



Speech By  
**Scott Stewart**


**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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**MOTION**

**Queensland Border Closure**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (5.26 pm): I have to say that the earth did not move under my feet with that one. We have seen how the government policy can help cushion the impacts of COVID-19 and how some government policies can deepen those consequences. We just have to ask 'Ruby Dutton' his opinion of cruise ships in Australia and that impact.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr STEWART:** Absolutely. I take that interjection from the member for Logan. In Australia the quick response of governments at all levels has contained the number of cases and the number of deaths from this virus. I must also join in the conga line of people congratulating Queenslanders for the way they have taken this on board. It has been so difficult to pull back from that automatic handshake, but people are very cognisant of that. It is only because of those changes in behaviour that we have been able to contain this virus that has been so deadly right across the world.

I will mention the United States. By contrast, the sluggish, piecemeal and conflicting approach to COVID-19 in the United States has seen it account for more than two million cases of COVID-19 and 117,000 deaths. The reason I am mentioning the United States is that I have a long-term friend over there whom I have been corresponding with for over 30 years. Dorian lives in Queens in New York and currently owns a restaurant in New York. She has had to shut it for four months and does not know whether she is actually going to open it because she is still finding that neighbours are sick, that businesses like hers are closed and that there are no tourists around the place. In fact, she said she has never seen the city that never sleeps like a ghost town. That is the impact. This is the warning sign. If we do not take on board these warning signs, then we are also heading down that same track.

There is no question that COVID-19 will subtract from economic output across the globe. The question is by how much. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development forecast that, even if contained, COVID-19 represents a five per cent, or \$95 billion, hit to the Australian economy in 2020. This is the largest annual collapse in growth since the Second World War, but the OECD also forecast that a second wave of COVID-19 would represent an additional \$25 billion hit to the Australian economy. That is \$120 billion less output in 2020 than last year. The Prime Minister himself also trumpeted on 2GB the potential for an extra \$25 billion hit to Australia if a second wave happens. There is the warning. Even our own Prime Minister is warning that a second wave will potentially have a \$25 billion hit. If small businesses cannot contain it now, they will be absolutely to the wall if a second hit comes.

The OECD sees both the containment scenario and the second wave scenario as equally likely; that is, we cannot be too careful or too hasty in reopening our borders. When I spoke to Lucy, one of my small business owners, she said, 'Don't open the borders.' She set up her business in the CBD, which is only about 400 metres from the stadium. She said that in the week the stadium opened, when

we had visitors coming to our city, she had the best trading she had experienced in the last 10 years. However, she says she does not want those borders open yet. The way we are handling it, she says, is the right way.

**Mr Stevens:** Does she get JobKeeper?

**Mr STEWART:** In Queensland a second wave of COVID-19 would wipe an estimated extra \$4.8 billion off our economy in 2020. I take the interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach. Lucy does not receive JobKeeper. She runs the business by herself and she had to close her doors for three or four weeks. She does not get any benefits from the federal government. She says 'Do not open the borders yet.'

This is the same amount as the Queensland parliament passed in special appropriations in April to limit the fallout of COVID-19 to date. The Prime Minister knows the danger of reopening the state borders. That is why he is not reopening national borders, and the Prime Minister is quoting OECD figures of a \$25 billion hit to the Australian economy from a second wave. The federal Treasurer might want Queensland to reopen our borders prematurely, but any of his forecasted benefits would be completely wiped out if a second wave struck.

On reopening our borders, like so much else, the LNP is hopelessly divided. We will decide when our borders will reopen and we will protect Queenslanders every step of the way.