

Co-operatives Australia has published this paper to demonstrate the economic and social value that can be delivered by co-operative businesses and the need for public policy to incorporate the co-operative option.

# Public Policy and Co-operatives

## Public Policy and the Co-operative Sector

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Greater awareness of co-operative principles and the co-operative business model is fundamental to the future of the co-operative movement throughout Australia.

Co-operatives Australia, as advocate for the Australian co-operatives sector, aims to lift the level of awareness of the sector within:

- parliament;
- government;
- government departments;
- the professions;
- educational institutions;
- political parties; and
- the general public.

An awareness of co-operative principles, and how they guide co-operative business practice, will ensure that public policy initiatives are determined in a way that recognises the value the sector contributes to the state and national economies.

The following broad-ranging, but not exhaustive, list of issues has been compiled by Co-operatives Australia from existing research to highlight the importance of having public policy covering the co-operative sector.

The co-operative business model should be recognised and promoted by State, Territory and Federal Governments as a viable option in areas of:

- **Housing** – to deliver and manage public and community housing.
- **Health** – to deliver community health care related facilities and services, including care for the aged and for people with disabilities.
- **Employment** – to create employment and job retention through worker co-operatives.
- **Childcare** – to deliver childcare facilities and services.
- **Indigenous issues** – to provide services in indigenous communities, such as enterprise development, health and education.
- **Industry restructuring** – as an alternative structure to industries affected by forced restructuring.
- **Regional and rural development** – co-operatives are a proven model for communities assisting themselves through self-help.
- **Commercial business enterprises** – co-operatives are a proven alternative model to companies.

The development of co-operatives should be encouraged by proactive policies in areas such as:

- **Small business policy** – that co-operatives should receive equal treatment in the promotion and development of small and medium business opportunities.
- **Government tendering and grants** – that the community contribution by co-operatives will be viewed favourably when assessing applications for government grants or tenders.
- **Education and training** – that co-operative principles, practice and theory will form part of the secondary and tertiary education curriculum in relation to their contribution to trade and commerce, business structures, community development and social values.

## Federal Issues

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The Federal Government should also address the following matters, and public policy in these areas should demonstrate support for the co-operative business model.

- **Accounting Standards** – adoption of international accounting standards is not to disadvantage Australian co-operative companies.
- **Trade Practices Act** – co-operatives should be exempt from collective bargaining provisions.
- **Economic policy** – the co-operative business model should be recognised and promoted as an effective option for industry restructuring.
- **Business development programs** – that the co-operative business model should have equal access to government business incentives and support programs.
- **Regional development policy** – given the capacity of the co-operative business model to contribute to the economic and social well-being of rural and regional Australia, co-operatives should be encouraged and supported through appropriate regional development policies.
- **Trade policy** – that government should afford co-operatives the same level of support as other business entities involved in exporting and importing goods and services.
- **Education policy** – that co-operative principles and theory should be included as part of national primary, secondary and tertiary curriculum, particularly in relation to commerce, business structures, community development and social history.

### Co-operatives Australia:

As an apolitical peak industry body, Co-operatives Australia encourages government and non-government parties to have suitable policy statements developed, adopted, regularly reviewed and up-dated, and widely published.

Co-operatives Australia is the national body for State Co-operative Federations. It is an unincorporated body. Its members are the State Co-operative Federations of New South Wales; Queensland; South Australia; Victoria and Western Australia.

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