




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 30 August 2016

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Back to Work Program

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.20 am): The Palaszczuk government's \$100 million Back to Work regional jobs package is an investment in jobs and an investment in our regions. After just eight weeks, this two-year \$100 million package is already delivering great results, with 46 regional employers successfully applying for and receiving support payments of nearly \$300,000 since the Back to Work eligibility payments commenced only four weeks ago. This includes eight employers in the Far North, 11 in North Queensland, five in Mackay-Whitsunday, seven in Central Queensland and 15 in Wide Bay. To date, in just four weeks 64 regional Queensland unemployed jobseekers are back on the job thanks to Back to Work, and more than half of these—36—are long-term unemployed.

The program's success stories include Cairns mum Tanya Primrose, whom I visited on Sunday at her new workplace, Living Colour of the Tropics gift shop in Edge Hill. Tanya and her employer, Carol North, are great examples of Back to Work, and there are others: a Bundaberg manufacturing worker, a Mackay automotive industry worker, a Townsville healthcare worker and construction workers in Gladstone and Cairns. We hope to see many more success stories in coming weeks. We have a further 35 employers applying for support payments which are currently being processed.

While the latest ABS labour force data shows unemployment falling in some regions, such as a 3.7 per cent fall in youth unemployment in the Mackay area, it remains a challenge throughout regional Queensland, particularly youth unemployment. That is why we have specifically targeted Back to Work at regions outside the south-east where the greatest employment challenge is. It is important to recognise that, to be eligible for an employer support payment, employers need their new employees to have started work on or after 1 July 2016 and to have been employed for at least four weeks. There will be employers who have already hired a new worker but are yet to apply for a support payment. The further we get into this program, the more applications we are likely to see. These are early days.

Seven Back to Work teams are in place across regional Queensland, connecting employers and jobseekers. Queensland's peak industry group, the CCIQ, is also getting behind Back to Work, distributing a webinar to inform members of the benefits. Across regional Queensland businesses and employers are getting behind Back to Work, which is giving them the support and confidence they need. This is boosting local economies and is supporting real jobs and real employers—jobs now and jobs for the future.