




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENTS

Small and Family Businesses

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (2.43 pm): Labor has abandoned Queensland's small and family businesses. You would not believe that it is Small Business Month because Labor turn their backs on small business every month of the year, so there is nothing special about May. Around one million Queenslanders are employed by small businesses, yet they are constantly an afterthought for this state government. As I travel the state to listen to business owners and community members, I hear their frustration at Labor's lip-service to small business. Recently I spoke to one tradie who summed it up pretty well. He said, 'It seems like the state government's Small Business Strategy is for us to get the scraps off the table of the big boys.' The challenges that Queensland's small and family businesses are facing at the moment have not been recognised by this state government. The impacts of crime and skyrocketing power prices are both problems of this state government's own making.

Thousands of small and family businesses are in distress. Many have desperately turned to the Small Business Financial Counselling Service for advice on how to keep their heads above water, but the service itself is now in distress. The southern Queensland team of just eight counsellors is working at 111 per cent of capacity. Those professional and dedicated counsellors are a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of small businesses. Labor treats that critical service with zero respect. Right now, staff are asking if they will have a job on 1 July. They are unable to take on new clients because they do not know if they will still be around after their funding runs out on 30 June this year. How are staff expected to plan for the future and what about the small businesses that count on them? We know that federal Labor already cut funding to that critical service last year. I call on the state government to immediately commit to extending funding to the Small Business Financial Counselling Service.

The impact of natural disasters is still being felt by small businesses, particularly in the north. Last week in Kuranda I heard from one tourism operator who has been closed for five months now. They have no income, just bills. They have had to spend thousands of dollars, which they do not have, on an accountant to help them apply for a Tourism Exceptional Assistance Grant. The application process has been so drawn out and convoluted that they are still waiting. They are waiting to find out if help is coming while they sink further into the red. They have been told that a small amount of their costs might be met but it will not be enough. The uncertainty is killing many small businesses in the north.

I ask: where is the small business strategy? In January last year, the government ran a small business survey, at great cost, to develop a strategy. They said we would have a strategy by the back end of last year but we are still waiting. Remember, colleagues: it is Small Business Month. The government put on a lovely event last week. They are all big fans of making it look like they care while small businesses suffer in silence. It is time to show Labor the door in '24.