

Year in Review

2021



Small
Business
Commissioner

Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Small Business Commission acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and recognises their continued custodianship of Country – land, seas and skies. We acknowledge the diversity of First Nations cultures, histories and peoples, recognise their enduring connection to our State, and we pay our deepest respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Minister's Message

Small businesses are the backbone of the NSW economy. Across the State they provide essential goods, services and jobs to local communities. In NSW, small businesses employ 41 per cent of the private sector workforce, pay \$60 billion in wages and salaries annually and contribute more than \$411 billion in annual sales and service income.

In 2021, NSW small businesses again faced a series of significant challenges. The year started with COVID-related public health restrictions on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. This was followed by regional floods, a mouse plague, and two further waves of the pandemic.

As it did in the first year of the pandemic, the NSW Government supported businesses through these extraordinary events. We provided assistance to ensure as many of them as possible could make it through to better times and continue their vital role in supporting families, communities and our economy. I acknowledge the outstanding work of my predecessor the Hon Damien Tudehope MLC and his support for small businesses throughout this period.

The Government provided additional funding to the Small Business Commission for mediation services, including support for tenants and landlords to help mediate commercial tenancy disputes. It also provided targeted funding to the Commission to ensure the voice of small business was heard in the development of business support packages and in new initiatives such as the Tender Support Program.

A range of consumer and business incentives to support small businesses were introduced, including support for alfresco dining, the extension of the Dine and Discover voucher scheme and, of course, the JobSaver program and targeted grants. Each measure was designed to help small businesses overcome what have undoubtedly been unprecedented times.

Despite these challenges, the number of small businesses in NSW grew by 4.1 per cent in the year to 30 June 2021. This is an outstanding result given the sustained impact of COVID-19 on businesses and the economy. The NSW Government will work to maintain these strong figures as we transition to a post-pandemic phase.

I extend my thanks to the NSW Small Business Commissioner and his team for the vital role they have played in supporting small businesses in 2021. The Commission has made a strong and positive contribution to this State and the NSW Government will ensure it continues to receive the necessary support in the future.

The Hon. Eleni Petinos MP

Minister for Small Business

Minister for Fair Trading



Small Business at a Glance



Small businesses employ about
1.6 million people
which represents 41 per cent of the NSW private sector workforce¹



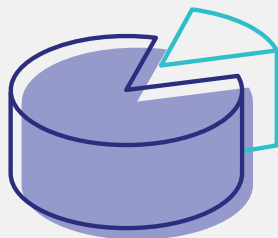
NSW small businesses contribute nearly
\$411.3 billion
to annual sales and services income¹



The NSW small business sector pays more than
\$59.8 billion
in wages and salaries every year¹



There are
797,956
small businesses in NSW²



Small businesses represent about
98%
of all NSW businesses²



More than **1/3**
of all NSW small business operators were born overseas³

1. Estimated from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017, 8150 Australian Industry, 2018–19

2. Estimated from ABS, 8165.0, 2020-21

3. ABS, 2016, 2016 Census—Employment, Income and Education.

Commissioner's Message



In 2021, the Commission assisted more small businesses across the State than ever before.

A second year of the coronavirus pandemic, combined with multiple natural disasters, saw a continuation of the severe challenges faced by many businesses. The Commission received an unprecedented 47,500 enquiries through its contact centre and website, a 53 per cent increase on enquiries in 2020.

The tens of thousands of calls for support received were dominated by those seeking rent relief and support through mediation. These calls came from both tenants and landlords. The Commission also managed thousands of requests for information and assistance regarding financial relief, grant eligibility and the impact of public health restrictions on businesses and staff.

Over 2,300 applications for mediation were received in 2021. To support this level of demand the Commission's mediation resources were boosted by the NSW Government. Pleasingly,

mediation has been highly successful in resolving a range of disputes, providing practical outcomes during what have been difficult times.

The Commission's website and other communications channels were vital to informing and engaging small businesses in 2021. More than 220 news articles and small business updates providing targeted assistance were published on the website during the year. The website saw record demand, with more than a million unique views in 2021, a 40% increase on the previous year.

The Commission provided detailed advice to government on matters affecting small business, including reports, submissions and engagement with other government agencies. There were 17 reports and submissions prepared, including reports on specific local issues that were commissioned during the year. The Commission also played a

“Pleasingly, mediation has been highly successful in resolving a range of disputes, providing practical outcomes during what have been difficult times.”

Our focus in 2022



significant role in supporting small business by reviewing proposed legislation and regulation.

The Commission partnered with TAFE NSW to develop four online microbusiness training modules to help small businesses be more successful in tendering for contracts with the NSW Government. These short courses and the downloadable guide are valuable resources for helping small businesses understand how to tender for government opportunities.

The coming year will no doubt bring new and continuing challenges for small business but also exciting opportunities. I look forward to supporting small businesses across the State in 2022, as well as engaging with the industry associations, chambers, local councils and community groups that also support them.

Chris Lamont

Small Business Commissioner



Tender Support

Helping small businesses learn how to become suppliers to the NSW Government by providing information and training on how to qualify for and tender for Government contracts. Through these activities, we will also promote the opportunities for small businesses across NSW to grow their operations.



NSW Small Business Month

Help small businesses **Rebuild, Recharge and Renew** through the delivery of NSW Small Business Month. We will also use the lessons from the event and the connections made with small businesses to improve our support for the sector.



COVID recovery

Help small businesses facing ongoing challenges related to COVID-19. The Commission will continue to engage with small businesses to understand their challenges relating to supply chains, staff shortages and the recovery of our CBDs. The Commission will advise government on these challenges and identify potential opportunities to improve outcomes for small business.

2021 Highlights

47,500

businesses
received direct support



25

Business Insights Initiative
engagement sessions



477

engagement sessions
with small businesses



Top 5

reasons for **customer calls**

1. Commercial & retail leases
2. Retail Leases Act
3. Lease issues (non-contract)
4. Retail lease bond scheme
5. COVID-19 Grants – eligibility & accessibility



100

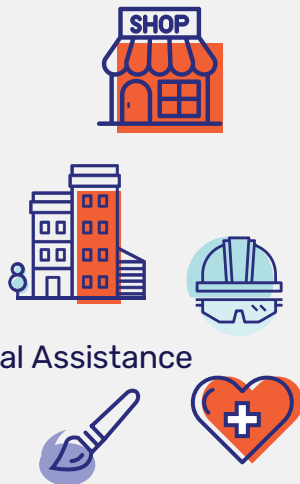
industry briefings and forums attended



Top 5

industries reached

1. Retail Trade
2. Accommodation
3. Construction
4. Health Care & Social Assistance
5. Arts & Recreation



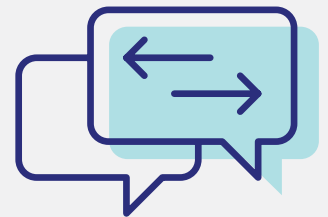
8

Small Business Reference Group sessions



690

mediations
conducted



10

Small Business Surveys



2,331

mediation applications
managed



1.03m

unique **website visits**



227

new articles
published on the website
to inform small businesses

17

formal submissions
and reports



4

quarterly reports on the
Commission's activities

New

guides and factsheets
for business



- Selling to the NSW Government
- Doing business in the gig economy
- Modern slavery factsheet
- NSW floods support factsheet
- Face mask and check-in rules for small business
- Small business electorate profiles



COSBOA had hoped that 2021 would be an easier year for small business. Sadly, that proved not to be the case and we all journeyed through a second and arguably tougher year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The one shining light, however, was a substantial strengthening in our partnership with the Small Business Commissioner. Our member organisations threw all sorts of curly issues at Chris Lamont and his team during 2021. On each occasion, the Commission proved its worth by constantly championing these issues to the NSW Government and securing meaningful solutions for small businesses in multiple industry sectors across the State.

Mark McKenzie, Chair, Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia

COVID Response

Overview of 2021

The NSW and Commonwealth Governments implemented a range of support measures, financial and non-financial, to support small business through another challenging year.

In fact, 2021 proved to be the toughest year so far of the pandemic for small businesses and the wider community. The emergence of the Delta variant of COVID required Governments to again implement strict public health orders to protect a largely unvaccinated population from the virus.

Small business confidence was severely tested throughout 2021, as measured in the Commission's Small

Business Survey. The confidence indicator fell from 52 per cent in March to as low as 32 per cent in August during the depths of the Delta lockdown, before confidence began to lift as the NSW reopening plan was announced.

Lease issues and grants for small business were the most common topics raised by businesses contacting the Commission for assistance. Many businesses were able to stay in their premises and remain in business because of the COVID leasing regulations and the government financial support. The list of industries most frequently contacting the Commission was similar to 2020. However, the beauty

Small business confidence fell sharply after the Delta lockdown



Source: NSW Small Business Commission

industry was hit particularly hard by lockdowns due to the nature of the services it provides and sought out the Commission's help the most.

The impacts of COVID were compounded by other natural disasters, including floods at the beginning and end of the year in regional NSW and even a mouse plague in parts of the State. Small businesses impacted by these events were offered dedicated support and assistance.

A further challenge to small businesses came late in the year with the arrival of the Omicron variant of COVID.

Key initiatives

COVID Support

The Commission worked closely with all levels of government, business groups and individual small businesses to develop financial and other means of support that would target those most in need and keep them operational, using many of the lessons that had been learned in 2020 and before on how to best support business.

The Commission also met with thousands of small business owners and operators through online and in person forums and informal visits to educate businesses about the support available and obtain their feedback.

The Government support package, developed with the assistance of the

small business perspective provided by the Commission, included:

- Grants to businesses of up to \$15,000
- "JobSaver" employee retention payments of up to 40% of payroll
- Mandatory mediation for rent relief for commercial tenants
- Protections against lockouts and evictions of commercial tenants
- Microbusiness grants of \$1,500 per fortnight
- Land tax relief for commercial landlords
- The Commercial Landlord Hardship Fund
- The Northern Beaches Business Support Grant.

The Commission's insights into the most appropriate forms of support were drawn from direct engagement with small businesses and business chambers in 2020 and 2021, including through its report into the Northern Beaches COVID lockdown of January-February 2021 and the Commission's monthly Small Business Survey, which surveys up to 2,000 businesses each month.

The Commission was also a key voice for small business on the impacts of the State's public health orders, helping to ensure that the rules to limit the spread of COVID-19 did not unnecessarily impact on businesses. For example, the Commission helped to secure changes to the rules that

required amusement and play centres to close during lockdown. Where there was scope to relax other laws to assist businesses through lockdown, the Commission was also a strong advocate, such as securing a change to the liquor laws allowing restaurants and cafes to deliver or offer take away alcohol.

The Commission received increased funding in 2021-22 in recognition of the greater need small businesses had for call centre support and mediation services. In 2021 there was an unprecedented 53 per cent increase in the number of businesses assisted by the Commission's customer experience (CX) team. The number of visitors to the website also surged. In the June quarter alone, there was a 270% increase in unique visits compared with the previous year.

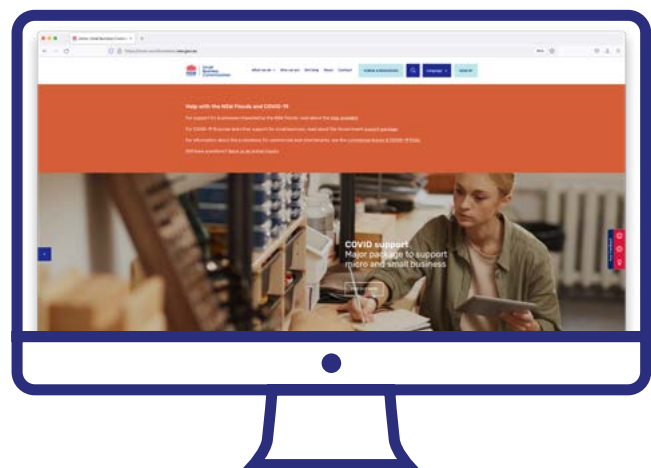
The Commission's website was a key interface for the hundreds of thousands of small businesses needing support during this time. Over the year, more than 220 articles were published to inform small businesses about the support available and particularly the changes to the NSW Government's public health orders. The website was also the key information resource for small businesses and landlords on the COVID leasing regulations.

On 14 July 2021, the NSW Government reintroduced the *Retail and Other Commercial Leases (COVID-19) Regulation*. The regulation required

commercial landlords to negotiate rent relief with COVID-impacted small business tenants, utilising the Commission's mediation services where necessary.

Mediation services remained in high demand throughout the year, but demand surged with the re-introduction of the regulation and there were 2,331 applications in total during 2021.

The Commission's website was a key interface for the hundreds of thousands of small businesses needing support.



Designing effective small business support during COVID

The Commission's advice to Government on the most effective small business support during 2021 followed some key principles derived from what had been learned earlier in the pandemic and from previous natural disasters.

Speed: Getting financial support to businesses as quickly as possible is vital to preventing otherwise viable businesses going under. Small businesses under cashflow stress typically have fewer reserves than larger businesses to fall back on and need support quickly to help pay rent and other bills as they fall due.

Make the application process as simple as it needs to be: The more complicated the application process, the more time it will take a small business to complete it correctly and get the support they need. A complicated process can also put off small businesses from applying for support at all or lead them to mistakenly believe they are not eligible.

Consult with key stakeholders: accountants and bookkeepers, for example, provided valuable input on designing an efficient application process by understanding what financial and business information a small business can readily provide.

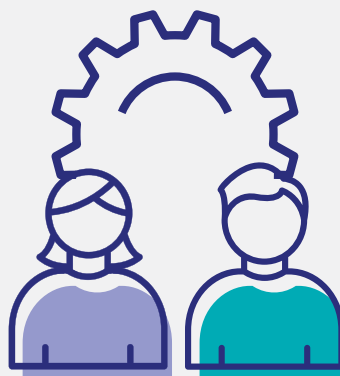
Account for the edge cases: regardless of how well a support measure is designed, there will always be some businesses that do not meet the key criteria but should receive support based on the intentions behind the measure. Therefore, there should be scope to include these businesses.

Help businesses open back up quickly: providing support that allows a business to keep its staff and other organisational capital is not only good for the staff, it allows the business to get back up and running more quickly (after lockdowns, for example) and limits the damage to the business and the broader economy.



The Small Business Commissioner has helped us with a range of issues including the impact of major government roadworks on our members and critical commercial and retail tenancy matters. The Commissioner has been the picture of success in terms of what he and his entire team have achieved. Their agility and responsiveness have been amazing and it's given small business a direct conduit of contact with the NSW Government. They've taken the lead to drive the best interests of small business during COVID. It's something every other State should aspire to.

Jos de Bruin, CEO, Master Grocers Australia



Advocacy

Overview of 2021

The Commissioner maintains that a strong small business sector is vital to the health of the NSW economy and local communities. To that end, the Commission seeks to stand up for the interests of small businesses when they are being treated unfairly or when circumstances justify that they should receive additional support.

The role of advocacy can be as simple as representing a small business that has not been paid on time and as complex as multi-year efforts to effect a change in legislation or the development of a new industry code of practice.

The Commission is an influential voice in debates over policies and practices impacting small business. While the Commission has certain powers under the *Small Business Commissioner Act*, the influence of the office derives mostly from its history of providing independent, informed and balanced advice.

That advice was called for frequently in 2021 to support small businesses hit hard by the outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID and the associated public health restrictions. The Commission was involved in the development of many support measures, working with the NSW Government and industry bodies.

The Commission also continued to work on longer term advocacy projects, such as reform to the electronic payments system to ensure small businesses receive fair treatment.

The Commission made formal submissions to 14 reviews of laws and regulations impacting small businesses.



Advocacy Achievements in 2021

- Advocated for and secured \$5,000 hardship grants and other support for businesses affected by localised COVID-19 restrictions in Sydney's Northern Beaches, through the Commission's Northern Beaches Report
- Secured changes to the NSW public health orders that required amusement and play centres to close during lockdown
- Secured an extension of the COVID commercial leasing regulations to help small businesses negotiate rent relief with their landlord
- Through the Commission's work on the Agritourism Pilot Program, laid the groundwork for 2021 planning changes by the NSW Government that made it easier for farms to set up agritourism businesses
- Worked successfully with the ATO to implement a change to ANZIC codes to allow businesses with an ABN to register up to four additional business activities, making it easier for them to access government support
- Made it easier to register for the NSW Government's Faster Payment Terms, leading to the addition of 10,000 more small businesses
- Advocated for and contributed to improvements to the Delta lockdown business assistance package
- Successfully advocated for temporary measures allowing low-risk licensed venues, restaurants and cafes to permanently offer delivery and take away liquor



The Commission was asked by the NSW Government to produce a number of reports on urgent matters seriously impacting small businesses in particular areas of the State.



Northern Beaches Report

In January, the Government tasked the Commission with consulting with small businesses on the Northern Beaches of Sydney to assess the impact of a localised lockdown on businesses in that area in response to a COVID outbreak in late 2020.

The Commission was also asked to make recommendations on what support affected businesses needed.

The Commission's final report recommended \$5,000 hardship grants for the most affected

businesses, a measure that was adopted by the NSW Government. The learnings from this report were also a valuable input into the design of Government support during the Delta lockdown, which impacted businesses across the State.

Wingecarribee Report

In March, the State Government appointed an interim administrator to the Wingecarribee Shire Council south of Sydney due to serious concerns about the council's ability to function effectively, especially in its interactions with small businesses.

The Commission was asked by the Government to consult with small businesses in the Shire about their dealings with Council, assess the extent and nature of the harm done to small businesses and produce a report with recommendations for improvements.

The Commission held a series of consultation sessions in Southern

Highlands towns with local small business owners and operators. Its report in June made a number of recommendations to improve council's communications with small business and its development approval processes, which were welcomed by the Council administrator and local businesses.

Inner West Rail Report

The Commission was asked to assess the impact on small businesses of the unexpected shutdown of the Inner West light rail in Sydney because of equipment faults. Commission staff visited hundreds of small businesses in areas that relied on foot traffic generated by the line and also conducted an online survey. The feedback in the Commission's report has been the impetus for increased engagement between the NSW Government and local businesses.

Photo: The Commissioner speaking at the release of the Wingecarribee Report at Centennial Vineyards in Bowral



When we had an issue with payments to our members for conducting COVID testing and we couldn't get any action from our key contacts, the Small Business Commissioner was able to cut through to make sure my members' issues were flagged and, most importantly, resolved almost overnight."

Liesel Wett, CEO, Australian Pathology

Submissions were made to these policy reviews and inquiries in 2021

Commonwealth Treasury – Regional Banking Taskforce

Office of Local Government NSW – Review of Tendering Regulation

Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications – Regional Telecommunications Review

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) – Digital Platform Services Inquiry

Australian Banking Association – Banking Code of Practice Independent Review

Reserve Bank of Australia – Retail Payments System Regulation Review

NSW State Insurance Regulatory Authority – Food Delivery Rider Insurance

Education Council – National Quality Framework Review

NSW Department of Planning and Environment – Agritourism EIE

Commonwealth Treasury – Increasing the Statutory Demand Threshold

NSW Department of Customer Service – Proposed prosecution costs orders, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*

Commonwealth Treasury – Payment Systems Review

NSW Minister of Finance and Small Business – COVID-19 public health orders

Commonwealth Joint Standing Committee on Migration – Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program



Payment systems reform campaign

Small businesses in NSW have been using contactless payments for a decade but COVID-19 has accelerated use of the technology and the demise of cash.

“Tap and go” and other forms of electronic payment have become the main, and preferred method of payment for goods and services.

Public health orders to maintain social distance and limit person-to-person contact saw businesses who were not already offering contactless payments adopt the technology, introducing contactless payment terminals onsite and in store, and enabling online card payment transactions through their websites.

While the technology has helped small businesses provide faster, more efficient and effective service to customers and suppliers, its growth, and a major outage affecting one network in January 2021 which impacted about 32,000 businesses across Australia, have also highlighted the risk to businesses of their major payments system going offline.

Small businesses have expressed their concerns about the duration of system outages and the absence of a transparent process by which their concerns could be addressed and compensation sought. This was especially the case for businesses with only one point of sale.

To address these concerns, the Commission made three recommendations to assist small business in a submission to the

Commonwealth Government’s Payment Systems Review in February 2021.

The key recommendation is for providers to give small businesses a service guarantee which would:

- Establish minimum reliability standards expected of providers
- Promote greater awareness among small businesses of the potential for outages
- Identify actions small businesses can take to mitigate the impact of outages
- Provide equitable, consistent and accessible compensation for small businesses
- Promote competition for the provision of these services.

Other recommendations made by the Commission include:

- The urgent mandating of low-cost routing (LCR) to place downward pressure on merchant service fees
- Helping small businesses get a better deal from providers through an expanded Consumer Data Right (CDR).

The Commission will continue to advocate on this issue with governments and industry and push for the speedy implementation of reforms.

Mediation & Bonds

Overview of 2021

The Commission's mediation service was a critical element in the NSW Government's plan to help small businesses manage the impacts of COVID-19 in 2021.

With the arrival of the Delta variant of COVID and the resulting lockdown from June, the Government reinstated the protections for commercial tenants through the *Retail and Other Commercial Leases (COVID-19) Regulation 2021*, requiring commercial landlords to negotiate rent relief with their small business tenants and banning them from taking certain actions, such as locking out a tenant for unpaid rent.

The regulations were designed to share the burden of COVID-19 between small business tenants and their landlords.

While some tenants and landlords would have been able to negotiate that relief between themselves, there were 2,331 applications to the Commission for mediation assistance, mostly by tenants but also by some landlords.

Most mediation matters are resolved informally with the assistance of the Commission's mediation officers, but of the 2,331 applications, 690 required formal mediation sessions.

Activity reached a peak in the December quarter, with 80 mediations conducted in just 18 business days.

KEY MEDIATIONS STATISTICS 2021

2,331

applications

for mediation, down from 2,517 in 2020



690

mediations

held, up from 619 in 2020



90%

of matters settle

before the need for a court or tribunal to decide them



The implementation of rent relief was assisted by the NSW Government's offer of land tax relief to landlords and the newly created Commercial Landlord Hardship Fund, which offered weekly payments to smaller landlords who provided rent relief.

Over the long term, 90% of mediation applications are settled before the need for a court or tribunal to adjudicate them.

As the manager of the NSW Retail Bond Scheme, the Commission managed the lodgement of over 5,000 retail bonds in 2021, with a value of more than \$40 million. There were 4,149 bonds claimed during the year with a value of \$27.1 million. The management of the scheme was transferred on 6 December 2021 to NSW Fair Trading, which already manages residential bonds.





The opportunity to engage the Small Business Commissioner to effect a mediation was instrumental in bringing my matter to a beneficial closure. Thank you and your team for their assistance and support.

Barry Boné, Complete Petrochemical Consulting Services



How mediation saved a Manly cafe

Peter Murray purchased his health-focussed café, Pure Wholefoods in Manly, in January 2020, just two months before the outbreak of COVID-19.

“When COVID hit I suddenly went from doing great business to trade being down up to 80 per cent at times,” Murray says.

Fearful for his business, Murray approached his landlord who, after some negotiation, agreed to provide temporary rent relief.

Later, Murray felt he needed more certainty, but his attempts to come to an agreement on longer term relief did not go well initially.

Then businesses were locked down for a second time in June 2021 after the outbreak of the Delta variant and he approached the landlord again about longer term relief. While the landlord was open to the idea, Murray decided that he needed help to negotiate.

“When you are a new business owner having just made a large investment and in the throes of a pandemic there are a lot of unknowns to deal with, which can lead to fear setting in and clouding your judgement,” Murray says.

While he and his landlord were initially poles apart in their positions, Murray says the mediation process helped bridge the gap.

“Not being a lawyer and not having the experience about how best to proceed, what to expect and what to watch out for was somewhat overwhelming,” Murray says. “(The mediation officer) laid it all out for me and helped remove the anxiety from the situation.”

The parties then moved on to formal mediation, which lasted most of the day, with breaks in between.

“This time it went as smoothly as it possibly could,” Murray says.

“Robert, our mediator, was really good at keeping everybody on track. He was very thorough.

“He made sure we understood at all times what the guidelines and the legislation said and what was possible and that helped us get to a suitable agreement.”

Murray now sees mediation as a much better way of resolving disputes than other methods, such as going to court, with the proviso that the parties involved have to be willing to negotiate.

“Without it, I think I would have been carrying a lot of resentment and spending my time shouting into telephones trying to negotiate an agreement.”

Pictured left: Peter Murray, owner of Pure Wholefoods in Manly, Sydney

Engagement



Overview of 2021

The Commission set a goal of significantly increasing its engagement with small businesses and other stakeholders during 2021, particularly direct engagement, despite the challenges of COVID.

Small business owners and operators are very busy people and may not be aware of information of benefit to them or have the time to make their views known. The Commission uses a variety of channels to make contact with small businesses, share information and understand their experiences.

Key initiatives

CX team

The Commission's Customer Experience (CX) team is the frontline of small business support and managed over 47,000 phone and website enquiries from businesses, landlords, local councils and other stakeholders in 2021, a record number and a 53 per cent increase on 2020.

The team provided direct support to business owners and operators requiring help with common and more challenging small business issues. The team uses plain language resources to assist small businesses to better understand the options available to them. Non-English speakers can talk

NUMBER OF CUSTOMER ENQUIRIES

2020

31,000

2021

47,500



to us through a government-provided interpreter and the Commission's website is available in over 100 languages.

Website, news and social media

The Commission's website was a key source of information during 2021, receiving more than one million unique views, an increase of almost 40% on 2020 and an almost 7-fold increase on 2019.

The most visited website page during 2021 was the page providing answers to frequently asked questions about the COVID leasing regulations. This page was able to be updated regularly as feedback was received on the operation of the regulations and in areas where small businesses and landlords needed clarification and further assistance.

News and updates published on the website are also distributed via the Commission's monthly newsletter,

Most viewed articles in 2021

1. Commercial leases and COVID-19 FAQs
2. Greater Sydney lockdown Q&A
3. COVID-19 information for small business owners
4. Support for commercial tenants and landlords
5. New package to support small business during lockdown
6. National code of conduct for commercial tenancies - leasing principles
7. Tougher lockdown restrictions announced for Sydney businesses
8. Small Business Rebate Scheme opens
9. Retail leases: disclosure statements
10. Guide to starting and running a home business
11. Template letter for tenants to negotiate with property owners.

direct emails to its database of small businesses and social media. At the end of 2021, the Commission had more than 15,000 followers across Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram.

The Commission launched two new content initiatives in 2021. Its podcast, *Talking Business*, features small businesses relating how they got started or overcame a challenge and also offers information and advice for businesses from experts in government and industry. The podcast is available on the major podcasting platforms. The Commission also launched its *Small Business Stories* page, a collection of inspiring stories on individual small businesses.



SMALL BUSINESS STORIES: Starting a travel business during COVID

Former travel editor Tara Harrison sat on the idea of starting her own travel business for four years before COVID pushed her to take the leap. In 2020, despite travel and tourism businesses shutting down and struggling to reorganise, Harrison had an epiphany: “It made me realise that life is too short and too precious to play small, or not chase your dreams”.

She poured her energy into Aweventurer, a travel business focused on delivering transformative travel experiences. The idea was conceived in 2016 while she was working as a travel journalist. Harrison was on a trip to Oman, going through high mountain passes on a 4WD with local Bedouins when she had this “rarefied, goosebump-inducing experience”. She thought: “how can I create that same magic for every traveller?”

A year later Harrison registered Aweventurer as a domain name. However, it wasn’t until 2020 that she had the time to invest in and build her business. “COVID was a circuit breaker where I hoped that this style of transformative travel would resonate - and it did,” she says. Travellers wanted connection and inspiration.

“I thought people would think I was crazy, but they didn’t. I think they knew I’d wanted to do this for years, and if I could test and learn in the age of COVID then the business would be set up for the future.”

However, starting a new travel business in the first year of COVID was tough. “There were so many challenges: from accommodation, venues and suppliers to border closures and travel postponements,” she says. When border closures and lockdowns stopped most travel, she was busy planning trips for the reopening and writing content for her website. “It gave me the confidence to know that if the business can survive that it can survive anything.”

Photo: Tara Harrison, founder of Aweventurer

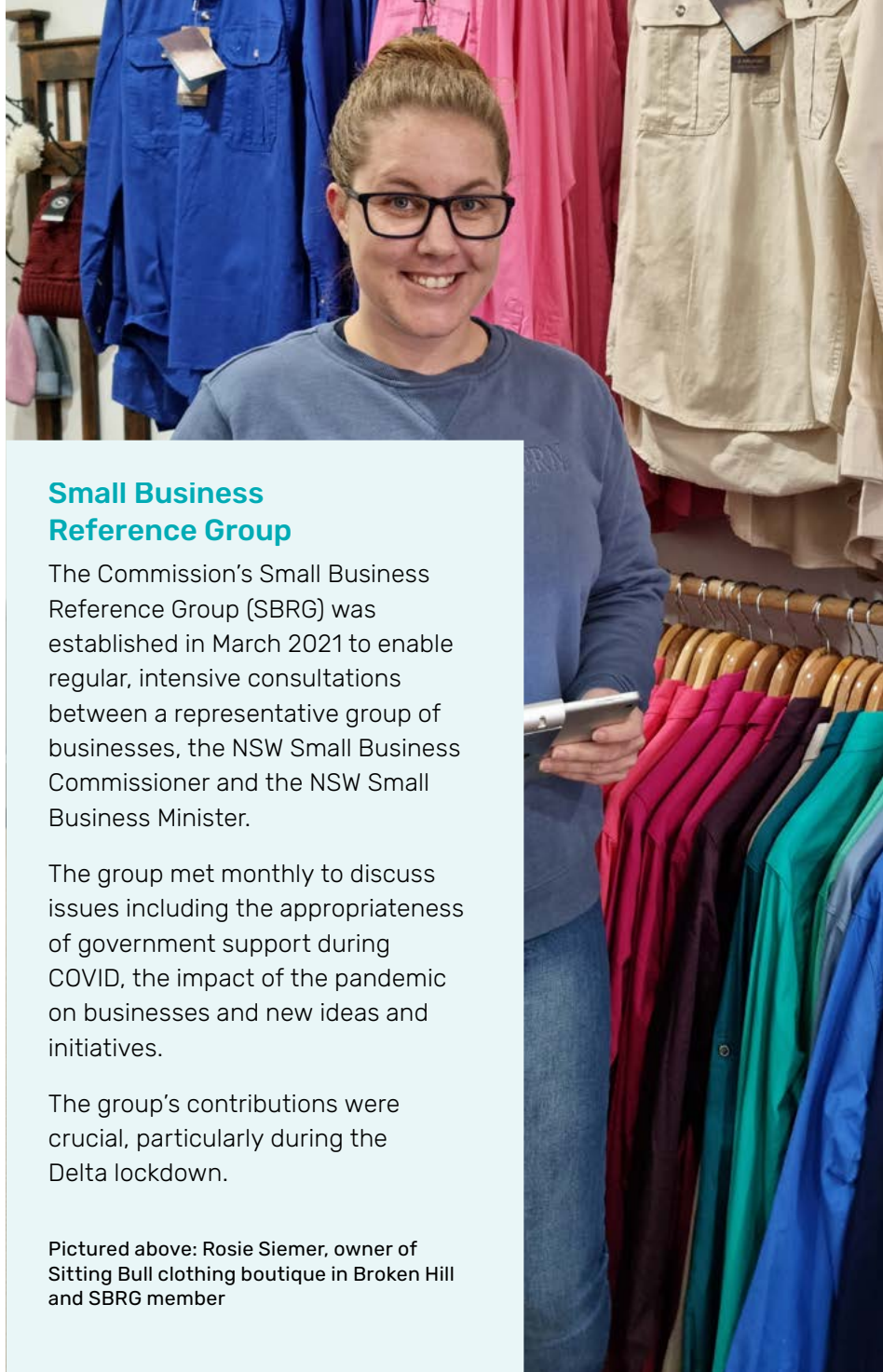


Expanded Small Business Survey

In May 2021, the Commission expanded its monthly Small Business Survey from 500 to 2,000 businesses to capture a broader and more detailed picture of the experience of businesses during the pandemic.

The survey measures key business indicators to inform the work of the Commission and the NSW Government in supporting small businesses, including business confidence, performance, planning and awareness of government support.

The number of questions asked was also expanded in the new survey to obtain more detail on business sentiment and performance. Businesses are randomly selected to participate in the survey, helping to ensure it is representative of businesses across the cities, towns and regions.



Small Business Reference Group

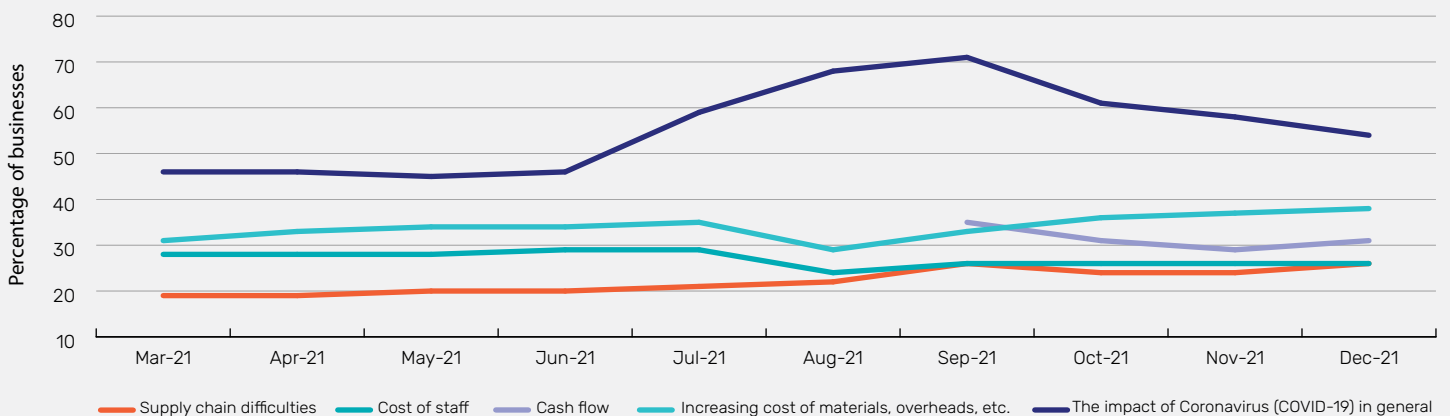
The Commission's Small Business Reference Group (SBRG) was established in March 2021 to enable regular, intensive consultations between a representative group of businesses, the NSW Small Business Commissioner and the NSW Small Business Minister.

The group met monthly to discuss issues including the appropriateness of government support during COVID, the impact of the pandemic on businesses and new ideas and initiatives.

The group's contributions were crucial, particularly during the Delta lockdown.

Pictured above: Rosie Siemer, owner of Sitting Bull clothing boutique in Broken Hill and SBRG member

Top 5 challenges for small business, March to December 2021



Source: NSW Small Business Commission survey



Business Insights Initiative

The Business Insights Initiative (BII) is a stakeholder engagement program conducted by the Commission and launched in August 2021. Between August and December, the Commission conducted 25 engagement sessions.

The BII involves small businesses, industry associations, chambers of commerce and subject matter experts. It aims to help identify emerging opportunities and challenges for small business and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of current issues.



CALD outreach

The Commission seeks to connect with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities so that small business owners and operators in these communities are aware of the support available from the Commission and the NSW Government and to understand their particular concerns. Language and cultural issues continue to be an impediment to accessing support for some of these businesses. In 2021, the Commission's activity included media interviews with CALD outlets, attending business events and promoting the Commission's services in non-English languages prevalent among CALD small businesses.



Meeting with small businesses and their supporters in 2021: Photos from top: Business NSW breakfast, Central Coast; Cafe Dzajko, Tempe; Kelby's Cafe, Marrickville; Corowa Distilling Co., Corowa NSW.

Right: Interview with Muslim community radio; Social media tile for the CALD campaign.

KEEPING UP WITH THE CURRENT
92.1 FM MUSLIM COMMUNITY RADIO

BUSINESS SUPPORT & RECOVERY
AFTER A TIME OF CRISIS

92.1 FM / WWW.2MF.M OR THE 2MF.M RADIO APP ON IOS & ANDROID

Chris Lamont
NSW Small Business Commissioner

Nadia Zahr
2MF.M Radio Host

TUESDAY 16TH
NOV
After the 3pm news bulletin

NSW Small Business Commissioner

為小型生意經營者提供幫助

新州小商業專員署 (NSW Small Business Commission) 能夠在多方面幫助你，包括：

- 解答任何有關商業或零稅務的問題。
- 提供經營小型生意所需的資訊與建議。
- 透過調解服務解決商業糾紛。

查詢詳情可致電 1300 795 534 或訪問我們的網站 smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au

若需要口譯員協助，請致電 13 14 50 聯絡翻譯和口譯服務處。

Traditional Chinese

Making it easier to do business

Overview of 2021

Identifying unnecessary or burdensome red tape, working to improving procedures and policies and providing new tools and resources to small businesses are effective ways the Commission makes it easier for small businesses to operate efficiently and grow.

2021 marked the launch of a number of new projects and publications to help make doing business in NSW easier.

Key initiatives

Tender support program

October 2021 saw the release of the first resources under the Commission's Tender Support Program, which was announced with dedicated funding in the 2020-21 NSW Budget.

The program aims to make it easier for small businesses to become suppliers to the NSW Government by providing information and training on how to tender for Government contracts.

The NSW Government spent about \$34 billion on goods, services and construction in 2020-21, with almost \$8 billion of this spent with SMEs. The Government has a goal of spending more each year with NSW small businesses and has funded

the Tender Support Program and introduced new policies to achieve this. The Government's Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) and Regional Procurement Policy, for example, allows Government agencies to directly procure goods and services from an SME or regional business up to the value of \$150,000.

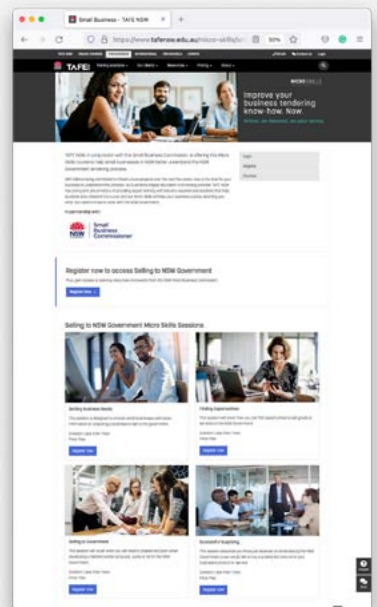
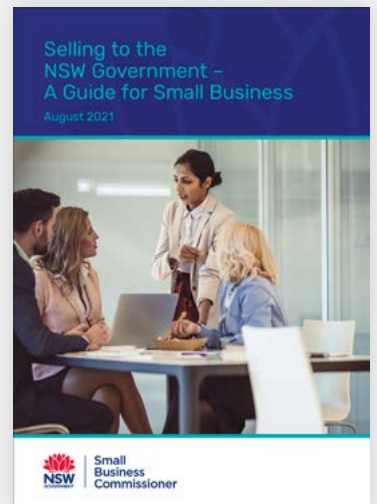
Finding appropriate tendering opportunities and understanding how to put together a competitive tender for government can be challenging for a smaller business, however, which typically doesn't have the resources or expertise that many larger businesses have.

The first stage of the Commission's program was the launch of the *Selling to the NSW Government Guide* and a four-part online training program developed in partnership with TAFE NSW.

The guide and the online training cover the key phases of successfully supplying to government:

- Getting Business Ready
- Finding Opportunities
- Selling to Government
- Successful Supplying.

The Commission also began a series of live workshops to introduce small businesses to the online training material, holding its pilot workshop in southwest Sydney in December 2021. More workshops, both online and in person, will be delivered in 2022.





I was so impressed with the knowledge, care and attention invested by your team – and the mindful follow-up. Without the budgets to access good legal and business advice, it is sometimes hard to achieve just outcomes, or stand up for our rights. Many thanks.”

Annabel O’Flynn, Grooove Graphic Design

Faster payments for small businesses

Getting small businesses paid faster for the work they do for the NSW Government is critical to supporting the sector by improving cashflow and giving businesses greater certainty.

The NSW Government’s Faster Payment Terms policy commits to paying eligible small businesses within 5 days of receiving a correctly rendered invoice.

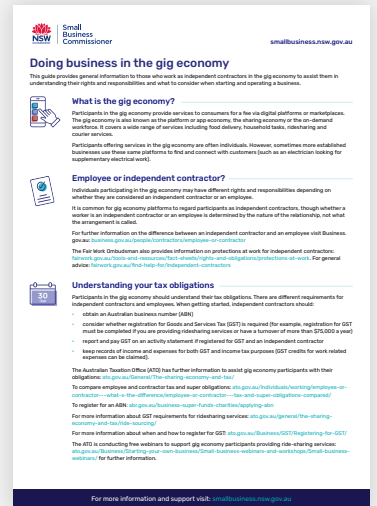
In 2021, the Commission worked to enhance the faster payments framework by transferring the registration system for faster payments to the NSW Government’s Supplier Hub, the central register for suppliers to the NSW Government. This resulted in an additional 10,000 small businesses being automatically registered for faster payments.

The Commission was also successful in its advocacy for faster payments for subcontractors working on NSW Government projects. The NSW Government began trialling its Shorter Payment Terms policy, which requires larger businesses supplying to the NSW Government (with a contract value of \$7.5 million or above) to pay their subcontractors within 20 days. After a successful pilot, the policy was implemented in July.

Guides and factsheets

The Commission produced a number of guides and factsheets during 2021 to help time-poor small businesses get the key facts on common and topical business issues. These factsheets can be downloaded from the Commission’s website and are distributed by the Commission at events.

- **Doing business in the gig economy factsheet:** helping contractors in the gig economy such as food delivery riders, rideshare drivers and web/graphic designers understand their legal rights and obligations.
- **Modern slavery factsheet:** helping small business understand what modern slavery is, its impacts on legitimate businesses and the laws surrounding the issue
- **Selling to the NSW Government factsheet:** a handy guide to key steps in the tendering process and where to find tender opportunities
- **NSW floods support factsheet:** Information on government assistance, insurance issues and emergency support during the January 2021 floods





I found the tendering course helpful and practical. I will recommend it to other business owners I know. I have been looking to start tendering and needed some guidance, so this is just what I was looking for.”

Belinda Sainty, Sainty Engineering – Tender support program participant

Small Business Friendly Councils Program

The Commission’s Small Business Friendly Councils Program offers a suite of resources to local councils to help them encourage the growth of small businesses in their area, including toolkits, guides, case studies and events.

In 2021, the Commission developed a local procurement toolkit for councils that they could use to encourage their local businesses to tender for local government work. The tools included:

- An improving opportunities to work with councils factsheet
- An insurance guide and dashboard
- A WHS questionnaire
- A guide for small business on doing business with their local council
- An insurance factsheet
- Templates for businesses to help them show their credentials in business capability, environmental sustainability and customer service

The Commission also published 7 inspiring case studies of projects and events developed by councils to help their local small businesses thrive.



WHY SHOP LOCAL?

CONVENIENCE & SAVINGS - Shopping locally can save you time and money.

PERSONAL SERVICE - You will experience enhanced customer service & customer care.

BETTER VARIETY - You will enjoy and experience more unique or boutique style businesses in your neighbourhood.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY - Your local small businesses typically support the local community e.g. local schools, sports clubs etc.

IMPROVE YOUR LOCAL ECONOMY - When you shop local, the majority of the money stays in your community.

JOB CREATION - Your local small businesses are typically big employers of local residents in your community.

For more information visit ryde.rocks/ShopLocal

 City of Ryde

Shop Local, Love Your Community campaign **City of Ryde**

Ryde's *Shop Local, Love Your Community* campaign was reactivated during COVID to help local businesses impacted by the health-related lockdowns and restrictions and timed to leverage the rollout of the NSW Government's Dine & Discover vouchers.

The hospitality sector in Ryde was hit hard by COVID, with cafes and restaurants reporting up to an 80 per cent decrease in patronage.

Council partnered with local business chambers and media to promote shopping locally, visiting local businesses to generate awareness and inspire community involvement.

Local media also offered special advertising rates for businesses promoting their acceptance of Dine & Discover Vouchers.

Marketing collateral was developed to support the campaign including:

- Postcards highlighting reasons to shop locally
- Posters for shop windows

- Council street banners promoting the campaign across the West Ryde Town Centre
- A six-week editorial and advertorial campaign in the local paper
- A sponsored social media campaign.

Data from Service NSW on Dine & Discover Voucher redemptions highlighted that suburbs where the campaign was promoted were significant beneficiaries, with an average spend of \$35 on top of a single \$25 Dine and Discover Voucher.

Above: An advertisement from the campaign



Small Business Commissioner

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