




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (5.12 pm): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021. I acknowledge the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, Di Farmer, the Education, Employment and Training Committee chair and member for Redlands, Kim Richards, the committee members, the committee secretariat and Hansard for their work to bring this very important legislative reform to parliament.

Small businesses are the backbone of our communities. They do so much to foster local economies, keep money close to home and provide ongoing support for local organisations and community initiatives. Small businesses such as the Hungry Pug at Mareeba—and I will give them a shout-out because they do so much in my electorate—and Mossman Custom Kitchens are absolute champions when it comes to giving back to the community. Whether it is supplying emergency school lunches for kids who miss out on lunch on a daily basis, raising funds to support community initiatives or refurbishing an old canteen to support junior rugby league, they highlight just how lucky we are to have small businesses in our communities. They give generously and selflessly to make a difference in communities.

I want to give a special shout-out to all the small businesses in my electorate from the Torres Strait to Cape York, Mareeba to the Douglas shire, which are establishing themselves as a true lifeblood of our communities, creating opportunities and supporting local jobs. These small businesses are our cafes, retail, beauty salons, mechanics, ferry operators, barbers, hairdressers, tourism operators—and the list goes on. I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet with some of the small business operators in my electorate to not only learn about what they do but to gain a better understanding of how this sector thrives in a vast electorate such as Cook.

I also want to acknowledge the small business sector right across Queensland which did it tough and is still doing it tough not just through the global pandemic but through the most recent floods that affected the business community across South-East Queensland. The impact of the global pandemic and the recent South-East Queensland floods highlights to us how vulnerable small businesses truly are. Any hardships or challenges that we go through also show our strength and resilience to overcome and be better and stronger.

COVID-19 resulted in fewer people visiting our region and communities in my electorate and Far North Queensland. I recall the federal government Biosecurity Act, which was enforced to safeguard communities. It locked in many of the small, discrete communities in Cape York and Torres Strait, but as a result it had a negative impact on businesses throughout the region. I want to acknowledge all the local councils and the chamber of commerce for working with government through this very challenging time. They not only highlighted issues for businesses in communities in my electorate but also worked with government to look at solutions and ways that we could better support small businesses going through this economic downfall.

I have heard contributions from others in this House, and we would all agree that what we are going through means this is not the best time for anyone at the moment. I think that is acknowledged on both sides of the chamber. I have heard from many small businesses expressing feelings of helplessness and frustration with the situation at hand. This is something that is out of all of our control and my heart goes out to all the small businesses which did it tough.

I will mention the tourism sector in Far North Queensland. These businesses depend on people visiting our regions. The numbers we were seeing in Far North Queensland had a huge impact on the ability of these businesses to operate at their full capacity. The realisation set in that suddenly they were running at a loss of revenue. I acknowledge the huge impact this had on people's mental health, physical health and emotional health. I have heard stories of the challenges they have faced of paying rent on time, putting food on the table, paying school fees or sending kids to school without lunch. The challenges that families faced across the board—especially those with a small business—had a flow-on effect to all different areas of their lives. Sometimes we take things for granted. When things are well and the economy is going well, we all celebrate but, unfortunately, going through these very challenging events puts a lot of pressure on people. I think this is also a good reminder to all of us to never take anything for granted.

I want to focus on some of the significant steps that the Palaszczuk government took to foster support for small businesses in Queensland. In April the national cabinet endorsed the mandatory code of conduct SME commercial leasing principles. As a result, the Queensland government implemented the national code and provisions were made for a temporary Small Business Commissioner to be established under the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act. This was a really good step forward for businesses in my electorate so they could have that single point of contact where they could access advice and guidance on different things. I listened to some of the contributions from those opposite who said that this does not spread wide enough with supporting businesses. Having that central point of contact would make a lot of difference to businesses—knowing that there is an agency there to work with them and to listen to their challenges. It gives the government a better understanding of the types of challenges that businesses experience right across the electorate.

I want to acknowledge and thank so much Minister Di Farmer for visiting Port Douglas, where we had a small business workshop. It was an opportunity for the minister to come in and engage with the chamber of commerce and local businesses to hear of some of the challenges. I think it is a good reflection of this government's work to closely support businesses. It also shows that we have a minister who cares and works in the best interests of small businesses here in Queensland, no matter where people live. I thank Minister Farmer for her time.

I want to acknowledge the support provided by the COVID-19 adaptation grant program. There were many businesses in my electorate that benefited from the grants, which went to paying their rent or helped alleviate some of the financial challenges that businesses were facing. The \$500 electricity rebate for small to medium businesses was also a really good initiative that made a lot of difference to businesses in my electorate. All in all, there was good collaboration across the board, where everyone was talking at the table. We acknowledged and listened to all of the concerns that were expressed, especially to me in my electorate. It was important to have that opportunity to relay those challenges back to government and to make sure that businesses in my electorate were listened to.

This is a fantastic bill. I think it will create opportunity for businesses to engage better and to know that they will be supported and that there is that single point of contact to support them in their time of need. I commend the bill to House.