

CORONAVIRUS — BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

703. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the minister representing the Treasurer:

I refer to the answer to question on notice 756, which stated that as at 6 August, only \$11 million of the budgeted \$42 million tenant rent relief scheme was provided by the government as part of the level 1 COVID business assistance package.

- (1) Does the minister now concede that the government’s COVID assistance package was too complicated and the application process too onerous?
- (2) How much has the tenant rent relief scheme delivered as of today?
- (3) Given that the packages were announced back on 24 February 2022, six months ago, in response to COVID lockdowns, “to assist small businesses with cash flow and to support safe trading”, why have those businesses had to wait six months for cashflow assistance?
- (4) How many businesses went bust before help arrived?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) No. A total of \$12 696 000 has been paid to over 4 000 businesses as at 18 August as part of the tenant rent relief scheme. The McGowan government’s business support programs were the most generous of any delivered by any state throughout the pandemic.

The Small Business Development Corporation has provided phenomenal support and assistance to small businesses in Western Australia throughout the pandemic.

- (3) All completed applications that were submitted over 12 weeks ago have been processed, fitting within the time frames published by the Small Business Development Corporation. The state government has an obligation to undertake due diligence on all applications to ensure taxpayer funds are managed appropriately. For example, more than 30 fraudulent applications for business grant programs have been detected to date and referred to the police. A large proportion of grant applications received are missing requisite evidence, which delays the approval of grants until the applicant is able to provide the necessary information.
- (4) Business activity has remained strong in Western Australia throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. State final demand in the year to the March quarter 2022 was 8.8 per cent higher than 2019—the strongest recovery of all states. Unemployment is currently at 3.2 per cent, which is a near record low. Retail spending reached a record high in the three months to June 2022 to now be 28.5 per cent above pre-COVID-19 levels.