



6 March 2022

The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

Via email: barnaby.joyce.mp@aph.gov.au

cc: Senator Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Emergency Management, National Recovery and Resilience

Dear Minister,

Following our recent meeting at Parliament House the Retail Supply Chain Alliance writes to express our growing concerns regarding the supply chain crisis and its effect on regional communities. Global and national supply chains are at a critical state from the triple threats of covid, flooding, and war, yet worker representation is missing from the Government response.

The harrowing scenes of flood disaster and Australia's emergency response to rescue families have been rightly front of mind. As we know from this year's troubling start with Omicron and flooding in WA, the knock-on impact of supply chain disruption exacerbates the hardship of Australian communities facing empty shelves and scarcity of supplies. In Queensland and NSW, we are seeing freight routes significantly impacted, cutting off some communities entirely. WA, SA and NT were forced to survive on limited supplies for weeks as floods damaged rail lines and highways.

Last month, we called for the adoption of a set of Supply Chain Safety Principles to defend against external shocks which frequently impact critical industries. These calls came in anticipation of further natural disasters, growing instability abroad, and future covid variants. Sadly, it was only a matter of weeks before these predictions panned out, highlighting the urgency of putting in place a national plan through consultation with essential workers to safeguard our supply chains.

As we discussed, working conditions in agriculture, transport and retail must be at the heart of our response. Insecure, underpaid jobs create problems of worker shortages, high turnover resulting in loss of skill and experience, and worst of all, corners being cut in safety. This impacts businesses and workers alike – particularly small businesses struggling to compete with the likes of Amazon.

Winter is fast approaching and inclement weather brings further dangers of covid variants and a bad flu season, as warned by medical experts. We must prepare by ensuring essential workers have access to rapid tests and workplace safety plans to keep supply chains safe and operational.

The Retail Supply Chain Alliance is calling for an urgent adoption of the *Supply Chain Safety Principles* attached to this letter, including:

1. Covid-safe supply chains with free rapid tests for essential workers;
2. Secure working conditions through regulation to eradicate gig-style exploitation; and
3. A standing supply chain committee of unions, workers, industry groups and employers to meet bi-annually and consult prior to policy decisions which affect supply chains and workplace safety.

We hope to receive a response which reflects the urgency and importance of this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Kaine
TWU National Secretary

Daniel Walton
AWU National Secretary

Gerard Dwyer
SDA National Secretary