

**MINISTER FOR TOURISM; SMALL BUSINESS —
CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE AND PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE**

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [2.52 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be debated forthwith —

That this house condemns the Minister for Tourism; Small Business for his disparaging remarks towards businesses struggling to survive through COVID-19 and his failure to prevent widespread damage to those in the tourism sector who are being choked out of businesses by liability insurance issues.

Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [2.53 pm]: This is the second standing orders suspension today, but the government will allow it —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: Very generous, Leader of the House.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am a very generous man. We will allow it, but I move the following amendment —

To insert after “forthwith” —

, subject to the debate being limited to 10 minutes for government members and 10 minutes for non-government members

Amendment put and passed.

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion, as Amended

The SPEAKER: Members, as this is a motion without notice to suspend standing orders, it will need the support of an absolute majority for it to proceed. If I hear a dissentient voice, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [2.53 pm]: I move the motion.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! Everyone who wants to have a meeting, including the Leader of the House, go outside, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Last Sunday on the ABC, the Minister for Tourism delivered another backhander that upset many people in the business world. He said that businesses should “focus on getting back to business because that’s what businesses do well, and concentrate less on whether there are going to be other government handouts”. That was the response by the Minister for Tourism; Small Business. The minister has a track record. On 13 May 2020, he said that only a genuine registered tourism operator could meet the obligations required to receive part of the \$14.4 million package that he announced. That package was for only 1 600 members, not the thousands and thousands of members that he claimed in his media statement, giving small businesses the impression that they had an opportunity to access a grant of up to \$6 500. The minister needs to provide this house with the detail of the advice that he got on selecting only Tourism Council Western Australia members or RTOs. Why did the package not include businesses that are registered with visitor centres? That is where the majority of businesses are registered because the visitor centres promote local businesses and local tourism operators. As we know, that \$14.4 million is not new money; it is repurposed money but for only those 1 600 businesses that can apply. Today in question time, the minister admitted that his announcement could never support businesses, but he sold it as that. He sold himself as the saviour of small business and tourism. Now, a business owner is not a genuine tourism operator if they own a fishing store, a hotel, a cafe, a real estate agency or a travel agency. That is why the minister is not genuine and that is why the majority of small businesses have missed out under the minister’s watch. Why would the minister not include businesses that are registered through visitor centres, which make up the majority of our tourism operators?

This government is all about smoke and mirrors. We have had the toilet tax. That is a tax on toilets not just for having a toilet or for the water that goes in and out, but for the privilege of having a toilet. Under pressure from the National Party on this side of the house, the government has waived that tax between 1 May and 1 August. Do members know what? When 1 August comes around, the toilet tax will come back. Looking at the other grants, we can see that the majority of people in places such as Kalbarri could not access the \$2 500 energy grant. It is smoke and mirrors yet again while not fixing the problem. Today, the Attorney General talked about the insurance issues but he did not even know about them. We heard him say in front of everyone, when he tried to whisper, “Tell me what the answer is. Tell me what we’re doing.” The issue is the lack of what the government is doing.

The Minister for Tourism was once called a junior minister and he said, “No, I’m not; I’m middle of the road.” Clearly, the minister is neither.

MRS A.K. HAYDEN (Darling Range) [2.59 pm]: I enthusiastically stand to support the Nationals WA on behalf of the Liberal opposition on this motion to suspend standing orders. Today, we saw what we on this side of the house have seen previously. The Parliament and the public have now seen what the minister displayed during his response to a grievance today. He showed his arrogance, ignorance and a lack of respect for and understanding of the portfolios that he represents. Any time a difficult decision is needed for tourism or small business, he bats it away and says, “It’s not my fault. I’m not responsible. Find the other minister that’s responsible. I’m not the minister responsible.” He bats everything away. The grievance raised by the member for North West Central today was on the very important matter of public indemnity insurance. The minister said, “It is not under my portfolio; it is under someone else’s portfolio. Ask the minister who is responsible. I do not know who that is, they could maybe even be federal, but I do not know.” What does the minister mean he does not know? A small business tourism operator is suffering. It is the minister’s job to advocate for them; it is his job to make sure their issues are heard. He has had letters written to him by business owners and members of Parliament, and he says he does not know. We heard in question time today that the Small Business Commissioner is looking into it, but the small business minister has no idea about it. How is that happening? I do not understand it. The Attorney General said that the Small Business Commissioner is looking into this issue.

Mr R.S. Love: It is chaos in this place.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: It is total chaos.

It is simple for the minister. If he is not up to the job, he should stand down—either step up or stand down. There are backbenchers here who want the job and who could do it far better than him. Backbenchers, there is a weak link—change the Minister for Small Business; Tourism.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [3.00 pm]: The sector that has been hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis is the tourism sector. It is the single business sector in Western Australia that fell off an absolute cliff face when Western Australia was shut down. What did the government do? It responded with the tourism announcement that it would support the sector with \$14.4 million. The Minister for Tourism came to the house with fanfare and pranced around and said, “Look what we are doing for the tourism sector in Western Australia.” There was \$10.4 million worth of grants rolled out for a tourism recovery fund. The government put it out there and what happened? People woke up to find that they were not eligible. The Minister for Tourism’s media release said that thousands of businesses would benefit from this. He pranced around Western Australia and said that thousands of businesses in regional Western Australia would get the benefit of the McGowan government announcement. They are the people who are doing it the toughest in the COVID-19 crisis, but the eligibility criteria took out nine-tenths of those businesses. What happened? A week ago, one week out from the closing of that grant round, the Tourism Council of Western Australia was ringing around desperately trying to get people to apply. At that time, there were 500 applicants out of the possible 1 600 that the minister mentioned today, but he said thousands of people would get the benefit. The tourism council was ringing around and trying to get some people to apply because it was running short. Even now the minister cannot come up with a number, and I am sure he knows it. I am told that around 1 000 businesses will benefit out of a possible 1 600. He set the bar too high. Most businesses in the sector in Western Australia that has been hit the hardest by the crisis have not even been able to apply. They thought they would get a little bit of love from the government but what did they get? They were told that they were not eligible.

The minister massively gilded the lily in the media release. He pranced around and said, “By the way, you should be focused on your business; do not focus on the grants.” The government said that thousands of businesses would be able to get the benefit of this, but the minister told them to focus on the business and not on the grants, and he is sitting there laughing at it. He is laughing in the face of the sector that is doing it the toughest in Western Australia as a product of the COVID-19 crisis.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members on my left, you have your own member on his feet!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Do members know what? To add insult to injury, when the Minister for Health announced in his media release that asymptomatic testing would be done for all sectors that were exposed to the issue in Western Australia, including the tourism sector, he said it would be for accredited businesses only. It seems that irrespective of the outcome of the testing regime, and on top of what this Minister for Tourism did, the health minister said that only accredited businesses were good enough to get asymptomatic testing through the DETECT program. At two levels, this government has fallen short in the support it has given the very sector that has done it the hardest in Western Australia during the COVID-19 crisis. The Minister for Tourism stands condemned for that. He cannot spruik that thousands of people will get government grants, stump up with the fund and then fall massively short because the government set the eligibility criteria too high. Even in the Margaret River–Busselton region,

415 visitor-facing businesses are not eligible for the grant. This is also the case for caravan parks in Denmark, Denmark Dinosaur World, the alpaca farm and all those wineries there. Those businesses do not even get a chance to apply. The government recognises that there is not enough money to go around, but those businesses cannot even apply.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [3.04 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the call.

The SPEAKER: I did give it; it is just that everyone was interjecting with hear, hears!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you. I could not hear you because the member was still yelling across the chamber.

The SPEAKER: I hope we have a defibrillator here somewhere!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am glad for the opportunity to respond to some of the silliness that happened during question time with the question posed to the Attorney General.

Can I say at the outset, as I have said many, many times both in this place and publicly in the media and in many locations—there was a dated reference to the comments made at the hotel opening, which was two weeks before the story that ran on the ABC the other night—imposing measures that harm small business has been the hardest thing that we have had to do in government, and that would be true of all governments, including the federal government. As a former small business person, I understand, admire and respect people who have the courage to strike out on their own and create a business through their own blood, sweat and tears. Those people undertake responsibility for providing for themselves and their families, and, in many cases, employ other people who provide for their own families. That is a wonderful thing that they have done. I am full of admiration for them, and I am deeply pained that the government has had to respond to COVID-19 in a way that has hurt those businesses. That was not intentional. The objective all along has been to stop the community spread of COVID-19 from threatening Western Australia. It has always been done in response to the best possible health advice in the world, I would say, and we have achieved the best possible health outcome in the world. That is a good thing, and it is a good thing for small business, because it would be impossible to have an environment in which small business could flourish unless we achieved the safety and health of our citizens as the first objective, so that is what we have done.

I will respond to the questions posed to the Attorney General in question time. In response to the grievance, member for North West Central, what I said was in reference to insurance matters, which are not under my portfolio. Of course I would not be across the detail of who is responsible for prudential matters. As it happens, it is a federal government matter. The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority is responsible for the licensing of banking, insurance and superannuation businesses. If members were to ask which minister is responsible, it would probably be Josh Frydenberg federally and, at the state level, the Treasurer.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member, you have had four or five minutes.

Mr P. PAPALIA: In response to the silliness of the member's contribution earlier, I raised —

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Look, you had a go. No-one interjected from that side of the house. I know you are trying to get a headline, but not in this chamber!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know. Take a little bit of responsibility to acknowledge what I am saying to you in giving you the explanation!

I have obviously raised the issue within government. Who would I have raised the matter with, it being an insurance matter?

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Me.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I raised it with the Treasurer. I have formally written to the Treasurer about this matter and I am still awaiting his response. In the meantime, in addition to that, as I said to the same journalist at the very press conference at which the grab the member is so aggrieved about was taken, I have asked the Small Business Commissioner to investigate and advise me on options. I also said that in this place in response to an almost identical motion moved—I do not know—the last time we sat. I said that I have asked the Small Business Commissioner to investigate and advise me. He did that. He has gone to Kate Carnell; he has raised it with the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman and she is investigating. She is doing that at our behest, not anyone else's—not because any other state government has raised the matter with her, but because I asked the Small Business Commissioner to investigate on behalf of our small businesses. It is really irresponsible of the member to suggest that, firstly, I might not have responded, and, secondly, that somehow I am being dismissive of those concerns. I raised this issue well before the member even became aware of it.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Confirming his lack of awareness on this matter, the member in his grievance mentioned Quad Trek in Coral Bay and suggested that Karen Lay had shut down her business because she could not get insurance. We have fixed that problem for motorcycle and quad bike tourism operators around the state. The moment we were able to, we sought a solution to that problem, and Karen is working and her business is open. The member said in this place this morning that that was not the case, and that she had shut down because of my failure to act. The member is a disgrace and we have to view any contribution in this place from him with a great deal of scepticism.

Beyond quad bike and motorcycle-related tourism, we are investigating the matter of insurance. I have asked the Small Business Commissioner to look at it, and he is addressing the issue through the Commonwealth Ombudsman and seeking her advice. I have written to the Treasurer and asked him to investigate what might be done at the state level, but insurance is a private sector activity normally. It is not normally a state government activity in regard to tourism operators but I am trying to seek out advice on what we might be able to do.

With regard to some of the other matters raised, it was very disappointing, Hon Terry Redman —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I expect more of the member for Warren–Blackwood —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren Blackwood, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I want to convey some more recent information on wildlife parks to the member. I think the member referred to West Oz Wildlife —

Mr D.T. Redman: It was dinosaur world and the alpaca farm.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member referred to Denmark Dinosaur World and Denmark Animal Farm and Pentland Alpaca Stud. Those animal parks and a couple of others—Yongernow Australian Mallee Fowl Centre in Ongerup and West Oz Wildlife—sought to apply for the federal government grants scheme for wildlife parks and zoos. I cannot remember the name of the grant that was announced; it is not specifically my responsibility. The businesses needed to be supported by state tourism agencies. The grant was not in my portfolio but the businesses needed the endorsement of a tourism agency. I understand that the businesses I referred to were initially advised by Tourism WA that they would not be supported. I advise those businesses here, through their local member, that that decision has been reversed and they will be supported in their application to Austrade. That is an independent process that is administered by Austrade.

Mrs A.K. Hayden: Will that apply to all of them?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It will apply to the ones I have mentioned. I do not know about others; I know about just those particular ones. I was specifically interested in conveying that information to the member because they are his constituents. The grant is administered by Austrade and will be similar to our own grant schemes. It will be about the amount of money, the capacity and the number of applications, and some may be oversubscribed. But those businesses will be supported.

On the other grant schemes and the media release, I am sorry; I got it wrong. I need to work on my editing skills because clearly I let that one through when it should not have been thousands. It is a simple fact that many more businesses—a significant number—could potentially be involved in tourism, but we were trying to focus on specifically those that were accredited as a way to reduce the overall scope of the scheme so that we could fund a finite number. There is only so much money. I think 1 138 businesses, or something like that, have applied. I do not know how many have actually been given the funding, but I would like to put on the record that Wendy from Geraldton has received \$6 500 of recovery fund money and she is well down the path of applying for the business survival grant. That is the big grant that everyone in WA can apply for; they do not have to be accredited with any particular organisation. It is a bigger grant of between \$25 000 and \$100 000 for business survival, particularly for those businesses that will not get the chance to operate in the near term. Wendy, who was referred to in a question to the Premier during question time, is well down the path to making her application. The process is independent of me, but I would expect that a business with a 100 per cent Chinese market would get one.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 18 June 2020]
p3945d-3949a

Mr Vincent Catania; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Paul Papalia

Ayes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr V.A. Catania
Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Mrs A.K. Hayden

Dr D.J. Honey
Mr P.A. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Mr R.S. Love

Mr W.R. Marmion
Mr J.E. McGrath
Ms L. Mettam
Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr D.C. Nalder

Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle
Mr A. Krsticevic (*Teller*)

Noes (31)

Ms L.L. Baker
Dr A.D. Buti
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J. Farrer
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr T.J. Healy

Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai

Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia
Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Ms C.M. Rowe
Ms R. Saffioti

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Pairs

Mr K.M. O'Donnell

Mrs M.H. Roberts

Question thus negatived.