

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Small Business

MR J.B. D'ORAZIO (Ballajura - Minister for Small Business) [9.08 am]: I am pleased to inform the house that, following a lengthy and thorough review, the board of the Small Business Development Corporation has presented me with a recommendation for the future shape of the business enterprise centre program in Western Australia. I am very pleased to be able to table the recommendation in the house today. Along with this recommendation, I am proposing to rename the centres with a name such as business assistance centres to more accurately reflect the role and function of the network - which is to assist small businesses. I have asked the SBDC to consult with stakeholders on this idea as part of the review process.

The proposed structure will result in the delivery of this highly valued service through a network of 26 better-resourced centres, seven of which will be in the metropolitan area and 19 in regional Western Australia. Core funding to the network will increase from \$2.28 million to \$2.83 million in the first full year of operation. The state government will also distribute a further \$185 000 of capital funding to the network to upgrade its telecommunications and information technology capacity to improve the flexibility of the service, especially in regional areas. Furthermore, an additional \$174 000 will be provided to the network for regional representation and coordination, marketing and professional development. This brings total funding for the new network to \$3.189 million in its first full year.

The proposed funding allocations will result in stronger BECs that are better placed to meet the needs of small businesses in the areas for which they are responsible. This review has been successful in identifying a series of issues that needed to be addressed to place the BEC network on a better footing for its role in delivering a quality service to small businesses throughout the state. The proposed program structure addresses the future needs of the BEC network to ensure it is effective in its primary support role for small business. A key component of the review outcome will be that BECs will work with the Small Business Development Corporation to ensure that an extensive range of assistance, most of which is provided free, continues to be available to Western Australian small businesses wherever they are located. I have asked the SBDC to advise both the BEC network and interested stakeholders of this proposal, and to allow a four-week period for these organisations to provide comment. The proposal will also be available to the public through the SBDC's web site. After reviewing the responses, I will then finalise the model so that it can be formally implemented from January 2006.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a clear example of the state government's continued commitment to the small business sector in this state. I commend the proposal to the house, and thank all who have been involved in the review.

[See paper 593.]