

NICK DAMETTO
Member for Hinchinbrook



MEDIA RELEASE

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Dametto delivers message to parliament: Free the North

THE survival of thousands of North Queensland businesses hangs in the balance unless the State Labor Government acts to lift all COVID-19 restrictions in the region, says Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto.

In a passionate speech to parliament on Tuesday, Mr Dametto said the government's existing support measures available to small businesses would not replace the ability for businesses to resume full trading free of any restrictions.

"We have now been nearly two months without any COVID-19 cases in the Townsville Hospital and Health Service footprint," he said.

"The regions need to be treated differently to the south-east corner. Businesses are crying out across the North to be re-opened. They're asking for restrictions to be lifted...so these businesses can have the opportunity to bounce back quicker.

"Right now, we're seeing businesses hamstrung with what's happening down in the Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Go and ask your local publican if he opened on the weekend with the restrictions only allowing 10 people. Most business owners will say no."

While Mr Dametto acknowledged the government has offered some support measures to business, they simply didn't go far enough while restrictions remained in place.

"Telling small businesses you can have payroll tax relief doesn't help small businesses if your payroll is under \$1.5 million. That's your mum and dad operators out there," he said.

"Those businesses have fallen between the cracks. \$500 off their power bill to cover three months is not enough to keep the doors open or the gas burner going at the local fish-and-chip shop. It doesn't matter if you've got a cold room running with half the amount of food in it or enough to feed 100 people a day. It still costs the same amount in electricity, actually a little more."

The State Government has since made a \$10,000 grant available to eligible small businesses that can be used to pay utility costs, but Mr Dametto said the scheme came with too many qualifications, didn't go far enough and let sole traders who don't employ staff out in the cold.

"Katter's Australian Party has been calling for a one-off, \$20,000 grant to be made available for those businesses that can demonstrate a 30 per cent reduction in trade and are currently exempt from payroll tax," he said.

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"I'm concerned that the government's grant program is not open to sole traders who do not employ staff. These businesses are struggling as much as anybody else and should be eligible.

"The KAP will continue to lobby the State Government for further financial support for a broader range of small businesses impacted during this difficult time."

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Photo caption

Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto fears for the future of thousands of businesses in the North unless all COVID-19 restrictions are lifted on them.

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