




Speech By
Brittany Lauga

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Keppel Electorate, Small Business

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (12.04 pm): Since the election last year the Palaszczuk government has been focused on giving Queensland businesses the best opportunity to grow, thrive and create jobs. The Palaszczuk government aims to inspire and empower small businesses to grow and realise the benefits of collaboration, which is the central theme of Advance Queensland's plan for jobs now and jobs for the future. Small business plays an intrinsic part of life in regional towns and communities, with almost 30 per cent of the state's small businesses in regional Queensland and over 3,300 of those small businesses located in Keppel.

Last week in Yeppoon and Rockhampton it was a privilege to host the Minister for Small Business for Queensland Small Business Week, which ran from 16 to 21 May. Small Business Week provided a great opportunity for local business owners to engage with other small businesses and also for me to hear about and understand the challenges they face and their ideas for the future. There are more than 406,000 small businesses in Queensland, with 121,500 of these based in our regions. These businesses have a big impact on local economies and it is important that we give them the tools to get off to the best possible start and every opportunity to thrive and create jobs. Small businesses make up more than 97 per cent of all businesses in Queensland and employ 43 per cent of the private sector workforce. They are the engine room of the economy and we are working toward empowering small businesses to grow.

Queensland Small Business Week was a great opportunity for owners and operators to learn, network and connect with new ideas. I know small business is doing it tough in regional Queensland, particularly with the downturn in the mining boom, which is why the government-hosted events, workshops and training sessions were developed around themes of collaboration and partnerships, innovation and entrepreneurship and preparing small business for digital disruption. The minister and I held a meeting with the Capricornia Chamber of Commerce in Yeppoon—and I thank the chamber president, Mr Peter Fraser, for hosting the event—and our local member of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, Mr Derek Lightfoot, who also attended. I truly value Derek's work in helping to provide a direct line of communication between small business and government in his role on the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council.

The minister and I also joined over 100 small businesses at the fit-for-change workshops and plenary in Rockhampton where the minister hosted a plenary session where speakers from Suncorp, O'Connells OBM and my friend and colleague Mr Geoff Higgins from Performance People addressed the crowd. Experts were on hand to advise pain points for small business, including cash flow, budgeting, tax, HR, brand culture, change management and training, getting online traction, building footfall and digital tribes, branding to grow, customer bases, succession planning, digital innovation, growth sectors and services, blue-sky thinking and crystalballing.

I am excited about helping small businesses in Keppel by guiding them towards existing opportunities. By tackling challenges head on together we can work towards successful innovation. Small business is a key driver of the Queensland economy and, indeed, the Keppel economy and it is important to provide business with the right environment to thrive. I note that the Palaszczuk government's commitment to the Keppel Kraken, a brand new water play park on the foreshore of Yeppoon, and our \$25 million investment in the Yeppoon foreshore revitalisation, together with the \$15 million commitment for the Rockhampton riverbank revitalisation, are already starting to stimulate growth and customer base for the small businesses in those areas. When I stroll along the foreshore of Yeppoon I see more people out buying coffees in the coffee shops, in restaurants, in our retail outlets and also in local small businesses like Afashionados, a great local fish and chip shop on the foreshore.

Throughout the entire business growth cycle we want to encourage businesses to be more innovative and embrace digital technologies in order to compete in the global economy and become more resilient. Our Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy will be focused on creating an environment that supports businesses when they start, sustains them through the first four years and facilitates high growth and employment by leveraging the Advance Queensland agenda. The Palaszczuk government is always looking for innovative ways to help small businesses grow and create jobs. These campaigns are another way we are helping to establish Queensland as the place to start and grow a business as we create jobs now and jobs for the future. We want Queensland to be the state known as the place for small businesses to start, grow and employ and I want Keppel to be at the centre of that vision.