




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.51 pm): I rise to address the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. On 30 January 2020 the World Health Organization officially declared the novel coronavirus 2019 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, and in doing so signalled to countries around the world that a pandemic was potentially imminent and may require a coordinated international response. Such a declaration was made after the first case of the novel coronavirus to be reported outside of China was confirmed on 13 January 2020 and following additional cases being reported in five World Health Organization regions in just one month.

As we now know, the declaration that a novel coronavirus pandemic was potentially imminent proved to be correct. The declaration by the World Health Organization was a signal not just to all countries but all jurisdictions. Certainly at a state jurisdictional level here in Queensland we saw various public health safety measures enacted in response to the unfolding events of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At a local public health level I have sought to provide professional assistance as a specialist physician, including contributing directly to the public health efforts and response. I was grateful today to receive and attend the briefing from the government, and I thank the health minister for that opportunity. That briefing was attended by the Chief Health Officer, where there was information provided in relation to vaccines and the vaccination program here in Queensland. We have to remember that vaccines and vaccination programs are one of the most effective public health strategies not only in Queensland but around Australia and internationally when tackling infectious diseases such as diphtheria, measles, polio, influenza and now COVID-19. I would add my voice to all those in the public domain in supporting those who are eligible for the vaccine to receive that at the appropriate time and in accordance with the vaccination schedule and program which has various phases and which is continuing to be implemented here in Queensland in collaboration with the Commonwealth.

All members elected to the Queensland parliament bring with them to this place their own unique knowledge, skill set and expertise as a result of their own professional training, industry experience, formal education and/or community and life experiences. In my case, as a senior member of the medical profession in Queensland with specialist qualifications and experience in health management and clinical medicine, I have always endeavoured as a legislator and parliamentarian to apply due diligence when examining legislation including not only this bill but also various pieces of preceding legislation, submissions made to the parliamentary Health and Environment Committee and various committee reports, including the Health and Environment Committee's report No. 4 of the 57th Parliament on this piece of legislation. I have taken this approach in order to deliver the best possible framework for public health safety in Queensland. Much of my professional frame of reference relates to previous roles as a former deputy chief medical officer, former executive director of medical services of some of Queensland's largest private hospitals, former senior public servant in Queensland Health and former president of both the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland and the Australian Medical Association of Queensland.

The last 12 months have been an extraordinarily testing time for not only all Queenslanders but residents across Queensland and, indeed, citizens around the world. The COVID-19 health pandemic has been unlike any other health event witnessed or experienced this century. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested our health system, our interstate and international relationships, and indeed at times it has tested our humanity. I believe we can all agree that Queenslanders and Australians have certainly risen to the challenges of COVID-19, and through sacrifice and a common appreciation for the safety of our fellow citizens we have persevered together to keep one another safe.

It was a significant milestone to see the first COVID-19 vaccine being administered here in Queensland and Australia this week. This is an incredible feat which underscores the very best of humanity and the global effort to combat this pandemic. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all Queenslanders for their efforts and sacrifice during the last 12 months. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank all residents in my electorate of Moggill for their understanding and adherence during the recent three-day lockdown of the greater Brisbane area and also their compliance with public health directives over the last year. Can I also acknowledge and thank the wonderful work of our local COVID-19 testing centres, pathology providers and all health professionals for their tireless efforts and contribution to tackling this public health crisis.

The legislation before the House today seeks to extend the expiry dates on a number of provisions within legislation that was passed last year concerning the state Labor government's initial health response to COVID-19. This extension will now be granted to the end of 30 September 2021, and it will align with the expiry dates for all amendments made to various health portfolio legislation. The Liberal National Party supports the extension of provisions as outlined in this legislation.

Further, the Liberal National Party respects that the enabling of these extensions will allow for the Chief Health Officer to respond as necessary to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout this year. However, I do think it is important that I highlight the submission made to the committee by Dr Rob Stable AM, who is a former distinguished director-general of Queensland Health and a previous vice-chancellor and president of Bond University. He has also been a chair of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council and a board chair of the Metro North Hospital and Health Service during the tenure of the Palaszczuk state Labor government.

I have enormous respect for Dr Stable's professional views and his sense of collegiality. Like Dr Stable, I hold our current Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, in the highest regard for her knowledge, expertise and professionalism. Dr Stable did offer some important views and recommendations in his submission to the parliamentary Health and Environment Committee, including the establishment of a Queensland health protection committee to be chaired by the Chief Health Officer. Dr Stable recommended that a Queensland health protection committee have balanced representation with the purpose of such a structure being to enhance governance, transparency and accountability with respect to future state government decision-making in times of any declared public health emergency.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the submission of AMA Queensland, and I certainly support the commentary that was contained within that. Can I also take this opportunity to mention that, following an invitation from well-respected ear, nose and throat surgeon, Professor Chris Perry, the current president of AMA Queensland, I recently attended the AMA Queensland's dinner for the profession. It was certainly an honour on that night to see Dr Jeannette Young awarded the Excellence in Health Care Award. Dr Young is an outstanding leader and she has certainly discharged her responsibilities as Chief Health Officer with grace, humility, unwavering professionalism and distinction. It was also a pleasure to see both Professor Noel Hayman and Associate Professor Alan Bruce Chater formally recognised on the same night for their contributions to Indigenous health and rural medicine respectively.

In concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the importance of both understanding and quality assurance learning from the experiences over the last 12 months when it comes to the way in which all governments and health agencies respond to pandemics, such as COVID-19, into the future. A global infectious disease outbreak was always a possibility in the 21st century, and certainly with the benefit of hindsight much more could have been done by all governments to prepare for such outbreaks. Indeed, I offered as much in a medical interview with journalist Brittany Vonow from the *Courier-Mail* shortly after I was inducted as the President of AMA Queensland. The *Courier-Mail* reported at the time—

'The world is very connected now, with transportation what becomes a problem in southeast Asia or America can quickly become a problem in Australia,' Dr Rowan said.

'We certainly need to be planning ... not only for the current infectious diseases that exist but new and emerging ones as well. In all this we need a strong and robust warning system and good planning.'

Queenslanders have endured complex and difficult circumstances over the last 12 months, but there is certainly hope. The patience, sacrifice and endurance of all Queenslanders is to be not only commended but applauded. As we continue to roll out the vaccine here in Queensland and across Australia, it will certainly have significant and positive health benefits for Queenslanders and be part of our economic recovery in Queensland and across Australia. Again, I would encourage all of those eligible for the vaccine to seek advice from a relevant health professional and take up the vaccine at the earliest opportunity and in accordance with the various phases as part of the implementation program here in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.