




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR HILL**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2022

### **SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (12.34 pm): I rise to give my contribution on the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021. The policy objective of the bill is to permanently establish a Queensland Small Business Commissioner and a supporting office. This will 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 only.

A further objective of the bill is to cease the operation of the temporary commissioner on commencement of the permanent commissioner. As part of this, it is intended to transition the temporary commissioner role from its previous arrangements, focused primarily on managing and responding to COVID-19 impacts, to a role with wider application to support small businesses. The bill also states that the permanent commissioner and supporting office will improve tailored support and advice to Queensland small businesses and provide timely and affordable access to justice through the permanent commissioner's dispute resolution function.

I wish to state that I will be supporting this bill. However, I want to put on record that the appointment of the commissioner must be transparent and devoid of cronyism to ensure we have a person on the job who is independent from government and can make decisions independently. I also want to place on record that the position and the office must have the authority to make effective, timely and decisive decisions in assisting small businesses in the state. Too often governments come up with great ideas to assist industry; however, they fail to ensure these positions provide effective services to the very people the office is created for. In other words, we do not want this position to be another reward for one of the boys. No, that never happens! What are you talking about!

I also point out that small businesses in regional Queensland face different issues compared to those in the large south-east corner so this must be recognised and considered when delivering these duties of the office. We have seen what happens in rural and regional Queensland when a bakery or a corner store closes down. It affects the community and it is then difficult to get another bakery or store like that up and going and get someone out to those regional areas. That is why it is so important to support these small businesses, particularly in rural and regional Queensland.

I am surprised, however, that the temporary commissioner has not heard the loud shouts from small business in regional Queensland about the absurd vaccination mandate imposed by this government—particularly when they have to police their premises—which has impacted heavily. If the temporary commissioner is truly doing his job, he should be constantly petitioning the government to immediately drop the vaccine mandates. Otherwise, many small businesses will be wiped out by the end of October. If the job of the Small Business Commissioner is to assist small business get back to normal business, then dropping the vaccination mandate should be the office's first priority.

However, apart from this failure in the current temporary office's duties, I can see the positives in the formation of a permanent commissioner and office. These positives include: reducing red tape for small business, which is very important; making it easier for small business to do business with the Queensland government, which is a priority; providing fair, independent and balanced dispute

resolution; liaising regularly and effectively with small business stakeholders regarding upcoming initiatives of the Queensland government, which has been so vital through COVID; receiving and responding to queries, submissions and concerns raised by small business on the delivery of government policy and services; connecting small business with expert advice, which is vital; and communicating with the public and raising awareness of the benefits and opportunities of small business as well as with government departments.

I also welcome the priority policies which will focus on rental relief and dispute resolution, which has continually raised its ugly head through the COVID period. I welcome any initiatives by the commissioner towards enhancing the operating environment for small business and in particular any changes that aim to reduce the complexity and costs. The establishment of an alternative, non-legal pathway for mediation will also save small business thousands in expensive legal fees that many simply cannot afford.

I cannot remember who it was that said this, but I used to quote that it was Peter Costello who said that if you give the incentive to every small business across Australia—because I believe it was 800,000 of them at that time—you would solve the unemployment problem. I quoted that the other day and someone said, 'No, it was not Peter Costello; it was Paul Keating.' Either way, it was a good line. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Try Google, member for Hill.