




Speech By
Amanda Camm

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2022

SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (5.52 pm): I would like to contribute to the Small Business Commissioner Bill and also acknowledge the work of the temporary Small Business Commissioner. On both sides of the House we agree that it has been a very important role in response to the COVID-19 pandemic but more importantly for small and family business to feel that they do have someone they can connect with, who can help facilitate them through challenging circumstances and save them time.

Many in this House have already contributed, as I will, about their local small businesses. In the seat of Whitsunday, one in three jobs is heavily reliant on the tourism industry. Nearly all of those businesses would be categorised as small and family businesses. Most of those businesses are also associated with the hospitality industry, which has been the hardest hit by the impacts of COVID-19. We talk about agility and pivoting, which was so critical for small business to do, but at times I heard from my small businesses about the challenges they faced and that they had no pivot left. There was nowhere else for them to pivot to. For my businesses in the charter boat industry, there is no market—it has disappeared.

I would like to highlight the LNP's position and the amendments that have been outlined by our shadow minister for small and family business, particularly the amendments around the office being independent of the minister. Amending the clause to ensure that the small business community can trust that there is a level of independence is critical. That is because the government regulates small and family business. There is significant red tape and challenges that small and family business face. In particular across North Queensland, we certainly see things that are different to our southern counterparts. That is why independence and advocacy by the Small Business Commissioner is so critical.

We pay almost 20 per cent to 30 per cent more in insurance costs in North Queensland if you are a small and family business. We also pay about 20 per cent to 30 per cent more in electricity costs. While it is wonderful to have heard the government announce a \$50 rebate, it does not go very far when you have no competition in North Queensland. The cost of electricity consistently affects the operating costs of small and family business. It prohibits small and family business from being able to employ an extra staff member or a casual teenager. They are real impacts that the state government could look at on the back of the Productivity Commission report that was released. They could look at changes to stamp duty and insurance for North Queensland and how that could directly benefit small and family business.

The other point I would like to highlight which I think is critical in the advocacy that this role could potentially have if amendments were accepted by the government is the way in which a commissioner could interact with our local chambers of commerce that represent small and family business across our community. It is not just limited to my tourism businesses. We have engineering businesses that help support the supply chain of mining across our region. We have small and family businesses that operate childcare services and family support services in our community. We have small and family businesses that offer professional services in our community.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of my local councils who have stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic to support small business. While we hear about the government's response to grant funding for small business, it took many of us on this side of the House to go to the media to demand support for small and family business. My tourism operators in the Whitsundays had to wait months and months before they even received a visit from the tourism minister to understand the pain and challenges they were going through on the back of COVID-19. We have had some amazing businesses who have been established and have been successful, but we have also had those who have had to make the hard decision to lay off people they employ. People have had to work 24/7. In my community many have had to shut their doors.

I note that the minister did meet with representatives of the Mackay Region Chamber of Commerce, and I welcomed that visit to the region. I note that their COVID-19 impact survey that has just been released showed that 61 per cent of all those surveyed experienced moderate to very severe impacts since 17 September. Their greatest hits were in mental health—their own mental health as business owners and that of their staff—sourcing goods through the supply chain, cash flow and business finances, and the challenges that they faced.

In particular, I would like to thank and acknowledge the tireless work of Gus Walscott for the small business financial counselling service that has been provided to small businesses across the Whitsunday community. I also thank the auspicing agent for that. Gus has worked tirelessly. I have received inquiries through my office and my office could refer people to him. He has been able to support them with financial counselling services. Gus is a chartered accountant, a small business owner and an adviser himself. He has expertise and skills that my small businesses could rely on in their time of need. Part of that was referral pathways to mental health services as well because small businesses were doing it so tough with the ever-changing environment of government regulation and the impacts of mandates—which we all know had a role to play at different times because, with very little notice, businesses were very challenged.