




Speech By
Lance McCallum

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2022

SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (5.43 pm): I rise in support of the Small Business Commissioner Bill which will provide improved support and advice for small business owners across our great state. Queensland is home to over 452,000 small businesses that employ fewer than 20 people. They represent over 90 per cent of businesses across our state. They are the lifeblood of our local communities. They are the very heart of every industry. They are our favourite cafes, takeaways, butchers, bakers, hairdressers, beauty salons, fruit shops, clothing boutiques, dog groomers or independent music store.

In our local community of Bundamba they are businesses like our iconic diner at Ebbw Vale; butchers Jace and Lee at Redbank Plains; Just Cuts at Redbank Plaza; Forty West at South Ripley; Goodna Place Fruit Market; Olive and Bean at Collingwood Park; Kruger Bakehouse; and Barkley and Pips dog cafe and groomers at Bundamba—along with so many more. This bill supports these very businesses as they continue to drive our nation leading economic and employment recovery from a local level that extends right across our community. We back our small businesses because they back our local community. They are our local community.

That stands in strong contrast to how the LNP treated small businesses when they were last in government. As we have heard, they abolished the Queensland Small Business Commissioner so that there was no dedicated advocacy role for small businesses. If that was not bad enough, red tape went up under the LNP. In its April 2015 Red Tape Survey, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry said—

The burden of red tape has intensified over the past two years and continues to adversely impact the performance of Queensland businesses.

They found one in four businesses felt growth was hindered by red tape and were disappointed the LNP government had let them down.

Government members interjected.

Mr McCALLUM: Indeed. The LNP failed to release a dedicated small business policy at the last election—little wonder when we consider the abysmal performance they put in with regard to small businesses when they were last in government. Their last small business policy was from May 2019, well before COVID-19 and the global pandemic. It would seem that the best they were able to muster was a small promise to prioritise procurement. In contrast, we have implemented an actual target which means real money in the hands of actual small businesses, and we are transparently reporting against our target.

I will turn to the LNP amendments to the bill that have been circulated. As the minister raised, not only are they inconsistent with federal arrangements for similar positions, they are extremely ill-considered and underdeveloped even for the goal that they are trying to achieve. If they take away the check and balance of being reported to government, then what oversight is there? There is certainly nothing in the amendments that would provide any oversight whatsoever. There is no mention of the

commissioner's position reporting to a parliamentary committee—not that it would matter because even if it did they would probably sack the parliamentary committee in the middle of the night like they did to the PCCC.

The arrangements in this bill strike an excellent balance and provide an appropriate level of oversight. There is a balance between the commissioner carrying out the roles and functions impartially and appropriate public accountability and transparency, especially when we consider the broader context of the openness and transparency framework that has been implemented by the Palaszczuk Labor government which is nation leading.

The bill will make permanent our Queensland Small Business Commissioner and its supporting office, transitioning the temporary commissioner role from its previous arrangements focused mainly on managing and responding to COVID impacts to a role with wider applications to providing ongoing support for businesses. It will ensure timely and affordable access to justice through the dispute resolution functions and provide a statutory basis for the commissioner's dispute resolution functions relating to retail tenancy disputes and enable mediation for commercial leasing and small business franchise disputes on an opt-in basis.

One of the primary roles of the commissioner is to mediate leasing disputes around things like retail shops and franchising to help prevent costly legal fees and to save that most vital resource for small businesses—time. It has been a huge success to date. Since May 2020 the temporary commissioner has carried out more than 6,000 activities for small businesses, commercial tenants and landlords. It is fantastic that so far more than two-thirds of leasing disputes have been successfully resolved by either informal resolution or mediation thanks to the Small Business Commissioner and her office.

The establishment of a permanent commissioner's office means small businesses will have a clearly identifiable, single point of contact for advice and assistance to help them understand their options in a dispute, as well as guidance on how to solve it informally. It delivers on one of our election commitments and it will also respond to the very unique needs of our local small businesses—providing easily accessible advice and support, and reducing the time and costs associated with resolving disputes.

Importantly, it has the backing of our frontline workers—the small business sector that welcomed the appointment of the temporary commissioner in May 2020 as part of our Big Plans for Small Business Strategy. With an ever-evolving operating environment, it means that a permanent commissioner and the office can continue to offer one-on-one support and an essential point of contact.

Backing small business has been at the heart of our \$14.5 billion COVID-19 economic recovery plan. The Palaszczuk government has committed more than \$2.5 billion in business support since March 2020, including \$1 billion in job support loans for over 7,000 businesses; \$950 million in payroll and land tax relief and electricity bill relief, because we still own our electricity assets; \$320 million in business grant supports, jointly funded, to over 35,000 businesses; \$182 million in adaptation grants to 20,000 businesses; and \$20 million on a COVID-19 cleaning rebate. More than 30,000 businesses have already received grants of up to \$30,000 under the Business Support Grants program. As a result, that means more than \$283 million is already in the bank accounts of businesses across the state that were impacted by the August 2021 lockdown.

We are backing businesses with tailor-made programs like our Mentoring for Growth service, small business financial counsellors and, of course, the Queensland Small Business Commissioner. In our local community of Bundamba, we have also provided support to businesses including World Gym Ipswich, MJO Bookkeeping, Support with a Purpose and MVP Cutz, which is across the road from my office in Goodna.

Small businesses are at the heart and hubs of our local communities. They are our families, our friends, our neighbours. Supporting small business through initiatives like the Small Business Commissioner is not only key to strengthening Queensland's economy but also crucial to helping families and communities prosper. That is exactly what will help be achieved by the measures in this bill. I commend the bill to the House.