

SMALL BUSINESS CENTRE NETWORK

Statement by Minister for Small Business

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Small Business) [9.07 am]: I would like to highlight some important changes to the small business centre network in Western Australia. For more than 20 years, the small business sector has had the support and guidance of 25 small business centres located around the state. There are 19 in the regions and six in the metropolitan area, and all receive funds through the Small Business Development Corporation. In 2013–14, a comprehensive independent review of the small business centre network was completed, resulting in recommendations for a new, enhanced business advisory service for small business. This new service will provide more streamlined advisory services right across the state, reduce the duplication of administration and overhead costs and redirect those funds to front-line services, specifically to business advisers. To find the most suitable providers, an open tender process was undertaken by the Department of Finance and all existing small business centres were welcome to apply, as were any other private, public or not-for-profit organisations. Some small business centres tendered as primary providers, some chose to tender in partnership with others and some chose to not tender at all. Ultimately, some centres were successful in their bids and some were not; however, decisions were based on merit and in accordance with the rigorous tender process conducted by the Department of Finance.

The successful service providers for the 12 regions are: Business Station Inc for the north metropolitan and east metropolitan regions; Business Foundations Inc for the south metropolitan region; Small Business Centre East Kimberley Inc for the Kimberley region; RSM Bird Cameron for the Pilbara and Gascoyne; Small Business Centre Great Southern for the great southern region; Small Business Centre Bunbury–Wellington for the south west region; Business Foundations Inc for Peel; RSM Bird Cameron for the mid west and wheatbelt; and, Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry for goldfields–Esperance. From now until 1 July, when the new service starts, all current small business centres will continue to provide services to their regions.

After the commencement of the new small business advisory service on 1 July 2015, those centres that have not been selected through the tender process will be free to continue or cease operations as they see fit but without funding from the Small Business Development Corporation. The new service is called Business Local. It represents better value for money because it will fund high-quality business advisory services instead of buildings and administration. It will provide an efficient, effective means of supporting the start-up and ongoing development of small businesses wherever they may be in this vast state.