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Driving Business Success for Consulting Firms in the Built and Natural Environment

28 June 2011

**Andrew Joyce**

General Manager  
Small Business and Deregulation Branch  
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
GPO Box 9839  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Joyce,

**Re: Options paper - Resolution of small business disputes**

Consult Australia is the peak industry body representing consulting companies that provide professional services to the built and natural environment. These services include design, engineering, technology and management solutions for individual consumers through to major companies in the private and public sector including local, state and federal governments.

We represent over 260 companies across regional and metropolitan Australia, 64 per cent of which are small businesses providing niche practices in over 100 different types of occupations. These include surveyors, project managers, architects, human resource specialists, economic planners and engineers.

**Review of the four options**

Consult Australia acknowledges that a range of dispute resolution mechanisms are already available but are underutilised, often due to a lack of awareness among small business owners of their existence. An awareness and education campaign as described under option two is an essential ingredient in any final proposal.

The proposal to introduce an information and referral service, under options one and two, to direct business owners to existing dispute resolution services is also a sensible approach that will help to ensure that those services are properly utilised. A referral service may make it unnecessary to create a new tribunal as proposed under option three.

Provision of a mediation service, under option two, for cases where none already exists would mean that no small business owner need miss out on receiving the help they need. Such services must also be mindful of the needs of businesses in regional Australia that do not have easy access to capital city-based services.

The introduction of a Small Business Advocate as proposed under option four has merit, but should not be at the expense of those initiatives proposed under option two.



## **Conclusion**

Option two is the preferred approach to improving small businesses' access to dispute resolution services. It will ensure that small business owners are made aware of existing services, they receive help in accessing them and, in instances where no formal mechanisms exist, low cost dispute resolution services will be made available.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. If you would like to discuss any matters raised in this letter please contact Jonathan Russell, Policy Adviser for Smaller and Regional Firms, on (02) 9922 4711 or at [j.russell@consultraustralia.com.au](mailto:j.russell@consultraustralia.com.au).

Yours sincerely,



**Megan Motto**  
Chief Executive