




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 15 July 2020

MOTION

Coronavirus, JobKeeper

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (4.09 pm): I rise obviously to support the motion. The Cairns community has been one of the hardest hit by the COVID pandemic. Cairns tourism providers were among the first in Australia to feel the economic impact of this train wreck of a virus. The Palaszczuk government responded quickly and effectively to the COVID-19 crisis, especially in Cairns. It was in Cairns that the Palaszczuk government announced the first major response package launched by any Australian government or territory. Back on 18 February, the Palaszczuk government announced \$27.25 million in aid, including nearly \$5 million for the tropical far north and Gold Coast regions, a deferral of leases for businesses on the Cairns marina and a raft of fee waivers for fisheries, jetties, marinas and liquor licence holders.

The careful easing of restrictions by our government has thrown a lifeline to Cairns businesses as more Queenslanders have been encouraged to become tourists in their own backyard. Likewise, the careful reopening of borders as part of the Palaszczuk government's unite and recover strategy will provide a much needed shot in the arm for our community.

No region in Australia has been immune to the economic consequences of COVID-19. On top of the Palaszczuk government's measures to support the Cairns economy, one measure which has kept the Cairns unemployment rate from rising even higher is the federal government's JobKeeper program. More than 180,000 Queensland businesses have applied for JobKeeper. According to the federal government data, Cairns has had the most JobKeeper applications amongst all postcodes in Queensland. More than 3,600 businesses in Cairns have applied for JobKeeper—a higher number than the 3,048 businesses in the CBD in Brisbane.

JobKeeper has played a critical role in keeping Cairns workers and businesses afloat. More than any other federal government measure, it is JobKeeper that has helped build a bridge to economic recovery. Of course the program does not go far enough as it excludes arts workers, short-term casuals, temporary migrants and other workers who underpin the Cairns economy. The program will not go far enough if it is withdrawn at the end of September, as the Morrison government has previously proposed. What makes the Morrison government's recalcitrance all the more difficult to swallow is the fact that they have spent \$60 billion less on the program than they said when it was announced.

The last thing Cairns businesses want to see is a second wave undoing the government's hard work and pushing businesses that are currently on life support over the edge. We call on the Morrison government to extend JobKeeper to include workers not presently covered and, crucially, to extend JobKeeper beyond the looming cliff at the end of September.