

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tuesday 19 October 2021

Survey deadline extended for women business owners to be heard

The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, Bruce Billson, has extended the deadline for a survey of women who own and lead businesses.

“There has been a tremendous response so far - it is clear there is an appetite to engage, and we want to give more women business owners and leaders the chance to be heard,” Mr Billson said.

The survey launched earlier this month and is aimed at identifying any unique challenges and opportunities faced by women who own and lead businesses. It will now remain open until 29 October.

“A lot of business entrepreneurs that are women are those who have solved a problem in their life, shared that with their friends who thought, ‘Yes, you can do the same thing for me,’ and then that turns into, you know, a side hustle and then on to a business,” Mr Billson said in an interview on Bathurst radio.

“And, frankly, with COVID, there’s been more problems to solve than ordinarily has been the case and we think if we can energise women’s entrepreneurship that will be fantastic in terms of women’s economic empowerment but really fab for the economy and livelihoods more generally.”

“The survey’s trying to say to women business leaders and entrepreneurs, what kind of roadblock’s have you run into? Have there been needless headwinds that have stood between you and your business ambition?”

The confidential survey can be accessed by visiting the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman website at www.asbfeo.gov.au or directly at: [WOWL survey](#)

A partial transcript of Mr Billson’s recently interview on Bathurst radio 2BS about the survey is attached.

Media contact: 0448 467 178

Attachment 1: Partial transcript of interview on Bathurst radio 2BS with Jac Underwood

JAC UNDERWOOD: Now, tell us what you're up to here. You're trying to boost Australia's economy. You're asking for women, in particular, to complete a survey. Tell us what's up.

BRUCE BILLSON: Yeah, well, I've always had a strong interest in women's entrepreneurship. It's been a real area of excitement in terms of the number of women that are choosing self-employment and creating their own business at this time. And that trend's been with us for a little while but it's kind of accelerated. There's almost been a renaissance of entrepreneurship, Jac, over COVID. And women have been leading the charge with, you know, two-thirds of new businesses created in the last couple of years being led by women. And that kind of makes sense.

I mean, a lot of business entrepreneurs that are women are women that have solved a problem in their life, shared that with their friends who thought, "Yes, you can do the same thing for me," and then that turns into, you know, a side hustle and then on to a business. And, frankly, with COVID, there's been more problems to solve than ordinarily has been the case and we think if we can energise women's entrepreneurship that will be fantastic in terms of women's economic empowerment but really fab for the economy and livelihoods more generally.

And the survey's trying to say to women business leaders and entrepreneurs, what kind of roadblock's have you run into? Have there been needless headwinds that have stood between you and your business ambition? And then part of my agency's role, Jac, is identifying opportunities to improve the environment for small business and entrepreneurship, and we're doing that through the lens of women business leaders' experience.

JAC UNDERWOOD: Right. So you'll take this data and then have a look at how you can make some changes or reform the industry to make it easier?

BRUCE BILLSON: That's precisely it. And it allows women business owners and leaders to share their experiences and to identify whether there's areas that seem to be harder than they need to be, mindful and respectful of, you know, it's tough running a business. But if there's policy settings and government programs that can be finetuned or new areas of support that can really – and I'm sorry for quoting my inner John Travolta; you're probably too young to know who he is – but, you know, if we can electrify entrepreneurship with women business leaders, that's fantastic.

And we saw recently the Commonwealth Government had a Backing Female Founders program, and, Jac, the response to that was just terrific. It was so oversubscribed that the government's thinking about, "Well, what do we do with all the extra applicants who maybe weren't lucky enough to get that support," but also mindful that Asialink has done some research and if we can boost the number of female entrepreneurs to get it about where the blokes are, you know, it could add anywhere between \$71 billion and \$135 billion a year to our economy. And that's why we think it matters and that's why we are hoping women entrepreneurs will share their insights with us.

JAC UNDERWOOD: Electrifying. I wonder if you've asked – have you asked men these sort of questions as well that go out in this survey? Or why have you decided to only tailor it to women?

BRUCE BILLSON: Well, mainly because we've found over the journey – and certainly in my time as the Federal Cabinet Minister for Small Business – blokes don't hold back telling you what they think. You know these are wildly generalised stereotypes, but we've often found that women business leaders and entrepreneurs are more circumspect, they're very receptive to the advice and counsel of others that have made that journey. They tend to be more interested in programs that develop know-how and acumen and can add to their business strategy and tapping into business opportunities, whereas blokes seem to be a little more convinced that they've got it sorted. And, you know, whether that's the case or not I'll leave that for others to discuss. But in this space we're just seeing real energy around women's entrepreneurship, a real opportunity, a real appetite. And we're just trying to make sure that there's good policy and programs supporting that entrepreneurship.

JAC UNDERWOOD: Now the survey is confidential. We have until the 19th* of this month to complete it. But where do we go to do that?

BRUCE BILLSON: We've stretched out the dates so there's a little bit more time for people, given the interest that's been there. But jump on I think the world's most gripping website, Jac – that's www.asbfeo.gov.au. That's my website as the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman. And tap on to that website; the link will be there for the survey, but there's also some useful resources there that small business owners and listeners might find really helpful, including a little bit of a check-in just on people's emotional wellness at this time when there's been, you know, on top of the usual challenges and responsibilities of running a business, you know, no-one ever learnt before how to navigate a global pandemic – well, no-one that's alive now has. And that's added a whole other degree of stressors for business owners and leaders. And there's some helpful resources on the website for that group, too.

JAC UNDERWOOD: Fantastic. It has been great to welcome you to the program.

*survey deadline extended to 29 October.

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