



Zali Steggall OAM, MP
Federal Member for Warringah
zali.steggall.mp@aph.gov.au

August 2023

Felicity Wilson MP
Member for North Shore
northshore@parliament.nsw.gov.au

I am writing to both of you in my capacity as President of the Mosman Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of our local businesses.

The Chamber recently canvassed feedback from a variety of businesses and sectors and my comments herein represent responses from retail, hospitality, tourism, beauty, health & fitness, and property. The key issues facing business at present are fairly consistent across the board and the situation is once again quite dire and they are asking for recognition of the issues, and assistance.

The key issues, and some suggestions, are:

1. Continuing labour shortages, and ensuing increased labour costs.
 - a. Please relax the weekly cap on working hours for international students. It is extremely difficult to find staff, and train them. Restricting the hours of current trained staff, and asking the business to look for more staff, and train them as well, presents unnecessary costs, stress and challenges, particularly for hospitality. In a tight labour market, the fairest solution is to enable the business to fully utilise the staff they already have.
2. Cost of living increases – small business owners are ‘households’ as well.
3. All costs of doing business have increased – stock, supplies, utilities, freight, fuel.
 - a. Incentivise landlords to install solar, insulation and other energy efficient modifications so tenants benefit in reduced energy costs.
 - b. Refer to the UK program of energy ratings for buildings and set up similar here. This will act as an incentive to landlords to embrace energy efficient builds and upgrades.
4. Consumer spending is massively down. Foot traffic is reduced, streets are quiet.
5. Interest rate rises affect consumers, but also small business owners. Many took out additional debt to assist them in surviving covid, and they now face significant pressure in debt repayments for their businesses, as well as their homes.
 - a. Request the ATO show compassion and less aggression in chasing small business.

There is a real fear that many businesses, particularly those selling non-essential items and services, will not survive. They have been under sustained stress since 2020 with no relief in sight.

Small business does not seem to be adequately recognised. The economic data referenced by the Government focusses on households and personal financial health but fails to recognise the huge burden that tightening monetary policy measures place on small business - the fabric of our suburbs.

These business owners are people who have worked hard, often for many years, to build their businesses, service their customers and create the atmosphere which is the essence of their local area. They are the ones who create what residents refer to as “the village feel”, the thing that residents love so much about where they live.

Small business owners have families and their own personal cost of living issues, like all ‘households’. However, unlike other ‘households’ that are employed by big businesses or Government (on safe and steady income), small business owners have the additional pressure (financial and emotional) from the horrific combination of increasing expenses and falling revenue. They are in the perfect storm.

Not surprisingly we are hearing of significant problems with mental health as business owners struggle with the pressure of maintaining their own income, and that of all the staff for which they are responsible.

Small business is the backbone of the Australian economy but it feels that they are forgotten when measures to cut inflation and curtail spending are implemented. There needs to be more recognition of their importance to the fabric of our suburbs, the impact on them as ‘households’ and additionally as business owners (they are being impacted two-fold), and more proactivity by all levels of government in doing whatever is possible to help them survive and not close their doors for good.

Any assistance you can give to bring these issues to light, and deliver some relief will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Tamara Keniry
President
Mosman Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 471
Mosman NSW 2088
0411 854 822
Info@mosmanchamber.com.au