




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (3.13 pm): I rise in support of the Small Business Commissioner Bill and to make a small contribution to the debate this afternoon. We cannot underestimate the contribution of small businesses in our state. There are estimated to be around 450,000 small businesses of up to 20 employees across our state. These businesses are in every industry and in every community in every region of Queensland. Importantly, they employ more than 40 per cent of all private sector workers and contribute an estimated \$120 billion each year to our economy. Their contribution is enormous. In my electorate of Algester there are many small businesses in places like Acacia Ridge and Archerfield right through to where I live in Hillcrest that are absolutely making a huge difference in terms of employing local people but also driving the economy of my local area.

From my portfolio's perspective, we know how important small businesses across the information and communication technology industries are to our state. We are fortunate to have thousands of innovative and vibrant small businesses across ICT industries. In fact, the 2019 State of Small Business report identified that small businesses across the information, media and telecommunications industries are some of the fastest growing in Queensland. It is an incredibly exciting space when we look at the kind of growth we are seeing in the information, media and telecommunications industry area.

From artificial intelligence to cloud based technologies, these businesses are not only employing tens of thousands of Queenslanders and boosting our economy but also improving our lives and making our state a better place in which to live. For example, Brisbane based technology business Real Serious Games is profiled in my portfolio's Digital Professional Workforce Action Plan 2020-24. This company creates engaging ways for businesses to train, upskill and create safer work environments by using extended reality, XR, technology. Its cutting-edge work has applications across the construction, mining, transport and education industries using technology to make workplaces safer for employees.

It is for these businesses and their future that I support the Small Business Commissioner Bill. Any efforts to make it easier for small businesses to start up and grow are good for Queenslanders and our economy. This bill seeks to establish a permanent Queensland Small Business Commissioner to deliver key functions of engagement and support, dispute resolution and mediation for leasing and franchising disputes. That is an incredibly important part of ensuring small businesses are able to operate at the highest level in our state. Over the years since the Small Business Commissioner role was temporarily created we know that that role has made a huge difference to many small businesses across Queensland.

We know that it can be challenging to start up and grow a small business. Over the past couple of years, COVID-19 has caused unprecedented challenges for Queenslanders, including small business owners and the people they employ. Businesses across a number of industries, including hospitality, tourism and the arts—to name just a few—were particularly hard hit. The Palaszczuk

government stepped up to provide a range of supports to small businesses to help them recover from the impacts of this pandemic. This included the creation of the temporary Queensland Small Business Commissioner along with financial assistance and relief.

The Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021 builds on these efforts, including the permanent appointment of a commissioner. This is an important function providing information and advocacy support to small businesses and informal resolution and mediation. Of course, we have seen the impacts of the recent floods across South-East Queensland. This bill will assist small businesses to recover from these floods and future disasters, particularly if they need support with leasing and franchising disputes. Having seen the devastation firsthand across many communities and as my department has led community recovery efforts, I know just how important this support and assistance will be for many small business owners recovering from the recent flooding events. We are seeing some flooding impacting local areas now that I know Deputy Speaker Lister has a particular connection to.

From my portfolio's perspective, it is also important to note that the changes included in this bill will apply to commercial tenancies. While there is no impact for residential tenancies in social housing, my department regulates a range of for-profit and not-for-profit service providers that could be deemed small businesses by the commissioner. This includes retirement villages, residential or manufactured home parks, residential services such as boarding houses and supported accommodation services and community housing providers. These regulated accommodation providers could have the opportunity to approach the Small Business Commissioner for dispute resolution assistance. The commissioner could be a valuable source for information, advice or relevant general support. It would complement and possibly ease the workload of existing dispute mechanisms such as the Queensland Ombudsman or the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Additionally, the establishment of a permanent Queensland Small Business Commissioner could complement existing Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 initiatives regarding guidance on best practice and enhanced dispute resolution mechanisms for the regulated housing sector.

Before I finish I want to pay tribute to the Minister for Small Business not only for her outstanding work in ensuring that this bill has come to the House but also on the work that she oversaw with regard to the recent Workforce Summit, which I think was an incredible success. Industries right across our economy came forward to speak about the very challenging aspects of not just running a small business but also the workforce that is required to ensure that small businesses can continue to thrive in Queensland. I want to place on record my thanks and acknowledgement to the Minister for Small Business for overseeing that summit but also for continuing to represent the interests and needs of small business in Queensland. On that note, I commend the bill to the House.