




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (5.33 pm): I rise to address the Small Business Commissioner Bill. As other speakers said, I declare at the outset that small businesses rock. If it were not for small business, the electorate of Glass House really would not exist. Aside from two—and literally it is that—large supermarket chain establishments, every single business operation in the electorate of Glass House is either a small or a family business. It is why we established the ‘Glassies’, our small business awards, a number of years ago. We try to get the gala to coincide with Small Business Week. We really love talking about our local heroes, our mum-and-dad small business owners who employ local, shop local and get our economy going.

I have had the privilege of interacting with the office of the Small Business Commissioner. I also thank Maree and her team for their work. Early in the piece, when COVID restrictions were in force, many of the businesses in my community, particularly the hospitality businesses, were struggling with the check-in app requirements, particularly when it came to things such as availability of mobile coverage; the demographic that was often frequenting cafes and restaurants around places like Maleny, many of which did not have the technology required; and reduced awareness of the public health requirements. Luke Forster from the team spoke to me and my office and was able to take on board the feedback. He said in his response back to me—

This feedback is consistent with some other segments of the small business community...

He escalated the concerns to the response lead engagement team within Queensland Health. As a result, we were able to quickly see some changes and improvements not to the way small businesses were required to operate but to how the public gained greater knowledge of and accessibility to that check-in app.

As the shadow minister has said, we will not oppose the Small Business Commissioner Bill but we will propose a couple of amendments. The first of those will be to make the office independent of the minister. It is important that the community trusts the commissioner. As I have said, they do a good job. I think they would do a better job if they were independent of the minister.

Secondly, there is no power to obtain information provision that the Small Business Commissioner could use to influence government departments to provide information that would enable resolution of issues. We want to add a clause that gives the commissioner the power to obtain information from government agencies and entities.

One other concern we have is along those lines. That is, the bill does not allow the Small Business Commission to initiate inquiries and investigations into areas of concern for small business. I want to raise a couple of areas of concern that have come up recently where I think the Small Business Commissioner and her team could really have weighed in and assisted local businesses. I refer to last

week's copy of the *Glass House Country & Maleny News* and the article titled 'Check-in mandates cause misery for cafes'. Whilst we were able to resolve some of those check-in app issues, editor Mitch Gaynor wrote—

A hinterland hospitality veteran has revealed the daily verbal and physical abuse she has endured because her small business is forced to comply with state government-mandated check-in rules.

Shotgun Espresso owner Kelly Robson who has lost staff and significant revenue in the past two years said the situation was now 'untenable'.

The hospitality sector is one of only a few industries where check-in and vaccination verification rules still apply.

But Kelly said the messaging was confusing and raised stress levels for people who thought that check-ins were behind us.

'Since the 17th December this has been a nightmare. It can only be described as abuse from our Government. We have been utterly neglected,' ...

Can I stress—and it is reported here—

Kelly is not anti-vaccination, but is urging an even playing field for all business.

Shotgun Espresso offer one of the best coffees in Maleny. I think we have something like 30 coffee shops, but Shotgun is certainly up there as one of the best. I regularly head down and have chat to Kelly. I have to admit that one day she was in tears. A gentleman had literally thrown a punch at her because of what she is having to enforce. The editor of the paper went to the government for a response. The article states—

A spokesperson for the Premier ... said no abuse is acceptable and 'staff should call police as the commissioner has advised'.

The only problem with that is that in Maleny we have at any given time at best two police officers on. They cover an area from Kenilworth and Mapleton all the way to Peachester. They are not able to respond to every single request from shop owners like Kelly. It is just not acceptable. I know that this is not an isolated example. That same story could be repeated by many cafe owners from across the electorate of Glass House. That is potentially an area where the Small Business Commissioner, with the changes that the shadow minister is proposing, could conduct an inquiry and then give advice to the government on how it could be resolved.

Another industry that seems to have been targeted is the wedding industry. Again, the shadow minister and the Leader of the Opposition joined me with Kelly Tilse of Tiffany's. This is an industry that has weathered COVID remarkably well, given what they have had to deal with. It was one of those small and family business sectors that had been forgotten by the state government.

Staff were isolating because they could not get tested and operators were being left with no choice but to either close their doors or, in Kelly's case, pay two lots of salaries—once for the staff members who were on leave and then to bring in casual cooks, chefs and wait staff to cover the weddings they were doing. They experienced similar trading conditions through lockdowns, but they were saying that right now they are getting no support. That is the big difference. What we in the LNP—the leader, the shadow minister and I—were calling for was a support package for those businesses.

There is good news for the wedding industry. On Tuesday all of them received from the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation the following—

Following the Premier's announcement ... the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation can confirm that from 6 pm on Friday, 4 March 2022:

- masks will no longer be required to be worn by staff and patrons at licensed venues
- density limits will be removed for parts of venues that are privately hired regardless of vaccination status of people entering.

That is great news for the wedding industry. I just hope it is not too late for some.

We had the crazy situation where people were cancelling their bookings and then going and holding backyard weddings because they could have 100 people in their home but only 30 at a wedding venue. Other brides and grooms were making double bookings—one in Queensland, often in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast or the Moreton Bay area, and another in northern New South Wales—waiting to see what happened with the restrictions and making a decision at the last minute as to which one they went to. Hopefully now with the news that we have had that will change, but boy it would have been nice to have had a support package in the meantime.

The final sector of the small and family business industry that I will mention is the school camp sector. I have worked very closely over many years with Andrew Grant from QCCC. He operates from Mapleton but has responsibility across all their camp sites. I thank the shadow minister for education for coming up and meeting with Andrew and hearing their concerns.

They were given assurances that, despite the delayed start to the school year, camps were still going to operate. It came as a surprise when, in the Premier's press conference, all of a sudden school camps were lumped in with the delayed start to the school year. It was contrary to the advice they had received from the department. Even now there is no guarantee that with school back camps can operate. Andrew and his team and all school camps have been exemplary in their operation under the COVID requirements. Andrew can attest to the fact that they had not one community outbreak of COVID amongst any of their camps.

When similar restrictions were placed on outdoor education programs and camp sites in New South Wales and Western Australian, what did their states do? They provided a support package.

Ms Grace interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): The member for McConnel will cease her interjections.

Mr POWELL: Western Australia actually sat down with the industry and developed the support package. What Andrew and his team and everyone in the outdoor education sector is asking for—as the cafes, pubs, clubs and wedding venues were asking for—is financial support. They know they have had to abide by the COVID restrictions.

Ms Grace interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for McConnel will cease her interjections.

Mr POWELL: This is the only state that does not provide assistance. I am pleased to hear the minister interjecting because I put a question on notice to her yesterday asking her to ensure that she sits down with the industry and compensates them for the loss of business they have had. I hope she takes it a little more seriously than she has this evening.