

Article Information

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COVID-19 Competition and Consumer Alert - Different rules apply (for now)

In this Insight Tom Griffith outlines some of the ways in which the ACCC has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic crisis.

Consumer:

Scamwatch

The ACCC has issued a warning about scammers using existing technology to play on people's fears about coronavirus. As at 20 March 2020 the ACCC had received 94 reports about scams. For further information see [here](#).

Guidance on Consumer Rights, Travel and Event Cancellations and Refunds

The ACCC has published information and guidance on consumer rights, travel and event cancellations in relation to COVID-19: see [here](#).

The ACCC has stated that it understands many businesses are struggling to manage cancellations at this time, and has urged consumers to remain patient.

It has also warned businesses that it is monitoring any unfair or unconscionable conduct in dealing with consumers during the crisis.

Competition:

Supermarkets

On 24 March 2020 the ACCC announced it had granted immediate interim authorisation to supermarket operators including Woolworths, Coles, Metcash and Aldi to allow them to co-ordinate to ensure consumers have reliable and fair access to groceries during the COVID-19 pandemic. For further information see [here](#).

Medical Equipment

A similar interim authorisation has been granted to medical technology companies to allow them to work together to co-ordinate the supply and potential manufacture in Australia of ventilators, testing kits, personal protective equipment and other medical equipment, see [here](#).

Banks

The ACCC has also provided conditional, interim authorisations for the Australian Banking Association (ABA) and banks to co-operate to devise and deliver a relief package for small business and to provide supplementary relief packages for individuals and businesses affected by COVID-19.

Airlines

Further, the ACCC has granted interim authorisation to regional airline Regional Express (Rex) to co-ordinate flight schedules on 10 important regional routes with Virgin and Qantas, however no one is permitted to raise fares higher than those in

place on 1 February 2020.

ACCC authorisation provides statutory protection from court action for conduct that might otherwise raise concerns under the competition provisions of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010*.