by enabling retailers to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of the food supply chain.

It is in this context that we have provided comments and recommendations below, responding to the terms of reference that are relevant to ensuring Australia's road networks are fit for purpose for the retail sector.

The comments herein relate to the food and grocery sector but equally apply to other non-food categories, across the broader retail supply chain.

### COMMENTS ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### **Engineering and construction standards required to enhance the resiliency of future road construction.**

The ARA does not have expertise in road engineering and construction standards so we are unable to offer substantive comments here. However, in our pre-Budget submission this year, the ARA recommended that Government provide funds to Infrastructure Australia to conduct a review and define the investment pipeline required to provide resilience of Australian road and rail infrastructure, particularly during natural disasters.

We also recommended building Australia's preparedness for future natural disasters by funding Emergency Management Australia to conduct scenario planning with retailers and their supply chain partners, to ensure the sector can continue to serve impacted communities during times of natural disaster.

We also recommend that road networks are considered alongside rail and domestic shipping routes, noting that retail supply chains already rely on each of these alternatives. Further, road networks need to be able to intersect with rail and shipping routes efficiently and effectively.

#### **Identification of climate resilient corridors suitable for future road construction projects.**

When record-breaking rain events in Central Australia cut road and rail routes between Adelaide and Perth for months, ARA members responded by increasing stockholdings in Western Australia to minimise the impact of buying limits and stock-outs.

Floods in Northern NSW also led to temporary road and rail closures that impacted retail supply chains as far north as Cairns and as far south as Melbourne. Our members worked with government, community organisations and local emergency services to get supplies moving as quickly and safely as possible.

The ARA recommends that Australia adopts a longer-term planning perspective and looks at investment in both road and rail infrastructure to address single-point sensitivities so that we can adapt to more frequent and more severe weather events.

#### **Opportunities to enhance road resilience through the use of waterproof products in road construction.**

The ARA does not have expertise in this area and is not able to comment on this, except to note that it is critical that Australia's roads are built to withstand future flooding events. We have already experienced the impacts of climate change and need to prepare for more frequent and severe adverse weather.

#### **The Commonwealth's role in road resilience planning.**

The ARA participates in the Trusted Information Sharing Network, as a member of the Food and Grocery Sector Group. We submit that this and similar forums - that bring industry and government together - are a useful starting point for planning improvements to national road resilience.

As noted above, we also recommend funding Infrastructure Australia to review and define the investment needed to improve road resilience.

Also, we recommended that Emergency Management Australia should play a leading role in planning for natural disaster management and recovery, working directly with industry. The ARA is willing to represent retailers in such planning efforts.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the committee. We look forward to further engagement as the committee's inquiry progresses.

Any queries in relation to this submission can be directed to our policy team at [policy@retail.org.au](mailto:policy@retail.org.au).