

NOVEMBER SENSIS BUSINESS INDEX, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Statement by Minister for Small Business

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Small Business) [2.14 pm]: The Government understands that small business is a significant contributor to the Western Australian economy and it is committed to creating an environment in which small business can prosper. I take this opportunity to inform the House of the results of the November Sensis Business Index - Small and Medium Enterprises, which was released today.

Sensis found that business confidence in Western Australia improved strongly during the last quarter, that sales continued to record very strong performances and that support for the Western Australian Government's policies also improved strongly. Sensis specifically noted that the largest improvement in business confidence in the country was recorded in Western Australia.

It is important to highlight that 74 per cent of Western Australian small and medium enterprises felt positive about their own business prospects, and that this figure is above the national average.

Western Australia has experienced growth rates of 5.7 per cent and 4.3 per cent in the past two years. Business investment in Western Australia increased by 22 per cent in the last financial year, and our exports increased by seven per cent. These positive aspects of the Western Australian economy are reflected clearly in the trends and sentiments that Sensis found in its survey results.

However, despite these positive trends, we are acutely aware of the need to continue to make Western Australia an even better place in which to do business. In this regard, the Government has put together a package based around the Retail Shops and Fair Trading Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. This Bill proposes to amend the Fair Trading Act 1987 to incorporate provisions to prohibit unconscionable conduct in business transactions, amend the Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act 1985 to incorporate unconscionability provisions that pertain specifically to commercial tenancies, and allow the commercial tribunal to have jurisdiction to hear retail tenancy disputes regarding unconscionable conduct. The package also proposes to extend weeknight trading to 9.00 pm for all general retail stores in metropolitan Perth after the next state election, lock in current Sunday trading arrangements for metropolitan Perth, and maintain the existing regime for trading hours in non-metropolitan Western Australia. We are also working hard to respond to the needs of small and medium enterprises in Western Australia. Members can be assured that the Gallop Government will continue to ensure that Western Australia is the best place in which to do business.