

Tuesday 9 April 2024

Director, Consumer Policy Unit
Market Conduct and Digital Division, Treasury
By email: consumerlaw@treasury.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic) to provide feedback on one component of the proposed *Competition and Consumer (Designated Complaints) Determination 2024*.

As the peak body and professional association for financial counsellors in Victoria, FCVic is uniquely positioned to understand systemic consumer issues. Our members assist more than 23,000 Victorians every year, and are privy to emerging themes in complex consumer issues – particularly those impacting vulnerable cohorts including those in financial hardship, people impacted by catastrophic natural disasters, newly arrived migrants and refugees, and more than 3,800 family violence victim-survivors.

We are part of a number of consumer advocacy bodies – there are similar financial counsellor peak bodies in other states and territories, as well as our federal peak body Financial Counselling Australia, not to mention other advocacy groups including community legal centres and other social services.

Given this breadth of experience and knowledge in the consumer advocacy sector, we believe that to limit the maximum number of designated complainants to **three** will be unnecessarily limiting, given the diverse range of issues that are managed by different consumer advocacy bodies, who are all very capable of meeting the mandatory criteria for a designated complainant as defined in the draft determination.

We recommend that the maximum number be increased to at least **10** designated complainants. Recognising that there are concerns about ACCC's capacity to manage a large number of designated complaints from this number of complainants, we suggest that the '*Maximum number of designated complaints in a 12-month period*' for each individual complainant be revised to an 18 or 24-month period, to help stagger the demand.

This time limitation will be assisted by the collaborative nature of the consumer advocacy sector, where organisations like ours frequently collaborate with our networks to ensure a joint voice on common issues.

Thank you for your consideration. To discuss this letter further or for any further queries, please contact FCVic's Advocacy Coordinator Amanda Chan on achan@fcvic.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Zyl Hovenga-Wauchope
Executive Officer
Financial Counselling Victoria