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12 October 2020

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian Bushfire Season 2019-20

Dear Senators,

Further to submissions made by Foodbank Australia (submission 54), we would like to provide additional information relating Foodbank Queensland's (FBQ) urgent need for extra warehouse capacity which relates to a question received on notice by Foodbank Australia.

Background

FBQ is the largest and most trusted hunger relief charity in Queensland. FBQ sources and provides over 14 million kilograms of essential groceries to a large network of front-line charities to support 1 in 5 Queenslanders who are in crisis each year. FBQ also plays a critical role in disaster relief efforts with recent devastating events leaving communities reeling. FBQ continues to provide direct support to communities affected by floods, drought, bushfires and COVID-19. Despite this huge effort, FBQ is struggling to provide enough food to Queenslanders seeking hunger relief with state-wide demand in increase every year. Every week, 28% of Queenslanders facing a hunger crisis are going an entire day without eating at all.

During 2020, FBQ has seen an extraordinary increase in demand for food relief from front-line charity members. Front-line charities are reporting that new demographic groups who have never had to ask for food assistance before are now seeking aid. FBQ has an excellent support network of food and grocery donors and other corporate supporters that help us provide food relief in a 'normal' month to more than 200,000 Queenslanders. These are no longer 'normal' times and generous regular donations from our food and grocery donors continue to help with supply, but demand for food relief continues to increase. FBQ is constrained by its limited physical resources for storage. Our most pressing need is for a larger Brisbane warehouse to service the state of Queensland.

Existing Queensland State Warehouse – Morningside, Brisbane

The existing FBQ warehouse at Morningside has been occupied since 2000 and has grown from processing around 600,000 kilos per annum in its first year, to over 14 million kilograms in financial year 2020. FBQ is now exceeding operational storage capacity on a regular basis and servicing high volumes of charity members, placing significant pressure on operational staff and volunteers. The existing FBQ site is congested, lacks sufficient office space, parking and loading space and provides poor refrigeration access for member-charities. The implementation of appropriate safety systems to manage the issues experienced at the site also create a high degree of operational stress and slow down operations.

During times of emergency response, volumes of food and water in our warehouse peak, further exacerbating our space issues. During 2020, we have needed to open an additional temporary site in order to procure, store and distribute a targeted 26,000 emergency food relief hampers. The regular utilisation of offsite storage is inefficient, costly and far from industry best practice. Any initial savings in warehouse capital expenditure, are rapidly offset by significantly higher operational costs.

Proposed Warehouse Characteristics

Given the change to the retail sector created by the events of the last year, FBQ are currently undertaking a review of our infrastructure requirements and the costs associated with this will be confirmed once a suitable site is found and detailed design is complete.

LOCATION: To be determined based on current review

LAND AREA: 1.5 – 2.0 hectares

WAREHOUSE CAPACITY: 5,000m²

ACCESS: B-double access and multiple receiving and distribution bays required

AMBIENT STORAGE: 2,000 pallets

REFRIGERATION STORAGE: 250-280 pallets freezer storage

80-100 pallets chiller storage

50-80 pallets produce storage

Proposed Funding Arrangements

To provide further capacity to meet community need particularly during times of peak demand during disasters, FBQ is seeking funding support to make the new facility a reality. FBQ has sufficient reserves to contribute to the required funding and could potentially raise further capital to cover contingency needs if required.

Food-Rescue Growth and Environmental Benefits

FBQ estimates that a larger Brisbane facility would provide sufficient capacity for the next 15-20 years and will facilitate significantly increased servicing and expansion within metro and regional Queensland. The site would allow FBQ to effectively double its existing capacity to achieve compound annual growth rates of approximately 4.5% over a 15-year term. This would provide food relief equivalent to an estimated 45 million meals per annum for Queenslanders in need and would divert an additional 12 million kilograms of food from landfill each year, saving approximately 22.8 million kilograms in CO₂ emissions annually.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,
Sara Harrup
Chief Executive Officer
Foodbank Queensland Ltd