

CORONAVIRUS — SMALL BUSINESS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

**166. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Small Business:**

I refer to the state government's response to the economic impact of COVID-19 on WA small businesses.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the government is ensuring that WA's small businesses have access to advice and support services they need to manage the impacts of COVID-19?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house what other action this government is taking to support small businesses during this uncertain time, in particular WA's tourism operators?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I thank the member for her question. I understand that she has experience of small business and, like myself, probably knows about the particular vulnerabilities associated with having a mortgage being a key part of how a person establishes and operates their business, and their home being on the line and the vulnerability that is experienced from the vagaries around income streams that are entirely derived from that business to fund not only a mortgage but their life.

- (1) Right now, we in the government know that there are thousands of small businesses across the state that are really doing it tough. They are confronting enormous challenges. It is tough at the best of times, and right now we are confronting, as we have heard many times today, an experience the likes of which probably no-one will see in their lifetime or certainly have not seen in their lifetime to date. One thing, therefore, that is a challenge for small businesses is wading through all the available information that they are confronted with in order to find where they might find assistance—what they are eligible for and the like. They are, in effect, suffering from information overload. To address that challenge, the government has asked the Small Business Development Corporation to create a dedicated assistance unit. This will be an opportunity for small businesses to go to the SBDC website or to make a call to seek specific advice that has been compiled by SBDC staff to give them an easy-to-understand guide on what they might be eligible for from the very large federal package and the enormous \$670 million package announced by the state. There are a whole range of opportunities for assistance to small businesses from both those packages, and the SBDC has gone through and assessed them and provided an easy ready reckoner for each of those, and, of course, guides to more detailed information from the appropriate sites at both a state and federal level. Also, they will be staffing a hotline. During working hours, there will be an opportunity for small businesses to call and seek personal advice from people in the SBDC. They provide an incredible service on normal occasions, but they are shifting towards providing COVID-19 advice. That is what a large amount of their efforts will be from now until as long as necessary. Therefore, I urge small businesses that are seeking further information to either call 133 140 to speak to somebody and seek out additional assistance on not only what they might be eligible for and how to access those support services or opportunities, but also advice about operating a small business in this incredibly tough time. There is also, of course, the website [smallbusiness.wa.gov.au](http://smallbusiness.wa.gov.au), which I urge people to visit. It has a blog post on a much easier to navigate assessment of what people may be eligible for out of the federal package and the state package. It is a great service. We are stepping it up and I urge people to seek assistance if they need it.
- (2) The member also asked about what else we are doing. Obviously, I think the one sector that has, probably beyond all others, got a lot of attention and that people are aware of how difficult they are doing it is the hospitality and tourism sector. I understand there are concerns amongst the community; some concerns have been aired around the state with respect to the threat from COVID-19 and attending places like hospitality outlets. What I would say is: right now the government, the Premier, is part of the national cabinet. The cabinet is taking advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Australia, and the best informed advice in the country is being provided and distributed and acted upon. Right now, it is safe for people to go to small businesses; in fact, they need it more than ever. We need Western Australians to support Western Australian small businesses right across the state. Hospitality outlets—cafes, bars, restaurants, hotels, tour operators—are all doing it tough, confronting the toughest environment that they have ever seen. If we abandon them now, they will have nothing else. International holiday-makers are not coming; interstate is confronting the shutting down of airlines as we speak. All we have is ourselves and supporting each other. Right now, it is safe and people should support fellow Western Australians. We will tell people if that changes. If that advice changes, of course we will advise people. But, right now, people can go to small businesses, cafes, bars and hotels. Get out to the regions and support regional small businesses because they need it right now.