11 FEBRUARY 2022

REPORT: HOW SMALL BUSINESSES CAN BUILD CYBER STRENGTH AND SMARTS

An Australian-first pilot project aimed at lifting the cyber security of small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) has found that ad-hoc cyber budgets and poor incident preparedness may leave SMEs open to cyber attacks.

Small but stronger: Lifting SME Cyber Security in South Australia, reports the findings of the pilot, a collaboration between the Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre (CSCRC), CyberCX and CSIRO's Data61.

The pilot, which was supported by the Government of South Australia and the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), was aimed at improving the security of six South Australian SMEs, fostering a better understanding of the challenges these organisations faced in implementing and maintaining cyber security. It builds on existing guides to create practical and implementable cyber security uplift solutions for all Australian SMEs and will help governments design targeted SME cyber uplift initiatives.

CSCRC CEO Rachael Falk said the pilot set the scene for more research into practical measures to support SME cyber hardening.

"SMEs make up a huge part of Australia's economy, so it is vital they are cyber secure. They are often bombarded with well-intentioned guides, which alone don't solve the problem. The process of getting cyber security right can be confusing and expensive but it is becoming ever-more important as Australia transforms into a digital economy," Ms Falk said.

"The pilot learnings have been analysed and formulated into a comprehensive report and blueprint to help inform the Government of South Australia, as well as other governments and departments, in the implementation of scalable and practical initiatives to support SME cyber security uplift."

Ms Falk said the pilot's findings will be used to inform further SME-specific cyber uplift research and at a broader level, would support the aims and objectives of Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020.

South Australian Premier Steven Marshall said the pilot's practical and pragmatic approach would help SMEs become more secure.

 "The cyber risk to small business is increasing every day. This report points to practical solutions to ensure our SME sector becomes more cyber resilient," he said,

Minister for Home Affairs Karen Andrews reminded all businesses that even the smallest digital footprint made them a target, and that they should visit the Australian Government's dedicated cyber security website – cyber.gov.au – for more information and advice.

"Recent attacks on Australia's critical infrastructure have demonstrated that no one is immune from malicious cyber actors," Minister Andrews said. "At the same time, the overwhelming majority of cyber-attacks are profit driven, and are undertaken by criminals looking to make 'a quick buck'. Small businesses can take proactive steps to safeguard their digital systems, data, and customer information, and should act now to avoid falling victim to scammers and hackers."

For media enquiries please contact: Anne-Louise Brown – 0468 934 453