




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (8.09 pm): I rise to address the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Bill 2020. At the outset, I directly address the people of Glass House as I have not yet had an opportunity to do so and, by the sounds of things, will not have an opportunity to do so after this or potentially for some time. I share the concerns of the people of Glass House about the health crisis we face. I commend them on their resilience to date. We were one of the first communities to be impacted by a positive test of COVID-19. There were initial reactions of panic and concern but, as the area I represent has done on so many occasions, they rose to the challenge. They cared for their neighbours and continue to care for those in the community around them.

I have heard loud and clear those in the Glass House electorate who operate the many small businesses. Potentially, the economic crisis of this virus, this pandemic, will be far more catastrophic than the health crisis. We need to do more. Many spoke about how the package released by Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the federal government went a long way to assisting them but, when we compare what is occurring in other state jurisdictions with what is happening in this state, the state's response has been lacking. We need to do more. For an area like Glass House that survives on tourism—and much of that Asian tourism—places like Montville are ghost towns at the moment.

As much as people in South-East Queensland can, given the restrictions now in place in terms of social distancing and so on, I encourage them to continue to come to communities that thrive and rely on tourism. Bring a friend, sit a metre and a half apart, order a coffee, enjoy a day trip to Montville, Maleny, the Glass House Mountains or Mount Mee. Otherwise, unless this government steps up and starts carrying some of the weight around the economic responsibilities that it needs to demonstrate, I fear for many businesses in my electorate. Those business owners should know that, whether or not this parliament is sitting, I will continue to be a strong advocate for them and a voice to ensure they survive this pandemic as well.

Turning to the provisions of this bill—given that we had it for only an hour and that our debate is restricted to two hours—let me focus specifically on those two aspects that pertain to the state development, manufacturing, infrastructure and planning portfolio. Sadly, the first comes about because of some very un-Australian behaviour, as the Prime Minister said—panic buying. While we have plenty of food and groceries in this nation, companies are unable to get them to supermarkets fast enough to cover up for what is some appalling behaviour. The main reason for that is because of the conditions of approval placed on supermarkets like Woolworths, Coles and IGA where the trucks transporting the goods cannot deliver them outside of certain hours. In normal operating conditions, it is a sensible thing. We do not want our neighbourhoods awoken by truck movements at odd hours. But in a situation like this, we need sensible solutions.

When I heard that the minister sought to explore the temporary use licence that he would declare over an applicable event, which allows those conditions to be removed for a short period of time, I saw a lot of sense in it. I saw a lot of sense in it—and the minister admitted this himself—as it is mirrored off

something that I as the environment minister at the time brought in to deal with a similar situation in the environmental sector, namely a temporary emissions licence. It came about through cyclonic events where some of our larger refineries were unable to meet conditions of approval. They needed to get rid of water and quickly, otherwise we could have had serious environmental catastrophes on our hands. We put through legislation in this place that led to the creation of a TEL, a temporary emissions licence. It is ironic that at that time I copped a lot of abuse from a number of members still sitting on that side, including the now Treasurer who was the shadow environment minister at the time. To know that that solution has formed the basis of this temporary use licence is in some ways refreshing and also ironic.

The temporary use licence will allow our supermarkets in particular to operate around the clock to refill their shelves hopefully to mitigate and eventually reduce this panic buying, but ultimately that responsibility sits with individual Queenslanders. As the Prime Minister and I said earlier, it is un-Australian and it has to stop. It also allows distribution centres and manufacturing hubs which may have conditions imposed on them to potentially operate outside of those conditions during such an applicable event as what we now see.

The other aspect of the legislation that addresses the planning portfolio concerns statutory planning time frames. As expressed to me by the minister, there is a concern that, as staff at the state government level, the local government level and within development organisations themselves, development companies and indeed amongst the community, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll, as people self-isolate or are isolated because they have tested positive, there may not be the staff in place in any of those government or private sector situations to address the statutory time frames enacted through legislation around planning and development approvals. If those statutory time frames are not met, in some cases it means it is a deemed approval. In some cases that is not what we want. We want the process followed correctly.

My understanding is that, again, the minister has the ability to extend time frames. Some talk was made of it being extended by an additional 20 business days at this moment to allow staff at all levels of government, within the development sector and within the community to meet the statutory time frames that rest within the planning laws. I will raise, as I did with the minister earlier today, one significant concern: where there are genuine instances where staff numbers are down and councils in particular are unable to meet the statutory time frames this makes sense, but because a blanket ruling will be made I am very concerned that a number of other councils not experiencing staff decline will use it as a means of going slow. To be blunt, as we heard from the shadow Treasurer, now is not the time to be going slow. Now is the time to ensure that anything that we can possibly approve legitimately and appropriately is approved, built, developed and that we keep jobs in the construction, hospitality and tourism sectors across this state.

I would be fearful if, as a result of these extensions of statutory planning time frames, we have a number of councils that deliberately use them to procrastinate and to extend out planning approvals when they really should not be. I put that on the record in acknowledgement of the minister taking that on board. I understand that his department will not have the staff to monitor every single council, but I say to councils and to the development sector, 'Please keep an eye on this. If you see issues arising, please report it to the minister and, if you do not get a response there, please come to me,' because in effect the minister and the government have been warned and know it is a potential problem. If it turns into a reality, I want to ensure that the minister is aware and that we can look at a solution.

In the time remaining, I return to some of the aspects that the shadow Treasurer touched on. We need to be doing more. I know that the focus is primarily on flattening the health crisis curve, on ensuring our hospitals and our hardworking frontline medical staff are able to cope with what is about to unfold in this state and nation. Again, what concerns me more is the economic impact on this state and this nation. The Prime Minister and his team are taking this incredibly seriously. State governments around Australia are taking this incredibly seriously, be they Labor or Liberal-National coalitions. The only one that is not is the state Labor government in this state. So far, what we see simply are loans—fine, there is no interest but it is a loan that will have to be repaid—or deferral of payroll tax. A deferral means that we must pay double when they come knocking for it. Where are the tax waivers? Where are the freezes on water and electricity prices and car registration? Where are the things that will genuinely help our businesses survive in the incredibly tough next six months, 12 months or two years? That is not being addressed by this bill tonight.