

# Small Business Roadshow

North Queensland Consultation Report 2021

## Introduction

During February and early March 2021, the Minister for Employment and Small Business hosted the Small Business Roadshow to hear from local small businesses on the challenges they are facing and how government can help them to grow and thrive.

From Cairns to the Gold Coast, 17 face-to-face and seven online sessions were held, providing many opportunities for the government to hear first-hand from small businesses. More than 1400 people attended a session.

Queensland small business owners were also encouraged to complete the Small Business Survey, to help government tailor future small business programs. Nearly 1200 responses were received from across the state.





# Message from the Minister

Queensland is home to a vibrant and diverse small business sector and I am proud to lead the Palaszczuk Government's efforts to support these operations as we work on economic recovery and setting the foundations for future growth.

Travelling across the state and hearing directly from small business owners in these challenging times has been a valuable experience for me. I appreciate each and every person who took the time to attend one of our Small Business Roadshow stops in person, join one of the online sessions or complete the online Small Business Survey.

The information and feedback you have provided will help the Queensland Government refine the support it provides the sector and we are redoubling our efforts to address your needs.

This roadshow has given me a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities that small businesses in different regions and industries are facing. Offering flexible programs that can tailor support to better meet the needs of small business will be an important goal in our future work – and will produce positive benefits for the local community and our economy as well.

Queenslanders' long history with natural disasters – floods, fires, cyclones and drought – and the more recent economic challenges brought about by COVID-19 have produced a resilient and supportive community where people help their neighbours in any way they can.

That spirit has been on display in our business communities, with many customers, clients, suppliers, workers, owners and other stakeholders looking to adapt and help each other, but we know there is more still to do.

Going forward I want to ensure established small businesses in Queensland get back on their feet and return to growth, while our entrepreneurs have confidence that developing their ideas and plans will launch new successful businesses.

Thank you again for sharing your feedback. I look forward to sharing the outcomes of your insights as we release a new small business strategy for Queensland.

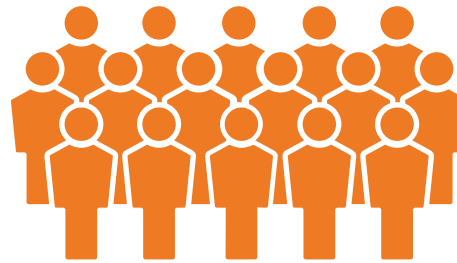
**The Honourable Di Farmer MP**  
**Minister for Employment and Small Business and**  
**Minister for Training and Skills Development**

# Consultation snapshot



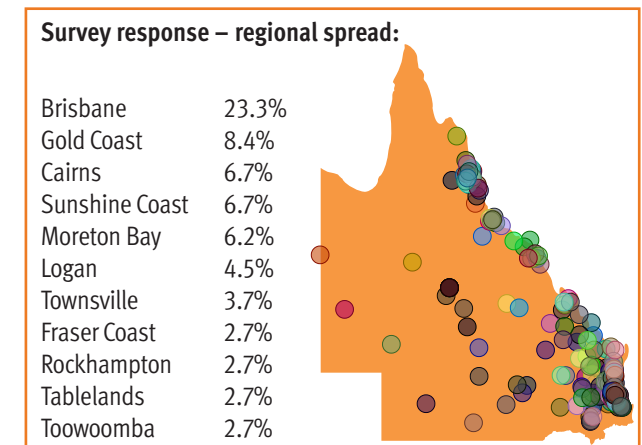
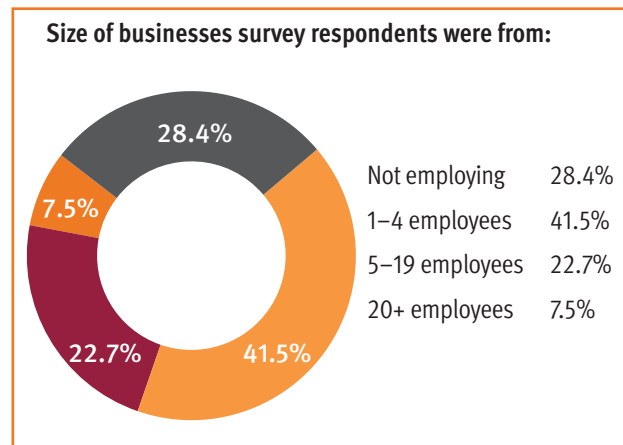
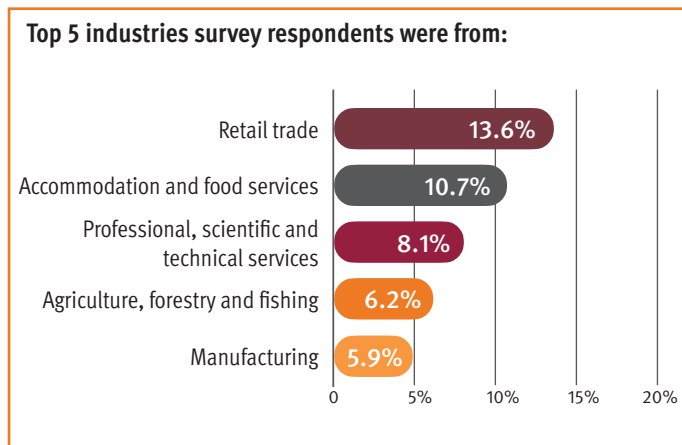
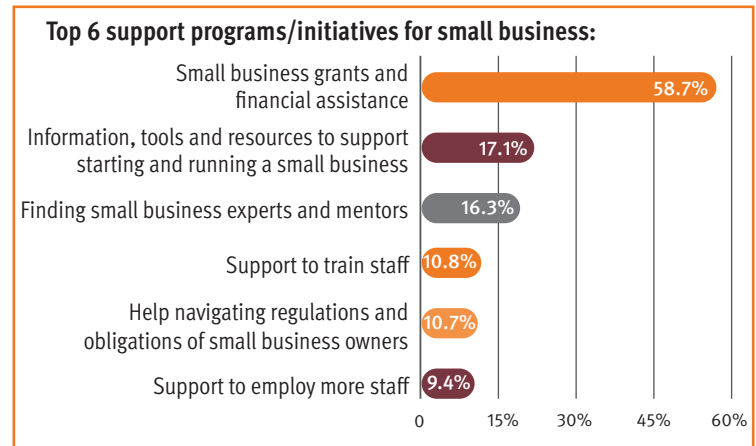
# 1188

responses to the small business online survey



# 1433 people

participated in the **24 sessions** across Queensland



# Queensland – what you told us

Feedback from the Small Business Roadshow identified that small businesses still face many challenges as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and there are a number of key areas where support is needed.

## What are your challenges?

- **Skills and capability development:** business owners and operators often need support to upskill to respond to the impacts of the changing business environment. Time and resource constraints were highlighted as the common challenges for small business in developing skills for themselves and their staff.
- **Workforce skills:** Staff recruitment and retention of skilled staff are a major issue for small business, particularly in regional areas where attracting staff to relocate and then to house is a major impediment. It also reported that staff often lack job ready soft skills and the introduction of the Australian Government's JobKeeper program has impacted employers' ability to recruit skilled staff.
- **Government engagement and communication:** Businesses report challenges due to multiple government websites and communication channels and platforms. They also find it difficult to locate and understand what is available and keep up with a large volume of information from government agencies. They would like to have a single point of contact to get information and advice that is applicable



to their business needs. Many businesses reported being unaware of government support for small business and advised that better promotion of these programs and services is needed.

- **Access to support:** Accessing government support programs and services is considered complex and time consuming. In particular, grant and program eligibility criteria and the application processes were highlighted as problem areas. Small business also highlighted the need for more intensified and tailored support. Further, businesses were concerned by the lack of support available outside of business hours and the need for service providers with local knowledge of small business issues.
- **Red tape and compliance:** Small business find it difficult to navigate the systems and processes of government and to understand regulatory requirements.
- **Government procurement:** Procurement processes and the time and effort required to tender remain a concern for small business. Small business highlighted the lack of transparency around awarding of tenders, substantial insurance requirements, little or no feedback given if unsuccessful, and the exclusion of small business from supply chain opportunities.
- **COVID-19 specific:** Small businesses are still recovering from challenging business conditions with particular sectors more impacted than others. There was a lack of certainty and concern around the cessation of JobKeeper at the end of March 2021, combined with feedback that access to workforce had been impacted by these same support mechanisms.
- **Regional issues:** The major constraints for the growth of small business in regional areas have been identified as the level of economic demand and activity, business acumen, costs of doing business, poor internet connectivity, housing and rental shortages and reduced access to a skilled workforce.

### What help does small business need to grow and thrive?

- **Workforce issues and skills development:** Small business would benefit from greater long-term support including access to information and

specific advice to plan and invest in their own skills and workforce skills. In addition, small business are seeking access to a workforce that is 'employable' and not just skilled.

- **Better communication and interaction with government:** Key feedback related to improving the Business Queensland website, providing a central point of contact that operates outside of business hours to help small business navigate information, programs and services and better promotion of available small business support.
- **Improve government's support to small business:** Feedback provided is that small business support should be tailored, affordable, accessible, flexible and include opportunities for regular peer-to-peer networking and mentoring. Specific proposals included access to one-on-one professional advice and support, streamlined eligibility and grant application processes (including checklists), scaling up existing small business services and programs that work (e.g. Mentoring for Growth and grants), targeted industry and regional grants and mentoring, professional development rebates, access to local networking and support services, and mental health support.
- **Red tape and compliance:** Lessening of regulatory constraints and better communication of the rules across all levels of government and simplification of processes.
- **Government procurement:** Key suggestions for improving access to government procurement for small businesses included simplifying processes, transparency in procurement contracts, providing concise feedback on unsuccessful tenders, breaking up larger procurement contracts and increasing new opportunities for small business.
- **COVID-19 specific:** Build business confidence and government to have a post-JobKeeper plan.
- **Regional issues:** Better connectivity, affordable housing, incentives to stay in rural or remote locations, dedicated regional economic development officers.

# North Queensland – what you told us

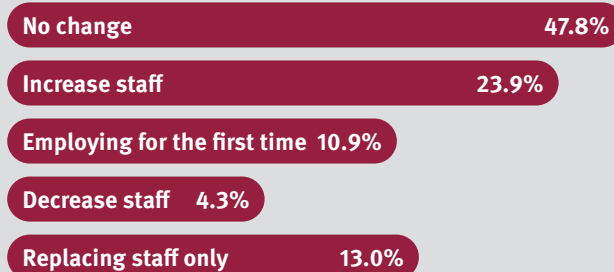
## Roadshow location: Townsville

	What are your challenges	What small business needs to grow and thrive
<b>Staffing and training pathways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty in accessing skilled and qualified staff with the right experience across many industries.</li><li>• Reduced access to the backpacker and international student workforce impacting on business operations.</li><li>• Ensuring enough young people are being attracted into certain trades to build skills in these areas for the future</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local, State and Federal Governments to explore new ways of attracting skilled workers to the region to increase the local skilled workforce; and to provide support to encourage people to move to, and stay in, regional areas where there are employment opportunities available.</li></ul>
<b>Government processes and programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complex and time-consuming processes to apply for grant programs with restrictive eligibility criteria.</li><li>• Government red tape, regulation and difficulty in understanding government requirements.</li><li>• Difficulty in staying informed of changes to compliance requirements.</li><li>• Overlap between government departments, and navigating services, both federal and state, can be challenging and result in differing information and advice.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More small business resources—including information, education and resources to help small business thrive, develop business plans, build up their business skills, grow their business and retain a skilled workforce (both professional workers and tradespeople).</li><li>• Extending eligibility criteria for government grants to make them more widely accessible to different types of businesses.</li><li>• Grant funding that provides small business with the flexibility to try new things and tying education and training options into grants to allow operators to advance their business acumen.</li><li>• Simplify grant and tender application processes to ensure they are ‘small business friendly’, including being easy to understand and able to be completed in a timely manner.</li><li>• Provide support to encourage business start-ups.</li><li>• Provide opportunities for feedback to be provided to small business if an application for support, assistance from government or to supply goods or services to government is unsuccessful.</li></ul>

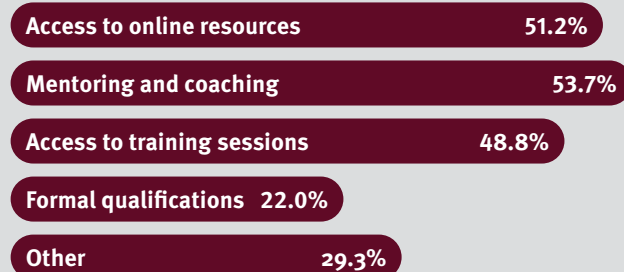
	What are your challenges	What small business needs to grow and thrive
<b>Greater localised support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining a vibrant and active central business district given changes to business and working arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easy access to appropriate networks, advice and support that is local and specialised to small business and covers a broad range of topics (e.g. in relation to compliance, financial assistance, HR and payroll support).</li> <li>Improved networking, access to the right people and right information, and customised mentoring from people who understand the local region.</li> </ul>
<b>Other issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost of doing business in North Queensland can be high in comparison with other parts of Queensland and Australia, including the cost of insurance, materials and business-related taxes and charges.</li> <li>Existing business challenges such as managing cashflow, receiving stock in a timely manner, obtaining/retaining customers and working within regulated markets have been exacerbated as a result of the changed business environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place a focus on the needs of small businesses outside of South East Queensland when developing a new strategy to support small business.</li> <li>Provide businesses with as much clarity and certainty as possible in relation to COVID-19 related restrictions to support business and consumer confidence.</li> </ul>

## Townsville

Do you expect the number of staff that you employ to change in the next 12 months?



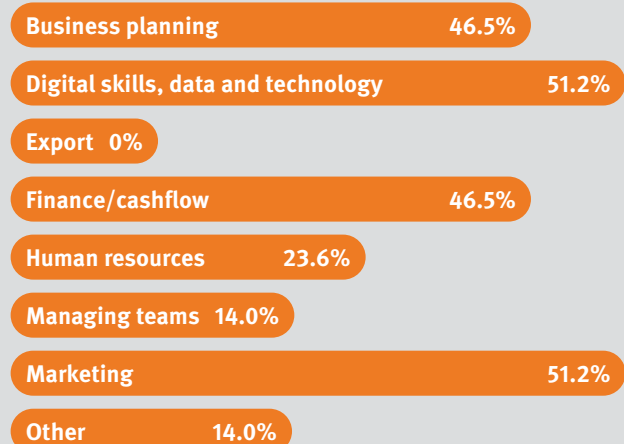
What types of assistance would be most beneficial to help you build these skills and capabilities?\*



Have you previously accessed Queensland Government support program/initiatives?\*



Top 3 skills you need assistance to develop to support success of your small business?\*



### Online survey data

Townsville online survey responses included all respondents that identified that they were based in the Local Government Areas of Townsville, Burdekin and Hinchinbrook.

\*Survey respondents could select up to 3 responses, so response percentages will not total to 100%



# Industry – what you told us

## Key highlights and commentary by industry

Key industry insights emerged from the face-to-face sessions and a series of seven online sessions hosted by CCIQ (Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland), the Australian Industry Group, Queensland Hotels Association, Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Restaurant and Catering Association, National Retailers Association and the Queensland Small Business Commissioner.

Industry	Key challenges for industry	Industry specific suggestions/solutions
<b>Tourism, hospitality and hotels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncertainty for tourism due to border closures.</li> <li>• Impacts from tourism events being cancelled.</li> <li>• Cost of travel to Queensland’s regions.</li> <li>• Hospitality/tourism operator uncertainty with last minute bookings.</li> <li>• Lack of profile for small Indigenous tourism operators.</li> <li>• Travel industry severely impacted, not only experiencing a significant downturn but also refunding customers and staff commissions.</li> <li>• Loss of backpacker and international student workforce (also impacting agricultural industry).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short courses – so people are ready for work quicker.</li> <li>• Accessing staff at short notice when last minute travel bookings are made.</li> <li>• International student bubble pilot and incentivise the return of international students to Queensland.</li> <li>• Promote tourism ‘off season’ as open for business.</li> </ul>
<b>Retail</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emergence of home-based businesses and working arrangements.</li> <li>• Patronage in CBDs remains below pre-pandemic levels with lack of foot traffic.</li> <li>• Lack of turnover with no international tourists.</li> <li>• Issues with shipping with some customers not prepared to wait for purchases from local retailers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support for sole traders.</li> <li>• Continued rent relief and ongoing support with commercial leasing disputes.</li> <li>• Training courses – how to set up an online business and do it better e.g. how to set up a Shopify account.</li> </ul>

Industry	Key challenges for industry	Industry specific suggestions/solutions
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delays in supply of raw material an issue for manufacturing.</li> <li>• Pricing and delays of freight coming into country.</li> <li>• Need higher skill levels for both employees and employers.</li> <li>• Supply issues – costs and time delays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursuing local manufacturing opportunities.</li> <li>• Building relationships with potential local suppliers.</li> </ul>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food going to waste, and the agricultural industry is planting 50% less crops as the industry is experiencing issues with accessing workers.</li> <li>• Wages of fruit pickers are low which in turn leads to a thin labour market (less employers offering jobs).</li> <li>• Loss of backpacker and international student workforce (also impacting tourism industry).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased (subsidised) wages for fruit/vegetable pickers.</li> <li>• Reduced payroll tax/tax free threshold for international workers.</li> </ul>

# Next steps

The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training is continuing to consider feedback from the small business community to develop a new small business strategy as well as ensure current and future support programs and initiatives address the ongoing challenges that small businesses are facing across Queensland.

Initially this feedback will help ensure the Queensland Government's \$140 million investment committed for the **Big Plans for Small Business Strategy** delivers actions which assist small business to recover and create jobs.

Initiatives under this strategy include:

- **\$100 million Business Investment Fund** which will invest in small to medium enterprises supporting them to grow and expand into new markets
- **Go Global Export Program** providing small and medium sized businesses with financial support to enter a new international market
- **\$25 million in small business grants**
- development of a **Business Ready website** to provide online, easy-to-use information on starting a business, employing staff and growing a small business
- holding **Queensland Small Business Month** in May 2021 to celebrate the success of small business, share knowledge and build skills
- continuing the **Mentoring for Growth** program
- making the **Queensland Small Business Commissioner** role permanent

- rolling out a **targeted engagement strategy** to make sure small businesses know what support is available
- looking at the role of the **Queensland Small Business Advisory Council** and how it provides advice to government
- rolling out the **Business Health Check** online tool to help businesses understand their weaknesses and provide helpful advice on next steps to make improvements.

For more information on current programs and support for small business visit [www.business.qld.gov.au](http://www.business.qld.gov.au) or call 1300 654 687.