




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (4.33 pm): I am pleased to speak to the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021 in support of the establishment of a permanent small business commissioner for Queensland. Our state has over 450,000 small business operators. Our small business operators have a wide variety of trade: hospitality, retail, food, manufacturing, small engineering workshops and mechanical workshops. Their types of trade are varied, but the pressure of keeping the doors open and staff employed is a similar problem for traders. I send a shout-out to the Mackay Region Chamber of Commerce for its ongoing and successful 'buy local' campaign. This campaign encourages locals to keep money in our community. It also encourages money to be kept in local businesses that employ local families. This is keeping our local families in work.

Mackay has many small businesses that are special to our regions. We have the famous Sorbellos Italian restaurant—

Mr Harper: Good restaurant.

Mrs GILBERT: It is; everybody has been there—Roshni's, Church on Palmer, The Dispensary, the Grazing Goat Cafe and Coolmango. These are just a few of our great eating places. I highlight Gypsy and the Bowerbird homewares, Let the Children Play toy store, Carroll's newsagency, Man About Menswear, McGuire Air & Refrigeration, Barcam Electrical, Roy Sturdy Plumbing, the very special Cliffies Butcher Shop on George Street, Slade Point Butcher, Sinclair Meats, Klippitz Hair & Beauty and many other wonderful hairdressers in Mackay. We have numerous locally owned and managed family businesses in Mackay.

The commissioner position will be an extension of the temporary commissioner position established to support small businesses navigate the uncertainty and change that they faced when COVID affected their trading during lockdowns. We know that the temporary commissioner assisted many small businesses in getting back to trading. They carried out over 4,500 activities for these small businesses including inquiries, disputes, outreach and advocacy activities and played a crucial role in supporting Queensland businesses to avoid lengthy and costly leasing disputes during the pandemic, with early and necessary information and advice. There was also advice on how to access mediation.

The success of the temporary office in addressing the previous gap in small business support relative to other states is why this government has committed to appoint a permanent Queensland Small Business Commissioner and establish the supporting office. We want to enhance the operating environment for small business. The permanent commissioner will support the office, will improve the tailored support and advice to Queensland small businesses and will provide timely and affordable access to justice through the permanent commissioner's dispute resolutions function.

During the national COVID lockdown I had many conversations with small business operators about the health of their business. The fear for their financial viability was palpable. Business owners were weighing up losing their home, keeping their business afloat or maybe just walking away from their business. As business support packages rolled out, they were able to apply for the type of support that best suited their need. During lockdown I bought lots of takeaway coffees—actually every day—

from many of the cafes in Mackay. I wanted to keep in contact with the small businesses in my electorate. I was also able to encourage locals to ring ahead to their favourite cafe or restaurant and order their takeaway, just to keep the money flowing into our local small businesses, mainly owned by families and employing many locals.

One cafe owner, whose business I will not name, was struggling with his rent and paying his franchise fees. He was paying staff. His No. 1 goal was to keep the family home. With a QRIDA loan he was able to have some breathing space and to get back on his feet post lockdown. One thing that resonated with me was that, although he could run a fantastic cafe and make a mean coffee, he needed assistance when it came to accessing financial support in that the process was different from sitting down with his bank manager. He did not really have his head around state and federal government departments, so we worked through this together. I recently had contact with this small business not just for a coffee but for more advice. I was able to connect him with the temporary Small Business Commissioner. He was happy with the advice and the information that he sought. He was able to put some of the pieces of the business puzzle together for his personal way forward.

With the ongoing uncertainty around COVID in the community and people thinking about their own safety and taking action to stay away from crowds during peak times of outbreaks, business is not as predictable as it was pre COVID. COVID has shone a spotlight on the need for small business support. It is vital that a commissioner dedicated to supporting small business is established after those opposite—the LNP—abolished the Small Business Commissioner. It is only a Labor government that has the best interests of future viability of our 450,000 small businesses in mind.

During the first COVID shutdown local businesses realised that they would need to pivot quickly to stay viable. COVID adaptation grants were applied for and used well to grow the health of our local businesses in Mackay. Carmel and Maddie of Saige & Sohl clothing and fashion store used their COVID adaptation grant to build their online presence. During lockdown some people were cashed up and still wanted to continue to buy fashion. Carmel and Maddie were able to go from just being a local store to being a national store—selling their clothing and shoes to local people who were able to collect their parcels but also to people in Melbourne and other major cities.

Ocean International went online through the use of a COVID adaptation grant. While their accommodation was empty, Hannah and her team were able to keep their catering staff employed by producing high-quality restaurant meals packaged for takeaway. They put their menu online so ordering and payment was easy. The takeaway was easy to collect with limited contact with the public. There are so many fabulous businesses in my region.

McCarthy Panel Works is a recent recipient of a growth grant. This local family has been in the business of smash repairs and panel works since 1971. Their \$50,000 grant will enable their business to move into the repair of electrical vehicles. There will be lots of those after the announcements this week. E-vehicles are aluminium, unlike traditional cars which are made of steel. The two metals do not mix. They need new equipment and workshop space. Andrea and Craig McCarthy are getting on with building the new side of their business. They employ many locals and they are continually taking on young apprentices. They are training the tradies of the future.

We also have many local businesses that are recipients of the second-round Business Basic Grants. I will outline a few of these. Becker Project Solutions is a newly established business providing development process management and civil engineering consultancy services to the local government and private urban development sector. Active Blends is a superfood bar in Mackay. It is a Mackay based cafe that specialises in juices, smoothies and coffees. Primal Coffee Roasters is an amazing business that purchases green coffee beans which they specially roast. They roast them locally and deliver to our restaurants and cafes. Mackay is a great place for business.