

## QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 167

asked on Tuesday 9 March 2021

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**MR R KATTER** ASKED THE MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS AND MINISTER FOR TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (HON D FARMER) —

### QUESTION:

With reference to the chronic worker shortages being experienced by businesses in rural and remote Queensland, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—

Will the Minister commit to lobbying the Federal Government to provide tax incentives, for example a taxfree threshold up to \$50,000 for employees who agree to work in critically-understaffed roles in remote regions, in order to solve this problem?

### ANSWER:

The Palaszczuk Government recognises the importance of helping Queensland businesses to find the workers they need as businesses recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help inform the Government's economic recovery efforts, we held a series of Small Business Roadshow events in 17 locations across Queensland throughout February and March 2021 to hear from local small businesses on the challenges they are facing and how government can help them to grow and thrive.

A common theme that arose in rural and regional locations, including in Mount Isa, were the difficulties associated with recruiting and retaining skilled workers.

The Palaszczuk Government has been, and will continue to work together with the Australian Government and other States and Territories through National Cabinet to address workforce issues experienced by businesses across Queensland, particularly in remote and rural areas.

As the member is aware, the Palaszczuk Government has made supporting businesses and connecting local skilled workers and local employment opportunities a central focus of the state's economic recovery.

The \$196 million Small Business COVID-19 Adaption Grant (SBCAG) program is supporting small businesses subject to closure or highly impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown restrictions to adapt and sustain their operations and build resilience. As of 5 March 2021, 20,146 recipients have benefited from \$179 million in funding.

The Palaszczuk Government provided substantial tax relief to support small and medium businesses across Queensland through COVID-19, including \$950 million in

payroll tax relief – providing refunds, payment holidays and deferrals for eligible businesses. In September 2020 a range of measures to further ease the tax burden on businesses were announced, including a two-month waiver of payroll tax for July and August 2020 for businesses with annual Australian taxable wages up to \$6.5 million and continuing to exempt JobKeeper subsidy payments from payroll tax.

Our Back to Work program, which is available for rural and remote small businesses, provides much-needed support to businesses to give them the confidence to take on new employees and employ unemployed Queensland jobseekers. Since 2016, the Back to Work program has supported 19,527 regional jobseekers with over \$202 million in funding provided to 8,534 regional employers.

Another way we are supporting businesses and workers in some regional and remote areas is through our Regional Jobs Committees. These committees bring together local industry, training providers, employers, unions, and councils to provide advice on regional skills and employment needs. Their role includes: identifying local industry trends and skilling opportunities to be addressed through training; fostering collaboration and local partnerships between local industry representatives, employers and small business; and building workforce resilience and agility to address changing and future skills needs.

Located in Redlands, Toowoomba, Mackay, Townsville, Fraser Coast and Springfield, Regional Jobs Committees have been undertaking important engagement activities for more than 12 months to determine future skills needs and gaps for regions. For example, Mackay Regional Jobs Committee has been instrumental in analysing future skills needs and gaps for the region and has released the Future Employment Study. The study provides a blueprint for the region that outlines the current and future workforce environment and a recommended approach to transition the labour market to the benefit of the region. The Regional Jobs Committee will use the outcomes of the study to identify specific regional training needs.

We have committed to supporting three more Regional Jobs Committees to help refine and better target our support in growing regional employment.

These key Palaszczuk Government initiatives, along with our critical investment in skills and training, support labour market responsiveness and the development of the local skilled workforce our businesses need.