

TABLED 9/4/2010

WILLIAM FARES

Statement by William Fares

---

Good Afternoon –

My name is William Fares.

For the past 20 years, my wife, Samira, and I have owned and operated the United Service Station in West Richmond.

When we first bought the land, it was a closed site.

The nearest service station was, and is ... at least for now, 1.5 kilometres away.

We made a huge financial investment at the time and, to be honest, we've been chasing our tails for the past 10 or so years, but it's been worthwhile.

We have loyal customers, we're consistent with our prices and we deliver good service.

Like any small business, we've had our challenges and, at times, things have been tough. But we've never quit.

Growing up, my parents had a service station too.

It's all I know.

I would work there on weekends. I would help my mum in the store and my dad in the workshop.

Today, my three children help my wife and I on weekends and before or after their lectures or school.

It's all they know.

When I heard Woolworths was acquiring the land next door, I was devastated.

Quite simply, it will be the end of my family's business.

Everyone says competition is good. And I agree.

But this is unfair. And that's why it's wrong.

My 13 year old son comes home from school and tells me sometimes that a bigger kid than him bullies him.

That's how I feel.

My fear is that the 'big' Woolworths will keep their prices so low for so long that we won't be able to match them.

My family and I rely on one income – selling fuel.

Woolworths has many income streams – it could sell below cost for months in one retail space and not feel it because they can make up for it elsewhere.

And while we do have loyal customers and the community knows us by name, if the service station next door is selling its fuel at 4 cents, 8 cents or 10 cents cheaper than us, then of course they're going to go there.

And this is the problem. Woolworths is able to sell their fuel that low.

If it were another independent petrol station opening up next door, I might be worried, yes, but at least I would know that the playing field was fair. That it was even.

It would be small business owner against small business owner ... not an army against one soldier.

Quite simply, the power that Woolworths has and the income it has will allow it to cut prices that I simply can't match.

I understand Australia has around 1.5 million trading small to medium sized businesses. I am just one of them.

But what's happening here could happen to any other small business owner, and that's a scary thought.

We've spent 20 years of our lives working 7-days-a-week for years at a time because we want to watch our business grow, only for a big and powerful business like Woolworths to come in and take it all away.

The economists will say it's good for competition.

But if you ask me, it's just unfair.