




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2025

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Western Queensland, Tourism; Back to Work Program

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (2.38 pm): If those kids want to come to Cairns, it will be far more exciting than what they are seeing here today. I also want to touch on the member for Gregory's comments. He made a very good point: there are some fantastic tourism products in Western Queensland. I would love to see a lot more support from Tourism and Events Queensland. There are hardworking people out there providing those tourism products.

I want to talk about the Back to Work program. It is delivering across the state. It is directly supporting small businesses in a range of initiatives. It is working with TAFE Queensland to deliver a range of impartial but tailored one-on-one supports for jobseekers to be ready and, more importantly, it is filling the jobs that are desperately needed. This is so vitally important once again in regional areas. Back to Work has delivered more than \$300 million in support of over 13,500 employees. Importantly, more than 80 per cent of those employers have been small businesses: the backbone of our economy.

In Cairns we have seen firsthand the benefits of Back to Work. It is helping small businesses thrive and giving jobseekers the opportunity to rejoin the workforce with dignity and with purpose. One great local example is Cairns Truck School, a family-owned and operated business in my electorate. I understand Back to Work has helped them provide employment and stability to their workers and has given them the financial certainty to continue delivering quality training and service. They said—

We have worked hard to deliver quality service and training, and we are grateful to be part of a program that genuinely supports Queensland and small businesses like ours.

Since 2016, Back to Work has directly supported over 29,000 new employees and employers through eligible incentive payments to businesses when hiring disadvantaged Queenslanders. A huge number of Queensland jobseekers are accessing a range of supports, as I said earlier, through TAFE. This is one of those programs that works and it works well in regional areas. I heard the minister this morning talk about TAFE and some time ago she talked about Back to Work. At this stage there has been no commitment to continue these initiatives. These are fundamental for jobs. They are fundamental in regional areas. I can guarantee that there are many people, in particular in the Far North and across regional Queensland, who are watching whether these initiatives will continue. For the party that claims to be the supporter of small businesses, it would be amazing if it did not. It would not be amazing if they cut it. This needs to be guaranteed. We need to ensure the money is continued. I look forward to many more discussions in relation to TAFE.