




Speech By  
**Mark Boothman**

**MEMBER FOR THEODORE**

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### **SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER BILL**

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Theodore—LNP) (5.19 pm): Before I start, I want to put on the record a thought and a prayer for the people of Eastern Europe, given what is happening there at the moment. Certainly many individuals are going to be put in harm's way.

I rise to contribute to the debate on the Small Business Commissioner Bill 2021. We all have small businesses in our electorates. They are the collective powerhouse of the Queensland economy and the largest employer. Many small businesses are family businesses. They are run by mums and dads who risk their own wealth and their own assets, such as the family home, to create employment for themselves and for others. Many of us in this chamber would have got our first job at a local small business. Small businesses employ our local families, they employ our children and, most importantly, they support our local community groups far more than any big business ever could. They pay their taxes, greatly assisting governments to deliver services, pay government wages and provide infrastructure.

Many small businesspeople will say that theirs is a thankless job. They work long hours, are subjected to continuously changing regulation and bureaucratic red tape by all layers of government and those who own storefronts are impacted by the ugly face of crime. In my electorate, one convenience store in Oxenford has been broken into on numerous occasions in the past 12 months. That highlights the issue we have on the Gold Coast and in other parts of Queensland with individuals who have no respect for law and order or for other people. The damage done to that business has been quite extensive.

**Mr KELLY:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mrs Gerber): Member for Theodore, I will give you some latitude to relate what you are specifically talking about back to the long title of the bill and the purposes of the commissioner.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Thank you for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. My point is that those are issues that the Small Business Commissioner could take to government. The commissioner could represent the interests of business owners by ensuring that the individuals who break into businesses are dealt with a lot more harshly than they are at the moment.

The COVID pandemic has certainly had a huge impact on local businesses in my area. While many businesses have been desperately holding on, some have had to close. Mandated vaccinations have forced businesses to restrict their hours of operation because of a lack of staff as workers were unable to work during that period.

Many businesses struggle to interpret or adhere to legal requirements that are a part of the day-to-day running of their businesses. Many people work late into the evening to complete the paperwork to meet those requirements, which places stress on families and takes up personal time. For example, when it comes to town planning, SSPs and the Vegetation Management Act can conflict with each other in certain situations. For a builder building a granny flat at Guanaba, adhering to the rules

and requirements can be quite onerous. Ken Wilkie is a former resident of my electorate who was very passionate about road transport. There have been many times when he expressed his concerns about the permit process. Those are the sorts of things that the Small Business Commissioner could get involved in and make recommendations to government to streamline those processes.

Small businesses welcome the idea of a small business commission if it has the appropriate powers but, as the legislation stands, the commissioner's powers are far too limited. While it would be helpful to have a commissioner to render assistance with dispute resolutions and tenancy dispute mediations, small businesses need a commissioner who has the resources and powers to properly serve their interests. They need a commissioner who can initiate inquiries and investigations that best represent their interests. The commissioner needs to be able to compel the state government departments to assist in investigations and create meaningful outcomes.

The commissioner must act independently of government to be a true advocate for the needs and interests of small businesses, especially when state government policies could be at the centre of their concerns. Current legislation requires the commission to seek direction from government, limiting its ability to act with freedom and, therefore, constraining its advocacy. The laws and regulations passed by this chamber can have serious ramifications for the day-to-day running of our local small businesses. Some changes may have unintended implications. It would be prudent to give stronger powers to the commissioner to champion those issues and give recommendations to government about reducing the unintended impacts of regulations or legislation. I have given the examples of town planning and the issues that can arise with SSPs and the Vegetation Management Act, as well as truck driver permits.

Unfortunately, this bill falls short of what is required. A strong voice for small business is needed to give hope to those who feel that government is not listening.