




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (12.01 pm): I rise in support of the Small Business Commissioner Bill. It is not news to anybody in this place that the last two years have been beyond tough for our small businesses. Small businesses were at the front line of the pandemic. They kept Queenslanders safe by following the health requirements every step of the way and supplying essential services. For that we owe them a lot. As COVID has continued in its reign, in Pumicestone we have seen the string of storms and a wall of water inundate businesses across my communities and that, more than anything else, is why Queensland businesses deserve the support of a permanent Small Business Commissioner as advocate, supporter and cheerleader.

Small business families are working families and Pumicestone is served by thousands upon thousands of them, with health, disability care, personal services, construction and trades businesses very strongly represented. These are not CEOs with deep pockets. Unlike the Prime Minister, they get up each day and go to work for their families and communities. I myself owned and ran small businesses for over 10 years, largely working with emerging businesses to help them grow, so I recognise the struggles that those small businesses face, although nothing in my experience would have prepared me for the challenges of running a small business during a pandemic and then the recent flood events.

On that note though, I do want to express my concern that flood impacted small business owners in my community who are impacted in their personal and home capacities are in the position where they can only claim \$1,000 in federal support grants from the Morrison government. That is absolutely shameful because part of getting small businesses back on their feet is getting them back in their homes. Where New South Wales business owners and community members can claim \$3,000, in Queensland they can only claim \$1,000. That is a scathing indictment on the do-nothing Morrison government.

Turning to my own experience in small business, I do wish that I had had access to the crafted supports offered by the Palaszczuk government during that time. I am in particular a loud and proud advocate for the Mentoring for Growth program and try my best to spread the word about its benefits across the business community in Pumicestone. Then, of course, our Small and Medium Enterprise Procurement Policy backs Queensland businesses by ensuring that 25 per cent of all government purchases are from those small and medium enterprises.

When COVID hit small businesses, our government massively stepped up its support. From the very beginning supporting small businesses was a central part of our \$14.5 billion economic recovery plan. That plan has kept over 334,000 Queenslanders in jobs. We brokered a \$600 million joint state and federal small business support package that protected thousands of small businesses and the jobs they support. We invested \$25 million in our Big Plans for Small Businesses strategy. We have invested another \$10 million to establish this permanent Small Business Commissioner office.

In Pumicestone, I note that 73 businesses shared in over \$580,000 from the small business adaptation grant program. The differences that those grants made were substantial in financial terms, but in human terms the impact of them cannot be explained. I think of David and Katrina White, who

run White Ridge Farm in my electorate, a small tourism business set in beautiful bushland at Elimbah. The White family absolutely personify the can-do attitude of small businesses everywhere. Whether you would like to hand feed a llama, cuddle an alpaca or get your photo taken with Gypsy the camel, I suggest that everybody with young children should visit White Ridge Farm.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns Farmer David and Farmer Katrina spent their time hand building new attractions and infrastructure at the farm. Their attitude was that if they could use recycled materials, thrifted equipment or draw on their own skills, effort and knowhow to improve their business they would not draw even \$1 from their hard-earned business income. From chicken sheds to playgrounds, hayrides to fencing, Farmer Dave and Farmer Katrina drew on their creativity and sheer hard work to make their business even better.

When they did receive a small business adaptation grant they were able to invest the whole amount in promoting their business through billboards and marketing and promotion training and that support really helped them flourish. Sadly, they have since had floodwaters through their home and their new hayride has been wiped out. I wish Farmer David and Farmer Katrina very well. They are incredibly resilient people. If only our Prime Minister for New South Wales would give impacted Queenslanders the same support as those in National Party areas of the Northern Rivers. Maybe the New South Wales coalition supports their National Party more strongly than occurs in Queensland.

In hard times our Pumicestone community goes in to bat for our local small businesses. I thank our vibrant, active and supportive Bribie Business Breakfast Networking group and pass on my best wishes to founder Craig McShane. Craig has recently made the move to Tasmania. He will be very much missed by the Bribie business community. I also acknowledge my local chambers of commerce, the brand new and dynamic Greater Caboolture Chamber of Commerce, as well as the longstanding Bribie Island Chamber of Commerce. I look forward to working with my chambers to promote the benefits of the new permanent Small Business Commissioner and all the other small business supports that our Palaszczuk government offers.

We know that the Small Business Commissioner was a success during the complexities of COVID-19 and making the role permanent is even more important as we recover from the floods. Let us look at the achievements of the office to date. The Office of the Small Business Commissioner has reduced the costs of disputes for small businesses. So far more than two-thirds of leasing disputes managed by the commissioner have been resolved by mediation or informal dispute resolution. From my time supporting small and emerging businesses I think this is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the role. So often when a small business finds themselves in hot water legally they are confused about their options and obligations. They assume obtaining proper advice will be financially crippling and that is especially the case in franchise and retail leasing disputes where there is a big disparity in negotiating power between the parties. The commissioner has also collaborated with the newly established Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction, continuing to deliver small business regulatory reform to assist with recovery.

Our small business support measures have worked and we see the evidence in Queensland's economic recovery. We built our economic recovery plan on the back of our world-leading health response and the results speak for themselves. Now we are swiftly rolling out state government grants for flood impacted businesses and giving that hope and support as we recover. As I doorknocked impacted households in Beachmere, Bribie and Caboolture, many locals identified as small business owners and were very glad to receive information. Time after time small business owners told me that during COVID and since, our strong health response kept the doors of their businesses open. They particularly acknowledged the Premier's role and leadership in achieving that.

The LNP talk a big game on small business every time they stand up on matters of this kind, but at the end of the day what is their record? Of course, when they were in government they abolished the Small Business Commissioner so there was no dedicated advocacy role for Queensland small businesses. In his former role, the member for Clayfield cut \$700,000 from the Mentoring for Growth program. The LNP completely failed to deliver on their promise to lift the payroll tax exemption from \$1 million to \$1.6 million and, of course, the CCIQ complained that the LNP actually oversaw an increase in red tape during their time in government.

The Liberal Party claims to represent small businesses but they sell them out in favour of big business every day of the week. As the Premier has asked over and over, where is the great Queensland National Party when it comes to standing up for small and family businesses in the regions? We cannot forget that two long years ago the member for Nanango would have flung Queensland's borders wide open before people were vaccinated and our small business community would have been decimated as a result. The LNP just do not back Queensland small businesses.

It has taken Labor to make the Small Business Commissioner permanent once more and bring Queensland into line with other states. Under our Palaszczuk Labor government, unemployment is at the lowest rate since 2008 and Queensland is powering forward with strong economic growth. I note the member for Bonney's comments lionising the delivery of services by the Small Business Commissioner and yet suggesting that somehow her role is insufficiently independent. You cannot have it both ways, member. It is Labor that backs small businesses. We always have, we always will and on that basis I commend the bill to the House.