

CUSTOMER RELIABILITY PAYMENT SCHEME

44. Mr T.R. BUSWELL to the Minister for Small Business:

I refer to the recently announced customer reliability payment scheme, which is limited to customers who use less than 50-megawatt hours of power per annum.

- (1) Will the minister explain why he has allowed the majority of Western Australian small businesses to be excluded from this scheme?
- (2) As the recently released Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers does not address reliability and quality of supply issues, will the minister please explain the relevance and value to Western Australian small businesses of this code of conduct?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)-(2) First of all, I thank the Premier for the honour of making me Minister for Small Business. It is indeed an honour to represent the 139 000 small businesses in Western Australia. We must understand that they are operated by mums and dads, and sons and daughters. Are they not excited about having another four years of a Labor government? More important than that, they are even more excited about having another four years of a Geoff Gallop Labor government.

What is even more important for small business is to have the framework within the state so that they can prosper. What does small business want? It wants support, both financial and -

Several members interjected.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Will members opposite let me answer this question? Let us look at the understanding of small business. The statistics indicate that business confidence in the small business sector in Western Australia is huge. Its support for what is happening in this state is fantastic. Business confidence among the small enterprises in this state has increased by 15 percentage points, as shown in the February Sensis statistics. These are the statistics that the opposition quoted to us about how terrible things are. Small business is telling the government what a fantastic job it is doing.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Can you answer the question?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I am getting to the answer for the question.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Members opposite do not want to hear the answer when it is good news, do they? Small business people in this state are now more confident than the national average.

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: Rubbish!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I am just presenting the Sensis statistics.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: They have outpaced the national average by 59 per cent this quarter - by 12 percentage points. Now the member asks me how the government is letting small business down! We are not letting small business down. In fact, we are supporting small business. The minister has said that reliability of electricity supplies is really important.

An opposition member: What does that have to do with it?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: It has everything to do with it. Small business wants to be able to operate in a climate in which electricity supply is guaranteed and its interests are protected. That is what the government is about. It is important that the government supports small business. The Minister for Energy is doing that, and he will continue to do that.