




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2022

ADJOURNMENT

Burnett Electorate, Small Business

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.08 pm): Earlier this month owners of small businesses in Burnett and Bundaberg met to share their despair and frustration over the impact of restrictions that affect their day-to-day business, worker shortages and spiralling confidence. While every small business is doing it tough, hospitality has had to carry the burden of policing the green tick of double vaccinations et cetera. They can see that there is no end in sight for the uncertainty and there is no assurance from this government that things are going to improve.

Queenslanders in the Wide Bay have done what they were asked—99 per cent of eligible people are now single vaccinated. Small businesses in my electorate ask: ‘What more can we do?’ If mandates do not change, small businesses are going to go to the wall. They will have to close, with no answers to the shortages of staff, the lack of customers and the lack of clarity from this government.

Mr POWER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. We have a bill before the House where these issues are being canvassed. The member is pre-empting that debate and he should wait until he has his opportunity to contribute to that debate.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): I will get some advice. Member, I remind you not to anticipate details of the bill.

Mr BENNETT: Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate your guidance. Following the business confidence meetings in Bundaberg on 10 March, I note that this group wrote to the Premier and their local member for Bundaberg appealing for help. They tell me that neither the Premier nor the member for Bundaberg has answered them. The member for Bundaberg spoke last sitting week and tonight on small business issues and COVID in this place. He spoke about the importance of small businesses for Queenslanders, but he did not support them in either of those contributions. Job opportunities will not be there—

Mr POWER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member for Bundaberg is flagrantly disregarding the rules. He actually made reference to a speech in the debate, further advancing the debate that the member for Bundaberg had made. It is flagrant.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will get guidance.

Mr SMITH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Ms SIMPSON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am getting advice from the Clerk at the table and I will ask everyone to come to order while I get that advice. Member for Burnett, I caution you to not anticipate debate.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you.

Mr SMITH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I actually attended that business meeting so therefore I take offence. I have the draft letter ready to go. I take offence and ask the member to withdraw.

Mr BENNETT: Madam Deputy Speaker, I note that the member for Bundaberg quoted two businesses from my own electorate—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, the member for Bundaberg takes personal offence to your comments. Do you withdraw?

Mr BENNETT: Can I seek clarity on the personal offence? I do not think I mentioned a personal offence. Is it just a vindictive and disruptive point of order? I am just clarifying that.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will seek advice.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, the member for Bundaberg has taken personal offence. Can I please ask you to withdraw?

Mr BENNETT: Of course, under your guidance.

Mr HART: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I did not hear the member for Bundaberg take personal offence. He did not say those words.

Mr BENNETT: I have withdrawn, if that clarifies it for the House. We all want to go home.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, you have the call.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you. I note that the member for Bundaberg quoted two businesses in my electorate of Burnett—and I acknowledge the Windmill Cafe and the Seafood Smokery—yet the member for Bundaberg failed to represent his own businesses which attended the business confidence meetings where he was present, despite those hardworking families and owners writing to him in desperation.

Mr SMITH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. This is the same subject that I took personal offence to. I take personal offence and I ask the member to withdraw. They are not true statements.

Mr BENNETT: Madam Deputy Speaker, I withdraw, but I will write to you and clear this up at the end of this sitting.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I do not need coaching from you, Linus. That is for sure. Let me put that in your head. Bundaberg is not alone—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, I ask you to withdraw unconditionally.

Mr BENNETT: Absolutely, but I am not sure what I have done to upset everyone. I unconditionally withdraw my statements. Bundaberg is not alone. Fraser Coast businesses held meetings with frustrated hospitality owners about the impact of mandates on their trade. They echoed similar messages to those shared with the Premier in the letter dated 11 March from Bundaberg, Burnett and Childers businesses. They are not alone. At the same time, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland issued a desperate plea to the state government for a review into restrictions and a clear way forward to recovery.

Mr Power interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Logan.

Mr HART: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I understand that the member for Logan is under a warning already, yet he is interjecting. I ask you to rule on that.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr BENNETT: What I might do is move to the hardworking volunteers in rural and remote Queensland who faithfully arrange shows and agricultural events and who are feeling unfairly targeted by this government. Agricultural shows remain subject to these mandates, and they are cancelling and postponing events that are crucial to the small towns and communities—

Mr POWER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member for Burnett spoke on this very bill this afternoon. He is absolutely aware that this debate is ongoing yet he continues to debate it.

Mr MICKELBERG: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Buderim, I ask you to take a seat and I will deal with the first point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: It is in relation to the point of order that was raised by the member for Logan.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Buderim?

Mr MICKELBERG: I note that the member for Burnett has not referred to what bill he is discussing, but if we consider the COVID emergency bill that is before the House, that deals with the head of power—not with mandates in any regard whatsoever. I would contend that the member is not anticipating debate. I would also observe that the member is referring to the Small Business Commissioner Bill, which is now finalised, and contributions that were made to that bill. I would contend there is no point of order from the member for Logan.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will seek advice from the Clerk. There is no point of order.

Mr BENNETT: It is an important time to talk about small businesses in our community. They are important to economic and sustainable outcomes. While I have a few minutes left, I will talk about the great businesses that provide so much to our communities. Those businesses need support. I guess it goes back to backing up the leadership team who have been calling for support for small businesses over a long period of time. We need to acknowledge the heartache. We need to acknowledge the deals we have to make. We need the government to give them respect and empathy. The small business community has come together in my community over a number of forums in Hervey Bay, Childers and Bundaberg. They are trying to express an opinion and trying to get people to listen. The Premier and the member for Bundaberg, who attended—

Mr Smith: I was there, mate.

Mr BENNETT: You were there, but you have not backed them up and that is the problem. That is why I am on the record tonight to say that it is enough. It is time for the people who make these promises to our community to back it up and stop squibbing their opportunities. When members speak in this House, they need to speak for the people they represent.