




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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**JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (5.09 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Bill 2020. Like so many members with a great affection for their electorate, I would like to echo those who have gone before me in thanking the communities that I represent for their hard work, suffering and sacrifices in the fight that we have all joined against the scourge of COVID-19. I am sure I would not be misleading the House in saying that many of my constituents have suffered more than most, be they suffering because of social isolation or because of economic reasons, such as them losing their jobs or their small businesses being turned upside-down and being unable to trade, and those who have had to patiently home-school their children which has not been an easy task for many. I would like to echo my honourable friend, the member for Ipswich West, in acknowledging the great work that health professionals and all people involved in the running of our health system have done to keep us informed, to keep us well and to prepare for the eventualities which we feared might happen but which so far mercifully have not. My sister is an ambulance officer—I take my hat off to her and all others that I have mentioned.

In Southern Downs the COVID-19 lockdown has been compounded by difficulties associated with the border closure. I am on record in this House as saying that I understand, appreciate and agree with the need to have closed the Queensland-New South Wales border. It was a central part of the effort to contain coronavirus and prevent infection and spread through the community. My constituents and I understand that. I have, however, spoken about the difficulties that the border closure has imposed even on those who are theoretically allowed to cross the border. They may have a border pass because their farm spans both sides of the border, their child goes to school, they have to go to medical appointments or they work across the border. The concern that many of my constituents and I have is that there are not enough border crossings, meaning many good people have been dislocated or cut off from their community of interest—the paddock on the other side of their farm or the shops they need to go to. If you have to drive large distances to reach a checkpoint, you also have to drive large distances to get back. This has caused a lot of disruption. I have asked in vain to have more border crossings opened so that those who are entitled to cross the border and have passes do not have to go so far. The people in my electorate of Southern Downs are suffering under that.

The bill contains a number of excellent measures. I will talk about a few of them. One which I really applaud is the amendments to the Liquor Act, in particular the expansion of the entitlement of hotel owners without ordinarily having a bottle shop to be able to sell off-licence liquor from their pubs. This is particularly important for the many small pubs that I am blessed to have in Southern Downs, pubs like the Maryvale pub run by Mick and Annie; the Yangan pub run by Bob and Kylie; the Blue Cow at Allora run by Denise and her mum; the Karara Tavern run by Pete; the Oasis Hotel in Yelarbon run by Mick and Chris; the Ballandean Tavern run by Naomi and Stephen—Naomi has been in touch with me recently to tell me about the difficulties that their business has experienced because of the COVID-19 lockdowns and border closure—and the Coronation Hotel at Toobeah run by Michael and

Stacy and Michael's dad, Mick. These pubs, as they do not ordinarily have a bottle shop attached, missed out on the exemption that allowed bottle shops to trade. We know that alcohol sales have been up. I am sure I have contributed to that increase in sales, as many of us have, because of the isolation that we have experienced having to work from home so much and we have had more time to sit down and relax. I am sure I am not the only one in this House. I see a few knowing nods on the other side there.

One of the concerns that I see with the amendment to the Liquor Act is that it does not go far enough in the case of cellar-door operators. In Southern Downs I have the Granite Belt in my electorate. There are many wineries, almost exclusively mum-and-dad operators, small operations, lovely boutique wineries, who cannot do wine-tasting and sell wine over the counter.

I have been contacted by Martin Cooper from Ridgemill Estate and, through him, the Queensland Wine Industry Association's Mike Hayes, a great Granite Belt fellow and former Winemaker of the Year in Australia. They have made the point—and I have received it from other constituents as well—that people will not visit the Granite Belt, even if they can, unless they can be satisfied that there will be a wine tourism experience available to them. Wineries that have a cellar door and those who have their own accommodation, as well as other accommodation providers, are missing out on bookings. People are ringing to say, 'No, thanks, I wanted to go and do some wine-tasting.'

I have written a letter in support of the Queensland Wine Industry Association—I have tabled that electronically and I believe it would be with the Table Office by now—asking that consideration be given to liberalising that particular aspect of the restrictions so that the many small businesses in my electorate that would benefit from that change could do so.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 20 May 2020, from the member for Southern Downs, Mr James Lister MP, supporting the request by the Queensland Wine Industry Australia to allow cellar door tastings from 12 June 2020 [814](#).

I applaud the increasing of the penalty and recognise the seriousness of the despicable act of spitting, coughing or sneezing on people deliberately. I think that that is assault in every sense. It has been said in the House before that that potentially can lead to someone's death. It is no small thing so I applaud that.

When I was listening to the member for Caloundra earlier today, he spoke with great gusto about three particular issues. I noticed that many others have spoken about these things since him, so I thought I might join in the chorus. One of the things that he mentioned was that we need a budget. This bill contains a great plethora of implications and I am quite certain that some of them will require funding. That begs the question: where will the money come from for this? The government has indicated that it will not be producing a budget before parliament rises and we go to the election. Although there are other states which have delayed their budgets, my understanding is that Queensland is the only government in Australia that is going down this path of no budget. That is concerning to me because we need to have some certainty about where the government's finances will be. How are they going to fund things? What are the implications for car rego, for land tax, payroll tax and stamp duty—these sorts of things? Will there be new taxes necessary?

Nobody doubts the economic challenges that this state faces, but the absence of a budget is unprecedented and it does not do much for confidence, particularly of the business community. The business community in this state is our biggest employer. We need to do everything we can to support them. Having a budget would certainly help in terms of their planning and their understanding about what the economic landscape will be ahead.

We have also heard many of my colleagues speak with gusto about the Corrective Services Act amendments which we are told the government will not be proceeding with. I really feel that such a move deserves attention in this House. Even though we are told the government will not be proceeding, it really ought to be said in this House what an appalling decision that would have been. I am glad that the government has sniffed the political breeze on this and decided to withdraw the ability for Corrective Services to release prisoners up to seven days earlier in order for them to catch a flight home, or that was the pretext we were given. That is symbolic of this government's persistent hand wringing over the rights of offenders, criminals and inmates, whilst at the same time having a tin ear to the views of victims of crime.

To give one example in my electorate, there is a lot of property crime going on in Goondiwindi. We have people who come from across the water in New South Wales who steal cars and then push them into the Macintyre River. We have a lot of break and enters and petty crime on the street. You could forgive the people of Goondiwindi for being less interested in the plight of wrong-doers than they are in their own safety and the safety of their property. People who work hard and earn their own money to spend on their own things—their houses, their cars, their possessions—people who are concerned about their safety—their situation should not be ignored.

The message that the government has been persistently giving—and I would urge them to reconsider what they are doing there because it will not be good for them electorally—is that they are more concerned about the rights of offenders and the plight of criminals than the rights of victims of crime. That is something I hear all the time.

We have all been speaking about the bill we dealt with yesterday in which the government was going to force more cases to go through magistrates courts. That would have been very concerning. I think of the old major generals from Cromwell's day saying, 'Everywhere crime abounds, but the magistrates are all asleep.' That is certainly the impression my people have regarding the crimes that we have seen like farm invasions and so forth. Those offenders seem to be given a slap on the wrist and told to leave. I am expressing the broad view of my electorate in saying that.

I come back to the issue of the border closure. We heard an excellent contribution from my honourable friend the member for Southport when talking about the border closure. I want to be on record that I do not wish to make a political point about this. This is not an academic or political point. This impacts my people, the many small business operators—tourism operators and so forth—and their staff who are without work, many of whom have never set foot in a Centrelink office.

When they hear a road map from the government, which was welcomed because it was needed, which indicated that the border would likely be opened in July and then not much more than a week later hear the Premier make a statement which includes a prediction that the border may not open until September, that hurts small business. It hurts particularly the tourism operators and others in my electorate who need the ability to plan ahead to take bookings, to buy stock, to manage their finances and so forth. It is no small thing that that quip was made and it is disappointing that the government and the Premier have been defensive about that.

Many of the people in my electorate fear the opening of the border if it is not done in accordance with medical advice. I understand that. I support the opening of the border no later than is absolutely necessary and when the Chief Health Officer says it is able to be done. The reason I do not have faith in this process is the number of bungles we have seen associated with the COVID-19 crisis and the impact on my electorate of Southern Downs. I am talking about my electorate of Southern Downs not the state of Queensland more broadly. We have had the closure of the border without enough border openings. I have asked the government for them a number of times, but nothing has changed.

I asked in vain for the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy to direct SunWater to follow the state government's broader relaxation of the fishing ban, if we can call it that, along the coast, but no such thing was forthcoming. The people of Southern Downs who fish—and I would say in a much less person dense environment—were disadvantaged. We saw the persistent closure of schools without the government releasing the advice from medical experts indicating that that was necessary. That has disappointed a lot of people in my electorate who need to get to work and have been disadvantaged because they have had to stay at home to homeschool their children. It has also caused a lot of angst amongst those who do not feel comfortable doing that. We cannot blame people for that. Not everybody has what it takes to be a teacher.

We saw the extraordinarily heavy-handed closure of gun shops. JB Hi-Fi could be open but not gun shops. Immediately the government wound that back to some extent, but they did not want to back down completely. Perhaps it was wanting to save face. People who have a legitimate use for firearms and ammunition and those who supply them were disadvantaged by the government's handling of this matter.

These are things that I have at length tried to get the government to relax and to see reason on, but that has not happened. That concerns me. It makes me wonder whether the opening of the border will be bungled as well. I urge the government to consider that someone will have to pay for all this one day and as soon as it is possible to open the borders it be done so that those who will be paying for this—that is, the private sector, the employers, the workers, the hardworking small businesses, not the politicians—can get going.

(Time expired)