

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION — BUSINESS OWNER ASSISTANCE

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

Before I ask my question, I would like to acknowledge Yasmine Martino, the YMCA Youth Parliament representative for the electorate of Moore, who is in the Speaker's gallery today.

Will the minister advise how the government, through the Small Business Development Corporation, is assisting small business owners to access information relevant to their particular circumstances?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

I thank the member for the question and for his ongoing advocacy for the small business owners in his electorate. The Small Business Development Corporation is the core agency of government that delivers information, education and advisory services to the small business sector. The government provides specialist support for the SBDC in five key business areas. These include finance, marketing, employment and operations, and, of course, commercial tenancy.

In 2011–12, 43 811 clients contacted the SBDC for advisory services, and 33 301 business owners contacted the SBDC business information centre —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, are you uncomfortable there or can we carry on?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Speaker, the minister appears to be reading her answer as though it is a ministerial statement. I think that is the point that the member for Girrawheen was making by way of interjection.

The SPEAKER: Minister, just refer to your notes without reading the answer, please. Thank you.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Mr Speaker, I am referring to figures in my notes, and I absolutely reject the premise that I am reading a prepared statement.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The SBDC also provided 10 500 business advisory and alternative dispute resolution services, and the SBDC business advisors and ADR service managers conducted 1 218 direct client sessions with business owners. People who did not have a face-to-face appointment with the SBDC advisors were responded to via phone, email or fax, or by letter. Of the commercial tenancy advisory services, there were 1 350 non-dispute related inquiries and 188 of those clients were aided by the SBDC in putting forward their applications to the State Administrative Tribunal for various matters. The SBDC also dealt with 6 657 business licence updates. People can access the SBDC to find out the range of licences that might be relevant should they choose to start a business. That information is provided to business owners on application. Also, 1 076 people took up the opportunity to do a BIZBasic course or one of our online “succeeding in business” courses. So the SBDC has been a very, very busy agency indeed over the 2011–12 financial year.

Members may recall that in 2011 we introduced legislation to establish the first Small Business Commissioner in Western Australia and an alternative dispute resolution service. Members may be interested to know that since 1 July 2012, 1 989 dispute-related inquiries have been received by the SBDC and 299 of those have been escalated to alternative dispute resolution case management, with an 80 per cent resolution rate.

When the SBDC surveyed its clients, 95 per cent said that they would access the service again. So I think the SBDC is doing a very good job, with over 94 per cent of people saying that the information provided was useful, and 88 per cent of people saying that the information was valuable and beneficial to them.

The Liberal–National government will continue to provide ongoing support to the small business sector, both through the SBDC and through a range of initiatives that will become apparent over time and through the budget process.