




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGEES

Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2022

SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (3.06 pm): I rise in support of the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021. The bill aims to permanently establish the position of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner and their office and provide a statutory basis for the commissioner's dispute resolution functions relating to retail tenancy disputes. It will also allow businesses to opt into mediation for commercial leasing and small business franchise disputes. A permanent commissioner and their office will provide small businesses with specialist support, including advocacy and dispute resolution services, as they have done since 2020.

Businesses across Queensland have struggled over the past two years faced with a pandemic, reduced trade, workforce shortages and, just as they got back on their feet, recent floods. It has been an extraordinarily difficult and stressful time. I acknowledge the struggle that many have experienced and the resilience shown by the sector, their employees and the communities who supported them during these difficult times.

In early 2020 our government created the temporary Small Business Commissioner position, cognisant of the fact that businesses needed during COVID more dispute-resolution functions relating to retail tenancy disputes than ever. We also established the Business Support Grants Program which as of 1 December last year had paid out \$318 million to nearly 35,000 businesses. There was also our Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation Grant Program to support small businesses that were subject to closure or were impacted by COVID restrictions to adapt and sustain their operations and build resilience. This program has provided \$196 million to nearly 20,000 businesses. We awarded \$1 billion in no-interest job loans to the 7,000 businesses that supported 86,000 Queensland jobs. In addition, we provided electricity bill rebates for 180,000 Queensland businesses.

Whether it is small business grants, tenancy dispute resolution, mentoring or getting the economic conditions right that has seen our government since coming to office help create over 405,000 jobs and an unemployment rate of 4.3 per cent—the lowest it has been in over 13 years—we want to see our small business community flourish and thrive post these difficult past two years. Small businesses make up 97 per cent of all Queensland businesses. The Nudgee electorate is home to over 4,000 small to medium sized businesses in industries as diverse as manufacturing, construction, service, hospitality and retail.

My community, like many, had a tough time during COVID. I wanted to ensure that we were doing everything possible to make sure that they survived the pandemic. I held a virtual small business forum so my local businesses could hear directly from then minister for small business Shannon Fentiman. She outlined the support that Business Queensland could offer and how the government could support them through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Queensland small business grants were very well received by businesses in my electorate—businesses such as Hub Brewing in Geebung, a neighbourhood brewery owned by Linda and Chris, where locals meet for friendly banter over a cold beer or two. All beers are brewed onsite and there are different food trucks every week.

Mr Mellish: Great times.

Ms LINARD: I take the interjection from the member for Aspley. It is a great place. The \$10,000 grant allowed them to improve their online ordering and scheduling system and to invest in additional marketing for the business. If anyone in the chamber is ever in Geebung, I highly recommend dropping by and trying their Sonic Lager—a personal favourite of mine.

Another beneficiary of the Queensland small business grants was Bells Property Services in Virginia that conduct building facade inspections. They used the \$10,000 grant to support the development of new technology to augment their existing building inspection services. Then there is Steve from the Photo Booth Guys in Banyo who also received a \$10,000 grant which he said made all the difference when it was needed most. This is just a small example of the many local businesses that reached out to us and were assisted by our small business supports.

Many others called and were desperate for advice and advocacy in respect of tenancy disputes. Having the office of the Small Business Commissioner has been of tremendous assistance and comfort to local businesses in this regard, with my office referring many for their assistance. Since opening in May 2020, the temporary Queensland Small Business Commissioner has carried out more than 7,200 activities for small businesses, commercial tenants and landlords. This includes answering 5,400 inquiries, mediating in 970 disputes and coordinating 580 outreach and 240 advocacy activities. Additionally, 66 per cent of leasing disputes accepted by the Queensland Small Business Commissioner have been successfully resolved either by informal resolution or mediation. This has saved small businesses from paying costly legal fees. Permanently establishing the position of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner will allow them to continue this vital work.

As I said earlier, it has not only been the last two years of COVID disruption that has challenged our small business community, the recent floods were a further knock when many were getting back on their feet. As the waters receded late last month, I, like many local members, was out in my community surveying the damage and providing whatever practical assistance was needed. Whether it was industrial businesses in Virginia, takeaway and retail businesses on Zillmere Road or our much loved Inflatable World at the back of Toombul, all were impacted—none more so than the 150 businesses and their employees catastrophically impacted by the inundation of Toombul Shopping Centre.

Many businesses and their staff reached out to my office and to my federal colleague, the member for Lilley, Anika Wells, for assistance. Last Thursday we convened a public information session for Toombul businesses and employees and any other businesses in my local community that had been impacted by the floods. The information session came about following a phone call to Small Business Commissioner Maree Adshead. Within days of our phone conversation we had representatives of the Small Business Commissioner's office, Peter Maddock, the director of assistance, and Julie Robson; Glenn Watson, the regional director of the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training; the regional area manager, Brian Coe, and his team from the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority; and representatives from the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Centrelink and the Brisbane City Council on site across from Toombul to assist small businesses. I take this opportunity to thank each of those mentioned for their time and assistance, and the Small Business Commissioner for her advocacy. I asked her to contact Mirvac, the owners of Toombul Shopping Centre, to offer every assistance to all the businesses in the centre and she faithfully did so and has been of great assistance with ongoing information and coordination.

I would also like to acknowledge my colleague and friend the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, Di Farmer, who has been out to my electorate and so many other electorates across Queensland several times already in her first year in the role to listen to the concerns of local businesses and to continue to tailor our response as a government to their needs. When it comes to supporting small business in Queensland, it is only a Labor government that will do what needs to be done when it needs to be done most to keep our state moving forward. I commend the bill to the House.