

MEDIA RELEASE:

Free legal help for bushfire affected farmers and small businesses in NSW

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Justice Connect is providing free legal help to small businesses, farmers and primary producers through a new project assisting bushfire affected communities in NSW.

This initiative is supported by a recently announced Commonwealth package for small businesses in NSW to access free legal help as part of the recovery effort.

Justice Connect will connect eligible small business owners and farmers to its network of 10,000 pro bono lawyers through its award-winning Pro Bono Portal.

Justice Connect CEO Chris Povey said, *“We know that the wellbeing of communities is intrinsically linked with the wellbeing of the small businesses in those communities.”*

“Our network of pro bono lawyers has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to assisting communities to recover from the 2019-2020 bushfires.”

“We want to make sure that the legal problems that small businesses and farms are facing now are resolved, and that we can connect them with firms based locally in those communities wherever possible.”

Legal problems related to bushfires can emerge months into the recovery period. These issues include insurance, debt, employment law, environment and planning law, contracts and tenancy. Most people avoid getting legal help because of the financial cost, but reaching out for help is crucial to solving and preventing legal problems.

The Commonwealth funding has supported Justice Connect to make a suite of upgrades to its Pro Bono Portal and its online intake systems. The Pro Bono Portal played a key role in coordinating the community legal response to the bushfires in Victoria and NSW earlier in 2020.

“We’re grateful to the NSW government and our collaborators in NSW for recognising the potential of our Pro Bono Portal and recommending that the platform form part of the legal response for small businesses,” said **Mr Povey**.

This project will make sure that those in need of legal support are efficiently and seamlessly connected with specialist pro bono resources where appropriate. 160 firms using the Pro Bono Portal can now be matched with people, community groups and small business needing free legal help.

The same funding package is also supporting [Legal Aid NSW](#) and [Financial](#)

[Rights Legal Centre](#) to provide assistance to NSW small businesses in bushfire affected communities. All three organisations are working closely together to ensure a joined-up response.

The Pro Bono Portal was developed by Justice Connect's in-house innovation team through their [Gateway Project](#) and has been operating in Australia for over 12 months.

How to apply for pro bono legal help

Small businesses, farmers and primary producers affected by the bushfires can apply to access free legal help from pro bono lawyers on justiceconnect.org.au/bushfiresupport

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