




Speech By  
**Joseph Kelly**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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### **SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL**

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.09 pm): I would like to start by wishing everybody a happy St Patrick's Day. It is nice to be surrounded by the Ryans, the Scanlons, the Peases, the Powers and the many other members of Irish descent here. As I said in my opening address to the parliament, my family covers all sides of the Irish flag, but it is a good day to be Irish.

It is appropriate, lest I be accused of being irrelevant to the bill, that when we talk about small business we do talk about the Irish and the significant contribution they have made. There is an excellent book in the Parliamentary Library titled *A New History of the Irish in Australia* by Elizabeth Malcolm and Dianne Hall that I would encourage all those who are interested to read. They talk about the early years of the Irish in Australia—those who came either voluntarily or at the hospitality of His Majesty. They had very limited options for employment. They had no options in the Public Service—small as it was at that stage. There was significant discrimination, so often one of the only ways to provide for their families was through taking up small business opportunities or the worst of the worst jobs. I think it is appropriate that we acknowledge that on this special day. I will say Erin go Bragh and I will leave it there.

I want to respond to some of the things that the member for Southern Downs said in his contribution. I will congratulate the member for Southern Downs on his elevation to the Panel of Temporary Speakers, but that is where the congratulations will end. I will get on to his speech now. The member made the statement—

... we have concerns about whether this Small Business Commissioner really has the tools and the independence necessary to be able to do a great job.

I think we should compare the Small Business Commissioner being put forward by the minister—well done, Minister—to the small business commissioner under the LNP. You would have had great concerns about the tools and the independence of that small business commissioner because that small business commissioner did not exist. It was abolished. They got rid of it. Yes, you need tools. You need a hammer, but you also need someone to swing the hammer, and the LNP abolished that position. He also went on to say—

**Mrs Frecklington:** Get back to 2022.

**Mr KELLY:** I take the interjection from the member who is on a warning, Deputy Speaker.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Member for Nanango, I am afraid you are going to have to leave the chamber for an hour. You were on a warning. He took your interjection. I was going to warn you.

*Whereupon the honourable member for Nanango withdrew from the chamber at 12.13 pm.*

**Mr KELLY:** I just wanted to give the member more time to celebrate St Patrick's Day! The member also raised concerns that 'the Small Business Commissioner would not have the power to compel state government departments to cooperate with inquiries or to initiate investigations in its own right'. I think again we should compare the powers that existed for the small business commissioner under the LNP. That is right; they were abolished, so they had no powers.

It is true that they should have concerns about these things. The permanency that we are granting to this body will allow this body to play a really important role for small businesses in our community. I will get on to that in a moment. I wanted to respond to one more thing that the member for Southern Downs said. The member said—

It is quite obvious that the state archivist was forced out because he was doing his job too well.

It takes a certain kind of arrogance to walk into this place and start pontificating on integrity and to come in and make a statement for which you provide no proof—zero proof—of your statement. In my opinion, the member would have known that this statement was factually incorrect. The statement is factually incorrect and the member would have known that he was intending to mislead the House.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock. Member for Greenslopes, there are processes in place where you can make that complaint to the Speaker, if you would like to.

**Mr KELLY:** Thank you. I intend to do that. I also intend to exercise my parliamentary right to call on the member to correct the record. He has made a statement in this debate which I believe is incorrect and misleading to the House and he has the opportunity to correct the record. I will leave it there because I do want to get on to the bill. It is a fantastic bill.

The LNP like to peddle the myth that they are the party of small business. I think over the last seven years a significant proportion of the growth in employment that we have seen in this state which we have heard today—4.3 per cent—has been achieved through the work that various ministers have done, and now this minister has done, in relation to strengthening and supporting the small business sector.

I literally ran out of time to go around and congratulate businesses that were receiving funding grants during the very difficult time of COVID. We know businesses were doing it extremely tough—businesses like Liquid Admin, The Old Seven, Lavelle Hair, Ashton & Old, Fitstop, Furniture Packages Australia, Little Black Pug, Stephen Dibb Jewellery, Olympus Cheese, the Institute of Culinary Excellence and Video Media Productions. I could go on because there are literally hundreds and hundreds of businesses in my electorate that received funding grants. Whenever I had the chance to catch up with those businesses, they were telling me how fantastic our government was in terms of creating the conditions that they needed to be successful in business, and a big part of that was then also to create employment for people. I think this bill is an important step in supporting small business.

I want to talk about some of the poor behaviour we saw from commercial landlords during the COVID period. I cannot speak for absolutely every commercial landlord. I am sure there are some good ones out there, but we saw some horrendous behaviour during COVID. I will tell one story, but I could tell it 20 or 30 times across my electorate.

We had an iconic business that was in a building that they had fitted out and renovated. They had built a successful business. Prior to that business renting that building, that building had sat empty for 10 years. Nobody else wanted to rent that building. This business came in and they rented that building. They established a successful business. Due to the nature of their business, when the lockdowns happened they lost all of their income. They had extended three times and taken up the entire building by this stage. They turned to their landlord and asked for assistance and were effectively told, 'Two for the Valley.' They were not only told, 'Two for the Valley,' but also told, 'By the way, your renewal is coming up. We think we're going to bump up your rent.' That is the sort of appalling behaviour that people had to endure. I do not know how commercial leasing works, but if that business left that particular premises it would be another 10 years before somebody else might want to go into those premises.

I can tell the House what that business said when I rang them and told them about the creation of the Small Business Commissioner and the role it could potentially play. They were over the moon. I had so many good conversations with small businesses who were having those sorts of disputes. I think if you can get sensible and decent people in a room through a mediation process, you can get outcomes. That is what I believe we have seen over and over again. The reality is that we need the capacity to support small businesses to continue to grow, to continue to employ people. I think this bill is going to do just that. That is why I support this bill. It is going to be good for small business. It is going to be good for employment in our state. I commend the bill to the House.