




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (5.45 pm): I rise to support the Small Business Commissioner Bill before the House and congratulate the minister for bringing it forward. Previous COVID emergency legislation introduced a temporary Queensland Small Business Commissioner and this bill makes a Small Business Commissioner permanent.

There have been some good things that have come out of COVID, and this would have to be one of them. We put this commissioner in place because we saw the impacts that COVID had on many businesses not only in Queensland but also throughout the rest of Australia. In 2021 the temporary commissioner's office carried out over 4,500 activities in terms of small business inquiries, disputes, outreach and advocacy. It was the right thing to introduce at the right time. We have seen its success. It has played a pivotal role in supporting Queensland businesses to avoid lengthy, costly leasing disputes during the pandemic by providing information, advice and access to mediation services. That is often what small businesses need. It is often very difficult for them to negotiate with landlords or owners of shopping centres in terms of where they are located, and the Small Business Commissioner has certainly assisted them with dispute resolution. Small businesses have welcomed this and, given its success, tonight we are debating legislation to make the position a permanent one.

I always look at the objectives of the bill in terms of what we want the commissioner to do—that is, to enhance the operating environment for small businesses in Queensland and to reduce the time and costs associated with resolving disputes involving small businesses. This is a key initiative under the Big Plans for Small Business strategy, and the commissioner will also work with the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction to continue to deliver small business regulatory reform in Queensland. Those four issues are key to the reason we are here tonight supporting this legislation. The minister did an incredible roadshow and engaged with thousands—about 2½ thousand—of small businesses, and that truly is a monumental effort. The feedback was that this position was greatly welcomed and the clear message is one we support—that is, an easy to identify commissioner small businesses can access who can help them with their issues and disputes. This is part of the Palaszczuk government's backing of small business.

I really do not care what anyone else in this House has to say about this, but I have the best small businesses in my electorate of McConnel than anybody else in this House. Whether we are talking about cafes or coffee shops—

Honourable members interjected.

Ms GRACE: Listen to them all. They do not like the truth. You can't handle the truth!

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjection from the member for Nanango: there is a pretty darn good butcher in Kingaroy and I did buy some fantastic meat from there, but I have a better one in McConnel! These are the small businesses that we support—the cafes, the restaurants, the retailers. Has anyone been to James Street in my electorate lately? It would have some of the best retail, fashion, food and restaurants—

Mr Mellish: It's not cheap but!

Ms GRACE: Who cares if it is not cheap? It is quality, and those businesses are doing extremely well.

An opposition member: She is a minister; she can afford it!

Ms GRACE: I will take that interjection as well. I only wish it were true. There are about 450,000 businesses throughout Queensland and they do an amazing job. We support them. There are some excellent small businesses in my community. When you have 18 of the top 20 restaurants in Queensland in your electorate, you know that you are on a good wicket. No matter how good you are, there are things that come around that make it difficult to survive. COVID would have to be one of those. The ones that did well, boy did they adapt. They used funding from this minister to adapt and adopt and pivot, to do takeaways when people were not able to come in. Some of the best takeaways I have ever tasted in my life came out of restaurants who had never done it before. Nightlife venues adapted the way people could go in and enjoy them. There was funding to support these businesses. The minister should be very proud of what we provided to these venues.

I have been in Brisbane all my life. I have lived in my electorate all my life. I have never lived anywhere else than the seat of McConnel. I grew up in Spring Hill and now live in the Fortitude Valley-New Farm area. I have seen small businesses come and go. They will continue to come and go. No matter how much government support there is, there are those who will stay and those, let us be realistic, who are going to go. There is a bit of a joke I have with Peter, my driver. If we have not been down a street in my electorate for a week we notice that something has changed. We have a joke where I go, 'Pete, I can't keep up'. There is a lot of change that comes with small businesses. A commissioner role is a crucial pivotal point that can sometimes help that small business to survive if they find that they are in dispute and they need someone to mediate.

When I travel around Queensland I see that all electorates have great small businesses. Member for Nanango, I agree that that butcher in Kingaroy is pretty good. I was driving back from Maryborough the other day and there is a butcher in Tiaro on the main highway. I stopped there and bought the best pork chops and the best cattleman's cut rib fillet that Michael and I have had, member for Gympie, for a while. It was pretty darn good. Let me say, though, that if you have not been to New Farm Deli and met Maria and Vince Anello you have not been to a decent deli here in Queensland. It would have to be the No. 1, best Italian deli. Coffee at Maria and Vince's is fantastic. That is one of the small businesses in my area that adapted. They had takeaway lunch bags to go in and collect. The Premier and I ordered one, went in together and picked it up. It was a beautiful lunch. They had tables of them. They adapted and adopted to COVID. I congratulate Maria and Vince. I know they had a heartache when the fire hit their deli, but they rebuilt in it record time with the assistance of the Sorbello family that runs the Merthyr Village and they were up and running before you missed them. The community supported them in the same way that I know we all here do.

If you have not eaten chocolate from New Farm Confectionery then you have not eaten chocolate. Jodie Neilson does a fantastic job. She started her business in her kitchen in James Street, New Farm and now has a fantastic business. I always give it as a raffle donation. People love winning it. She is now located in Newstead and was impacted by the floods and is very grateful for the funds that are available through the grants process that this minister has put together. Go and do yourself a favour and buy chocolate from New Farm Confectionery. It is absolutely fantastic.

Last, but certainly not least—and there is not enough time for me to go through all the fabulous small businesses in my electorate—Joedy Kyle opened up Joedy's Cafe, believe it or not, in Sydney Street in New Farm in March on the day that COVID-19 hit. In spite of that he is still open today. He got flooded in the floods in Sydney Street; he opened straightaway. We even had a stand-up at Joedy's with the CHO and the health minister. He was still operating. What a fantastic small business it is. If you want good coffee, go to Joedy's. People were asking me where to go. New Farm Deli, Joedy's—there are so many I cannot list them all. These are just some of the topnotch small businesses I have in my electorate who will welcome this legislation. Support the bill.