




Speech By
David Janetzki

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2022

SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Mr JANETZKI** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (5.01 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021. A key focus of my contribution will be on the fact that it is excellent to finally see in this House some attention being assigned to small business. Throughout the past 18 months there has been an underlying theme that small business has been forgotten or, if not forgotten, there has been no clear and strategic plan to support it not only through the pandemic but also most recently with the storm and flooding events. While the bill will not be opposed by the opposition—in fact, we applaud making permanent the role of the Small Business Commissioner—I want to highlight a range of areas where small business has been forgotten.

It does not matter how often the small business minister establishes a task force, undertakes consultation, publishes a glossy brochure, has a strategic discussion or organises a summit. The truth is that, over the past 18 months, time and again it has been members on this side of the House who have been speaking about small business. We have been getting out on the road to draw attention to the challenges that small businesses are facing during these most extraordinary times. I pay tribute to the shadow minister for small business, the member for Buderim, and the opposition leader for being at the forefront in meeting with small businesses across Queensland.

One thing that has been missing from government, but that we have been focused on, is clarity of message and evidence of a plan that small businesses can rely on. Time and again we have stood with small businesses to contrast our approach with the Queensland government's plan to support small businesses, whether through the pandemic or most recently through the storm and flooding events. What has been the Queensland government's plan to support them? Time and again, under pressure, the government has been silent.

I contrast the treatment of the small business sector in Queensland with the support packages on offer in other jurisdictions. In New South Wales there is the payment of a certain amount of payroll costs according to certain turnover thresholds. In Victoria a link was made to support commercial tenancies. There are direct grants and subsidies of other kinds. Time and again, when we have called out the government for their package and asked what they will do to support small business, there has been silence. I am not sure whether that is because of the ineffectiveness of the small business minister in the cabinet. I am not sure if the voice of the small business minister is simply not loud enough or persuasive enough. Perhaps the Treasurer has not been listening to the small business minister. But time and again, when put under pressure to outline their plan, there has been silence.

The member for Buderim, the Leader of the Opposition and I have travelled. In the first couple of months of this year I personally travelled to Cairns a couple of times as well as to the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast to meet with chambers of commerce. If the small business minister and the Treasurer listened carefully to small businesses, they would understand the need for support and the need for clarity of message.

When I was on the Sunshine Coast I met with Graham at the Mooloolaba Chamber of Commerce. In Cairns I met with tourism operator Roddy Rees, who is simply calling for clarity of message, consistency and support. The Leader of the Opposition visited our chamber of commerce in Toowoomba and met with business leaders, and I will return to that. In Cairns we heard that, particularly with the Omicron wave, the January month of trade was the worst ever month. That is pretty astounding given the past couple of years and the challenges that businesses have faced. In Cairns, and anecdotally across the state in many sectors, January was the worst ever month of trading. At a time when one would expect the government, the small business minister and the Treasurer to stand up for businesses and speak out on their behalf, there was silence.

We know of the dire situation that businesses have been facing, particularly small businesses. In the middle of February the CCIQ pulse survey results came out, which again led us to have some grave concerns. There was a 16.9 per cent drop in business confidence as against the previous quarter and a 6.9 per cent drop in sales and revenue as compared to the previous quarter. Most tellingly, after two years of battling the pandemic there has been an increase in businesses reporting an impact on mental health. In the CCIQ pulse survey released in the middle of February, 63 per cent of businesses reported mental health challenges. In my opinion, the government has been far too flippant about that, which is obvious because there is no plan.

Tonight I want to read into *Hansard* some of the personal stories of those who contributed to the pulse survey. We heard the Treasurer try to discredit this. He has already tried to discredit the CommSec reporting and now he is trying to discredit the CCIQ pulse survey as self-nominating. Just because the government does not want to hear the information or the feedback from businesses around Queensland does not make it any less valid. I want to read these comments into *Hansard* because we know of the challenges to mental health. A Cairns retail staff member states—

Neither my husband or myself sleep through the night. For the first time ever, I have started to worry that we will lose everything we have, which isn't much now as we have both put our superannuation into the business, plus our savings and even sold our home ...

From Central Queensland—

Several employees suffering stress directly related to conditions created by COVID. Management team is also affected due to significant additional workload to try and understand the constantly changing requirements and managing the risks to the business.

From the Sunshine Coast—

COVID has all but destroyed my business. I had a staff of four before COVID and now I only have myself. I held onto staff for as long as possible.

From Brisbane—

Managing as best we can given no traffic in the CBD. Pre COVID we would take \$2,500.00 during a normal COVID day we would be taking \$1300. We are currently down to \$350 per day ... The situation is dire.

On the Gold Coast—

Total breakdown every night, don't want to carry on, don't see a way out. want to close the doors. Can't afford to keep going.

In Townsville—

Government ignoring small business, Little or no support interest in helping.

Mr Harper: Rubbish.

Mr JANETZKI: I take the interjection from the member for Thuringowa simply because, again, that interjection betrays the lack of care and concern the government has had for small business. Over the past 18 months or two years—

Mr HARPER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take personal offence at the member's comments and ask him to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Toowoomba South, the member for Thuringowa takes offence. Do you withdraw?

Mr JANETZKI: I withdraw. If there is one thing that is abundantly clear from chambers of commerce across Queensland, whether it be in my home town of Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast or Cairns, it is that they wanted to have trust in their government. They wanted to have confidence in their government, that it understood the travails facing small business. Time and time again, members will hear from this side of the House that small business and the chambers of commerce had no confidence in the government to deliver a plan and to deliver certainty and clarity of message.

When we compare the performance of other states, whether it be consistency and clarity of message or whether it be a vision for small business, other states and jurisdictions were acting because they clearly wanted to see their small businesses get across the final threshold and survive through COVID to the end of the pandemic—they wanted to see their small businesses thrive and prosper—but in Queensland we had silence from the government. Yes, the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021 is an important measure, but small business under this government is languishing without a vision and without a plan. There is no glossy brochure that will ever fix that.