

SMALL BUSINESS CENTRE PROGRAM

376. Mr J. NORBERGER to the Minister for Small Business:

I noticed the recent media release by the opposition questioning the government's commitment to the small business centre program. Can the minister please outline how the government has reformed the program to improve services to small businesses?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Joondalup for his passion and advocacy for small business in his electorate. I have been up to Joondalup in front of small business groups before, and I know they think very highly of the member. Well done to him on their support. I also acknowledge the magnificent federal budget released last night and the way it incentivises small businesses in particular. It is a very exciting time for small business, not just in Western Australia, but also for the entire country.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am sure small business will see the glass as half full, not half empty like the opposite side does, and will obviously embrace the future, which is very bright for small business.

This issue was raised last week when I said that very shortly the government would release the outcome of a competitive tender process done by the Department of Finance after we did a review of the small business centre programs across the state. The short version is that there were 25 small business centres—19 in the regional areas and six in the metropolitan area. That means that there were 25 bricks-and-mortar buildings, with 25 CEOs, 25 separate boards, 25 personal assistants and 25 motor vehicles—25 sets of infrastructure to deliver small business services.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member of Albany! Member for Victoria Park!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We looked at that, for the first time in seven years, and asked ourselves whether we could do things better and provide a better outcome for small business. The member for Joondalup is absolutely right that the opposition shadow minister, Hon Kate Doust, released a press release on this matter. Besides the fact that the release is full of the wrong terminology all the way through and that she cannot get small business centres separated from the Small Business Development Corporation and she does not know the terminology, she said following —

“The re-arrangement of the Small Business Development Centres —

I assume she means the small business centres —

is yet another slap in the face as we will see diminished service delivery capacity and small business will suffer because of it.

What a load of rubbish.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The net result of the rationalisation of small business centres across Western Australia is an increase in service delivery, with an increase in the number of small business advisers across the state of 75 per cent. There will be 75 per cent more people going out there, for the same money, delivering business services to small businesses across Western Australia. That is a 75 per cent increase; it is hardly a slap in the face. This government is committed to providing, firstly, value for money for taxpayers, but also the best possible outcomes for small business. That means the best possible advice, more advice, more advisers out on the floor and more advisers on the road in country areas delivering the best possible and highest quality advice to small business that they can.