

COVID-19 Special Report

This COVID-19 Special Report covers the period of August 2020 to March 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to dominate the attention of businesses, government, policy-makers, and the media well into the second half of 2020. However, with a robust COVID-19 contact tracing system, governments' support for business and individuals, and the relatively high compliance with public health orders, living with the disruption of the pandemic became slightly more manageable – mostly – as a new normal.

As such, attention began to move to meeting the challenges of a post-pandemic Australia, including the resulting economic recession. For Accord, this shift presented a further opportunity to promote the crucial role our Members played in Australia's COVID response, and to highlight again the potential of our resilient industry for jobs, investment and the rewards an improved policy environment could bring.

Promoting our industry and opportunities for sovereign manufacturing

In August 2020 we invited the Hon Karen Andrews MP, then Minister for Industry, Science and Technology to address our industry leaders and to promote the emerging opportunities for greater investment in Australian-based manufacturing. This roundtable also provided an opportunity for Members to discuss directly with the Minister the ways in which the business environment, local input costs and regulatory frameworks could be improved to incentivise local investment decisions.

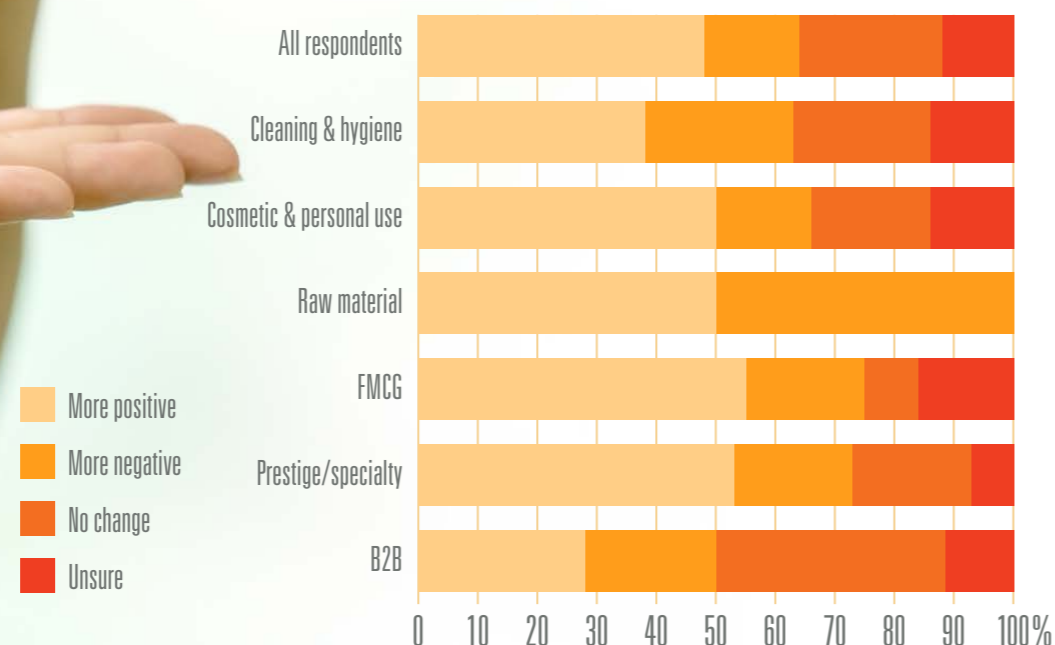
Since then, Accord has continued to promote to Members the funding opportunities available through the Morrison Government's new Modern Manufacturing Initiative, via our Member Updates and also through an Insight Hour with the Department of Industry in March 2021.

Business Impacts Survey

Earlier in 2020, we surveyed our Members to compile industry-wide data on the business-impacts of the pandemic to share with government-decision makers. Beyond the original advocacy aims of this exercise, the resulting report was also highly valued by Member companies as a tool to benchmark their performance during this tumultuous time. As a result, Accord conducted a total of three COVID-19 Business Impacts Surveys – in July 2020, October 2020, and January-February 2021, so that Members could meaningfully track their own performance and that of the industry.

Pleasingly, by the third and final survey in 2021 the majority of Members had a clearer sense of optimism in terms of the business operating environment. The surveys also provided feedback to Accord on the priority issues as identified by Members, providing us with a clear mandate for our ongoing advocacy efforts relating to the pandemic, a business-led recovery and beyond.

Business Outlook in January-February 2021 compared to three months ago



At the heart of everything Accord does is our service culture, ensuring we are meeting the needs of our Members and providing value-add.

Other pandemic related-work areas to assist our Members and raise our industry's profile over the course of the reporting period include:

Member services – keeping our Members ahead of the pack

- ▶ Communication and information, via direct company engagement and specific Accord email alerts, as well as distribution of the ACCI COVID-19 Updates and other special bulletins, on:
 - critical pandemic trends,
 - key government decisions,
 - changing regulatory requirements,
 - business continuity issues,
 - HR and employment considerations,
 - COVID-safe workplace advice, and
 - economic stimulus programs.
- ▶ Guidance, navigation and access to government for Member companies across all layers of the Australian system.
- ▶ Information, advice, engagement and supplier connection to mitigate the impacts of supply chain disruption.
- ▶ Expanded online training and information sessions.
- ▶ Introduction of sector-specific roundtables, to engage and address the needs of our diverse Membership.

Advocacy and industry pandemic response

- ▶ Provided input into government COVID-19 guidance materials.
- ▶ Developed the 'Hand Sanitiser Industry Benchmark for non-therapeutic products', to address concerns around quality, efficacy and safety of non-therapeutic hand sanitisers in line

with existing regulatory requirements and existing industry standards and expectations.

- ▶ Campaigned for regulator fee increase relief for businesses, as a Government COVID-19 economic response.
- ▶ Sponsored the Food Safety Information Council's National Handwashing Survey and associated education package, reminding all Australians of the ongoing importance of good hand hygiene.

Media Statements

Accord takes a strategic approach to media claims and announcements, releasing public statements on key matters of importance to the industry – examples during the reporting period included:

- ▶ 'Maintaining strong safety, quality and performance standards at the heart of the newly launched Accord Hand Sanitiser Industry Benchmark', 10 September 2020.
- ▶ 'COVID19 Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitiser Connect: meeting urgent product demand', 1 May 2020.
- ▶ 'Accord survey reveals supply issues for some essential ingredients and materials needed for hand sanitiser production', 14 April 2020.
- ▶ 'Industry Action Report #2: Update on the priority responses of Australia's hygiene products industry to the COVID-19 pandemic through the industry body Accord', 9 April 2020.
- ▶ 'Industry Statement on Hygiene Product Supplies: Hand Sanitisers', 7 April 2020.
- ▶ 'Industry Action Report #1: Australia's hygiene products industry responding to the COVID-19 pandemic', 25 March 2020.

Looking beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

As we move beyond the pandemic and into a period of recovery, Accord's focus will continue to deliver essential member services and our advocacy priorities will turn to a number of important and re-emerging issues – areas that were put on pause while the industry managed the many disruptions of COVID-19. These priority issues pose both challenges and opportunities for our industry.

The Federal Government's Deregulation Agenda.

This newly announced initiative is aimed at removing red tape burdens for business and lifting regulator performance. Proposed reviews and consultations associated with this agenda, present an opportunity for Accord and our industry to have meaningful input to achieve more efficient and internationally aligned regulations.

• **Supply chain optimisation.** COVID-19 highlighted the weaknesses in Australia's supply chains, and industry will need to focus on the lessons of the pandemic to mitigate the risks for any future resurgence and disruption. Accord's ongoing

participation in the National COVID Supply Chain roundtable, and other supply chain fora and Government bodies, provides our Members with a mechanism for raising issues directly with the Government to facilitate solutions to ongoing supply chain issues.

• **Plastic and packaging waste.** With the release of the Federal Government's National Plastics Plan in early 2021, plastics and packaging waste will be a significant priority moving forward. Prior to the announcement of the plan, Accord had proactively commenced an extensive industry data-gathering and analysis exercise to benchmark current practice and inform our advocacy and future actions in this area. With our proud history of implementing effective, voluntary industry initiatives to achieve positive sustainability outcomes for our sector, Accord looks forward to working closely with the Government and other stakeholders on industry-led programs to tackle the issue of plastic and packaging waste.