

Health and Environment Committee

From: Michael Dalton [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 12 January 2021 9:55 AM
To: Health and Environment Committee
Subject: RE: Health Emergency Extension

Categories: Submission

To the Committee Secretary of the Health and Environment Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to the extension of the emergency powers. Whilst I believe we have been well served by these powers to date, we need to be very mindful of the precedent we are setting for future governments.

Our parliamentary and legal system has evolved over the centuries. It represents the wisdom gained through many past emergencies and the reflection that came afterward. The lesson that is at the heart of our system is that executive power needs oversight and constraint.

Our government should be praised for its actions during this crisis, but we do not know about another government, at another time, with another crisis. History tells us that our society comes under pressure at regular intervals. It will again in the future. We know that in past times of crisis our society has treated individuals or groups in ways we look back on with shame. The wartime internment of Australian citizens and German Jewish refugees is one that comes to mind. Other societies provide many examples we can learn from such as McCarthyism in the USA and Germany's Reichstag Fire Decree.

When the next crisis arises I would like the government of the time to look back at this one. I would like the lesson it learns to be that the quick but judicious application of emergency powers is appropriate. But most critically, I would like the lesson to be that the executive of any Australian government hands back emergency powers at the earliest possible time.

In summary, the use of emergency powers to date has been praiseworthy and we are now well placed to deal with COVID19 without them. But most importantly, not extending the emergency powers will set a powerful and enormously valuable convention for future governments.

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Kind Regards,

Michael Dalton
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ph: [REDACTED]