

Retailers unite to ensure food security in remote communities

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Outback Stores and other remote retailers have joined forces with governments and major supermarkets to ensure food security across all remote Aboriginal communities during the coronavirus pandemic.

The collaboration is part of a national taskforce of representatives from federal, state and territory governments, remote community store groups Outback Stores, Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) and the Islanders Board of Industry and Service (IBIS), Mai Wiru, and major retailers Woolworths and Coles.

Earlier this month The Food Security Working Group held a roundtable discussion with the Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt and the Northern Territory Chief Minister Michael Gunner.

Outback Stores chief executive officer Michael Borg says the group discussed the changing situation for stores in all remote communities across Australia, looked at supply and logistic challenges and suggested mitigation plans to address the ongoing concerns.

“Collective action is required to deal with the current pandemic and its impact on a reliable supply of essential goods and groceries to regional and remote Australia,” Mr Borg said.

“So, it’s great to see groups from across the nation work together on a common cause and to collaborate rather than compete.”

Outback Stores says the working group’s combined strategy involves increasing its focus and engagement with manufacturers to support distribution centres in the Northern Territory and around the country.

“If manufacturers can keep up significant stock weight to distribution centres, then a lot of the concerns around food security will be extinguished for a large proportion of the country,” Mr Borg said.

“We’ve seen an unprecedented growth in store sales reaching in excess of \$6 million over the past two weeks and many manufacturers have been doing their bit to fill orders but this additional national push for remote store distribution centres to take priority will help to keep food security strong.

“Without their ongoing support, remote stores will undoubtedly face significant challenges in the future.”

As part of its additional commitment to food security in remote communities, Woolworths has donated 4000 food boxes which contains essential items such as flour, milk, pasta, tuna and juice.

“We applaud Woolworths for this initiative, and we are currently focusing on distribution of these boxes to address emergency food security issues,” Mr Borg said.

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Outback Stores says increased sales show the key messages for community members to return home and stay on country are being heard.

“Our team expects to be further challenged by increased trade due to the increase in numbers, the lockdown of the communities and government stimulus packages boosting the local economy,” Mr Borg said.

“The current pandemic is posing some challenges for us and we’re seeing some key items become unavailable in some community stores.

“Once again, we want to assure people that we’re working hard with manufacturers and distribution centres to replenish those stocks as soon as possible.

“Our team is committed to serve customers and communities during these unprecedented times.”

Outback Stores will continue to post information and regular updates on its social media channels and website: www.outbackstores.com.au

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