

CORONAVIRUS — SMALL BUSINESS — GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

20. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Premier:

I refer to the government's efforts to safely and responsibly manage the spread of Omicron and avoid the "let it rip" approach to COVID that has been adopted by some of the other states.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on how the state government is continuing to support businesses and industries throughout the pandemic?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house what impact a full reopening of the WA border with no quarantining and no testing would have had on businesses?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for the question.

- (1)–(2) As the Prime Minister said, Omicron was a game changer. It caused chaos across the eastern states. It impacted the health of Australians and has caused thousands of deaths over the course of this year. It has also impacted heavily on economies and businesses across Australia. We have seen repeated stories and headlines of shadow lockdowns in Sydney and Melbourne. I saw one article in the *Daily Telegraph* that read —

“Sydney’s CBD ... has withered into a bleak wasteland ...

That is because of the impact of COVID, particularly Omicron.

Again, going ahead with a full reopening of the state's borders on 5 February would have been reckless and irresponsible. We would have not only risked the lives and health of Western Australians because we did not have a high enough third-dose vaccination rate, but also seen a huge impact of Omicron on our community, mass furloughing of workers and the impacts that we have seen in the eastern states. We made the right the decision in order to preserve lives and jobs in Western Australia.

The government understands that some businesses based on travel have been impacted, but there were no cost-free decisions available to us in this matter. Letting Omicron rip through our community, which is what we were facing, would have come with incredible costs to Western Australia, with even bigger and more urgent demands for business support packages. In light of what we did, which was a necessary decision, we have announced a comprehensive safe transition industry support package for businesses in Western Australia. The package itself is worth \$77 million. It is backed by the Tourism Council of Western Australia and it is aimed at supporting businesses and organisations in international education, tourism, aviation and the events sector. It includes nine targeted programs to support cashflow and help offset some of the costs endured by some parts of those sectors.

International education has faced significant challenges due to federal border controls and we have provided support for students. We have provided support for small and medium-sized education providers. We have provided assistance with quarantine costs for international students. Tourism has done incredibly well in Western Australia over the course of the last two years, but we understand that some businesses were impacted by our decision. Therefore, we are delivering a \$20 million tourism support program, a \$15 million tourism deposit refund program to businesses that had to refund deposits and a \$3 million travel agent support fund.

For the events industry, we are extending and expanding the Getting the Show Back on the Road program and delivering the \$3 million events suppliers support program. We have been able to do this because of responsible financial management. Our financial management over the course of the last five years, but also our safe management of COVID over the course of the last two years, has meant that we are the strongest state and strongest government financially in the commonwealth of Australia. We have been able to fund these programs without significant impact on the state's debt levels because of that financial and COVID management. Already, in response to COVID-19, the government has delivered around \$10 billion in measures to support the community.