Business is in a fine mess

Paul Nicolaou



We were once known as the premier state, but small businesses could be forgiven for thinking we're now the penalty state.

As the Daily Telegraph has revealed, small business is suffocating under the burden of red tape and compliance costs.

But it is the raft of penalties that must have operators terrified of making a mistake or unwittingly breaching the latest regulations.

The move to ban single-use beverage containers has cafes and restaurants reeling.

Businesses breaching the compulsory reuse scheme could face fines of up to $110,000 or $22,000 for individuals.

Another new regulation requiring that food waste be stored separately from general waste has eye-watering fines.

Companies could be fined up to half a million dollars plus $50,000 for each day an offence continues. There are also on-the-spot fines of $5000.

Small businesses failing to comply with specified federal record-keeping, payslip or job-advertising rules can be hit with Fair Work infringements of nearly $11,000 per breach.

They face heavy fines covering workplace safety, wages, food handling, environmental protection, planning and licensing.

The range of penalties is also daunting. There are on-the-spot penalty notices, maximum court-imposed fines, and penalties for repeated or serious breaches.

Multiple penalties involving several notices for different aspects of the same inspection can create a much larger bill than any single fine.

To ensure compliance with red tape, businesses might also need to engage costly consultants, conduct training, do equipment upgrades or seek legal advice or remedial work.

Premier Chris Minns should take action to simplify the regulatory and penalty regime.

It should be possible to distinguish between deliberate or dangerous misconduct and technical, first-time breaches that can be corrected quickly.

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