




Speech By  
**Ros Bates**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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## **PUBLIC HEALTH (DECLARED PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (11.38 am): I rise to speak on the Public Health (Declared Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Bill 2020 on behalf of the LNP opposition. The bill was introduced in the House on Tuesday this week by the Minister for Health and declared as an urgent bill in a resolution of this House which was supported by the LNP. As I mentioned on Tuesday in the debate on the urgency motion, these are the types of issues where there is a need for urgent legislation. It is a time where we work together in the best interests of Queenslanders, a time where politicking takes a back seat.

Despite not being reviewed by a parliamentary committee, this bill is very limited and technical in nature. In fact, it only contains five clauses and, as we were briefed on Tuesday, the bill provides that the amendments will expire 12 months after commencement and revert back to the existing time frames under a declared public health emergency.

The bill extends the time frame for which the minister can declare a public health emergency beyond the existing provisions in the Public Health Act 2005 which only provide for a seven-day declaration. While we are speaking about that declaration and for context, it would be appreciated if the minister could provide in his reply the number of times a ministerial public health emergency has been declared since the powers were introduced and the context for the occasions that that has happened. Under the current arrangements, the minister would have to redeclare the same existing public health emergency every week that the threat of the novel coronavirus continues. Given the number of unknowns about this virus, that seems an overly administrative process for something that is not contentious.

There are now over 20,000 worldwide cases of the novel coronavirus, with the death toll rising. In Australia we have seen 14 cases, four of which are here in Queensland. All four are in isolation and are being clinically supported at the Gold Coast University Hospital. The National Incident Room is currently activated in response to this incident and is coordinating the Australian government response across the country. Over 1.4 million face masks have been made available from the National Medical Stockpile as part of the Commonwealth government's response and I understand the Queensland government has made similar arrangements.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee meets every day. Two hundred and forty-one Australians are currently on Christmas Island in quarantine and are being looked after by the Australian Medical Assistance Team. As I said previously, this is an unprecedented global health emergency. No-one is downplaying this issue. This is not a time for politics. The public health and safety of Queenslanders is not something to play politics with. The priority now should be about the containment of the novel coronavirus to limit its impact on the broader population and the development and introduction of an economic assistance package to protect tourism jobs and to support other industries who are suffering devastating economic impacts in the short and the long term.

The Premier's attempt to try to politicise this issue has been completely outrageous and completely unacceptable. She was caught out last Friday and she has doubled down ever since. What is clear is that the Premier and the Palaszczuk Labor government cannot work with Canberra to get things done for the benefit of Queensland. Demanding the federal government bail out the Queensland government once again because Labor cannot manage the state budget or the Queensland economy clearly demonstrates that. It shows that Labor is incapable of managing the Queensland economy for the benefit of everyday Queenslanders. All other governments and agencies are working together, as they should be. It is only Queensland throwing their toys out of the cot.

I do want to thank the health minister, his office, the health department and the Chief Health Officer for the briefing we received on Tuesday that was also afforded to all members of parliament. We are also in regular contact with the federal health minister and the federal government. Given these circumstances, and the limited and very technical nature of the amendments, it seems that the urgent need for these new laws is justified.