

CORONAVIRUS — SMALL BUSINESS — REGIONS

Statement by Minister for Small Business

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Small Business) [12.15 pm]: I rise to inform the house about my recent visits to Kalgoorlie–Boulder, Karratha, Albany and Denmark to meet with small business operators and key stakeholders to hear about their experiences in dealing with COVID-19. The impact of the pandemic on the state's small business sector over the past two years has been significant. Small business operators have continually stepped up when required to help protect their communities.

The recent spread of the Omicron variant in the eastern states highlights the devastating impact the virus can have on business operations, supply chains and workforces. The government is doing its utmost to ensure that small businesses in Western Australia have time to ensure their staff are vaccinated and prepare contingency plans to deal with community spread of the virus in order to minimise disruption to their operations.

During my visits, I met with around 100 people and heard from a wide range of small business operators. Many of them expressed confidence in their local economy. I met with several operators who are benefiting from renewed confidence and investment in the mining, tourism and retail sectors in the regions. I would like to acknowledge the support services available to business operators at the local level. The Kalgoorlie-Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Goldfields Aboriginal Business Chamber, the Karratha and Districts Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Albany and Denmark Chambers of Commerce and Industry are great examples of this support.

I would also like to thank the hardworking local members who accompanied me during my visits: Ali Kent, the member for Kalgoorlie; Kevin Michel, the member for Pilbara; and Rebecca Stephens, the member for Albany. I would also like to extend my thanks to Jane Kelsbie for inviting me to Denmark in the electorate of Warren–Blackwood. They are all vocal advocates for small businesses in their electorates and they appreciate the important role they play in their local communities.

Finally, I also recognise the Small Business Development Corporation and its Business Local service, which provides free practical advice to businesses throughout the state. This government-funded service is well positioned to help guide small business operators to become more resilient in countering the impacts of this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.