




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 6 February 2020

MOTION

Amendment to Business Program

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (11.42 am), in reply: As I speak today there are 24,478 confirmed cases of novel coronavirus globally. Of these, 24,266 are from China. Four hundred and ninety deaths have occurred in mainland China, one in Hong Kong and one in the Philippines. Outside of China there are 212 confirmed cases in 26 countries. Of course, these numbers change daily, moment by moment, as the situation evolves.

Our own situation here in Queensland is also rapidly evolving. In Queensland an eight-year-old boy, a Chinese national from Wuhan in Hubei province, was confirmed yesterday as the third person to have the virus. The boy was a member of the tour group travelling with a 44-year-old man and a 42-year-old woman already confirmed with coronavirus on 29 and 30 January. Last night a fourth member of that tour group was confirmed by our labs to have the novel coronavirus. They all remain in isolation at the Gold Coast University Hospital where they are stable and receiving the best care and treatment available from our fantastic Gold Coast University Hospital health staff.

Members of this House understand the gravity of this situation and the critical need to protect Queenslanders, particularly the most vulnerable in our community, from the spread of novel coronavirus. The Palaszczuk government has done everything it can to prevent the spread of this new disease. We have stood up Queensland's disaster management committee to ensure a quick, coordinated and comprehensive response.

We have screened more than 650 travellers for coronavirus at our airports and we have tested more than 458 people for the virus across the state. We have ramped up testing by expanding it to private pathology collection sites. We have set up fever clinics at Gold Coast University Hospital, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and the PA Hospital with several other hospitals across the state also ready to open fever clinics at short notice if required. We have developed comprehensive information packs for hotels, cleaners, transport operators and other stakeholders. We have shared our experiences and learnings with our interstate colleagues to assist with their efforts. We have led calls for more to be done by the federal government, including providing states with Border Force intelligence on travellers' whereabouts and contacts and providing the states with disaster funding just as they would in a flood or bushfire.

On 29 January as the Minister for Health I declared a public health emergency under the Public Health Act 2005. I did this to ensure emergency powers under the act could be used, if needed, and that our clinical staff have the authority they need to stop this new coronavirus in its tracks. It will allow emergency medical officers to require a person to remain at a particular place, such as in their homes, or stop a person from going to a particular place, like a school, or require a person to provide an emergency officer with help when requested and various other powers to manage public health risks. It also allows police and other agencies to enforce the directions of emergency medical officers.

Members understand that this bill's purpose is to allow for a regulation to be made which extends a declared public health emergency for a period of up to 90 days, giving greater certainty to the community and our health staff about the public emergency period. It will also allow the government to communicate clearly about the emergency arrangements that will apply in coming weeks as we manage this public health emergency. The alternative would be to make a regulation each and every week to extend the emergency declaration until the emergency ends.

The bill includes a sunset clause, as it has been progressed urgently and not subject to the usual scrutiny of a parliamentary committee process. Because of that it is appropriate that the effect of the amendments in the bill end after 12 months and that is what this bill provides for. If there is a clear need for the provisions to remain after that time, parliament will then have the opportunity to enact amendments following a full and proper committee process and with the benefit of all that it has learned during this emergency.

The initial seven-day period for the declaration I made on 29 January 2020 expired at midnight last night. The Governor in Council convened an extraordinary meeting to make an extension regulation to extend the declared public health emergency for a further seven days. If this bill is enacted, any further regulations will then be made under the arrangements contemplated in this bill, extending the emergency declaration for up to 90 days, and I foreshadow my intention to do just that.

I thank members for their support for this bill. It is a simple but necessary step to allow the most effective management of this emergency. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, our hardworking emergency officers, hospital staff and those involved in the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre who have worked around the clock to manage this health emergency, as well as senior officers and staff of many other government departments who are assisting us, who have officers based within the SHECC and who are working with the State Disaster Coordination Group.

In particular I would like to thank Minister Grace, her director-general and the staff of Education Queensland. Clearly the task of notifying returning school students and schools was probably the most urgent as this issue emerged in the first week of school as students were returning. The work Education undertook to provide that information was very important and has ensured that the coronavirus is not spreading within our childcare centres, our TAFEs and our schools—public or private—which could well have happened if we were not able to implement those quarantine arrangements in a timely way ensuring that students returning from mainland China were not in our schools. Of course, other agencies including sport, housing and public works, the police and others have all assisted Dr Jeannette Young in her work.

At this time it is vital that we provide support to the industries affected here in Queensland, which is why the Premier convened a round table at Parliament House yesterday. We invited stakeholders from the tourism, agriculture, transport and education sectors, as well as many others.

The Tourism Industry Council made it clear that they want our assistance to lobby the federal government for more assistance for tourism operators that have already been devastated by this disease. Daniel Gschwind, QTIC's CEO, estimated that his members would lose hundreds of millions of dollars. People in the sector are already feeling the sting of the downturn with services suspended, jobs laid off and bookings cancelled, particularly group bookings. Tourism Tropical North Queensland's Mark Olsen said that his industry was losing \$5.5 million each and every day. Given that 10 per cent of our tourism footprint is in regional Queensland that is a brutal blow for those towns that need that income. They see the answer in increased promotion to other international markets not currently affected by the virus. In the south of our state, the Gold Coast estimates the current loss to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, affecting 3,500 businesses that support 42,000 jobs.

Representatives from Brisbane said that the gateway to Queensland was set to lose between \$100 million and \$500 million, with hotels, cafes and other service industries most affected. The retail sector has been hit not only in patronage but also as many of their workforce are now in self-isolation. That has led to a 20 to 30 per cent reduction in trade. So far the Brisbane Airport has lost 100,000 domestic seats and 60,000 international seats, with that number expected to rise to 650,000 in the next six months. That is devastating for our economy.

The Port of Brisbane has seen an impact on our exports, including resources. The Queensland Resources Council calculates that one in three export dollars is related to resource exports, while supply chains and manufacturing have taken a hit in China. They are seeking a recovery package.

In education, the University of Queensland has the most exposure of the Queensland universities, but the Queensland University of Technology is also struggling with the impact. UQ is estimating a \$1 billion loss in just one year if the travel restrictions remain in place. International students generally contribute \$5 billion to the Queensland economy. The universities are doing all they can to support their communities and their students. There is a real risk that the UK or other markets could

take our market share if we do not have a plan in place for international university students, to ensure that they feel welcome to return once the emergency is over. At our independent schools, 600 students are currently impacted. They have had 40 study tours cancelled already.

The outbreak has also wreaked havoc on our seafood industry. Forty-one coral trout boats have ceased operating. The live mud crab and lobster trades are struggling. They are desperate for assistance with energy costs so that they can refrigerate and store food that cannot be exported. I encourage everyone in this House and in Queensland to support our seafood industry this weekend, if you can.

I take this opportunity to thank the key people who have been keeping Queenslanders safe during this outbreak. It is their efforts that have limited the spread of the virus in Queensland. I have already thanked Dr Jeannette Young, our Chief Health Officer. As a voice and face that is trusted by Queenslanders, she is the perfect person to be conveying important, concise and accurate health information to Queenslanders. I also give my sincere thanks to Dr John Wakefield, Queensland Health's director-general, and his executive director, Jasmina Joldic. In the past week or so, the three of them have worked around the clock.

I acknowledge and thank Dr Sonya Bennett, the Executive Director of the Communicable Diseases Branch; Dr Heidi Carrol, the Medical Director of the Communicable Diseases Branch; and the entire communicable diseases team. I thank Victoria Chalmers, the Executive Director of the Health Contact Centre, and all of the staff at 13HEALTH who, so far, have taken 2,100 calls. I thank their dedicated nursing staff who have triaged those calls, identified the most urgent cases and provided people with advice about what treatment they should seek.

I thank Damian Green, the Chief Executive of eHealth Queensland and Phillip Hood, the Acting Chief Executive of Health Support Queensland, who have facilitated the distribution of over 1,700 text messages. I thank Mr John Doherty, the Executive Director of Forensic and Scientific Services, and his team who have been conducting the coronavirus testing. They acquired primers for the virus incredibly quickly. They were able to equip their labs incredibly quickly. They have been turning around test results 24/7. Sometimes those results have come through at midnight or at 3 am.

I thank Dr Mark Elcock, the Executive Director of the Aeromedical Retrieval and Disaster Management Branch, and Dr Peter Aitken and the SHECC team who have been working 24/7. On behalf of the House, I thank Dawn Schofield, Naomi Hebson, Jennifer Rossiter, Robyn Clark, Sandra Daniels, Jacqui Heywood and Kyle Fogarty who have performed the role of SHECC response liaison lead, covering the roster 24/7. I thank Dr Keith McNeil, the Acting Director-General of Clinical Excellence Queensland, and the entire Clinical Excellence Queensland team who have assisted.

I thank Ambulance Commissioner Russell Bowles, Acting Commissioner Craig Emery, Ambulance Medical Director Dr Stephen Rashford and Director of Media and Communication Michael Augustus. They have all assisted in ensuring that our frontline ambos know how to respond to suspected coronavirus cases. Paramedics have been evacuating suspected coronavirus patients and those who have been in contact with them, which is important.

I thank Barbara Phillips, the deputy director-general, and her key staff. I thank the team working behind the scenes to develop the bill before the House, including David Harmer, Tricia Matthias and Michael Coccetti. Other staff in the Office of the Director-General have worked around the clock to provide necessary support, including Loretta Carr, Laura Kanaris, Tammy Sovenyhazi, Sally Gannon, Emma Williams and Larin Bligh. I thank the ODG team working to assist the Chinese women's football team during their period of isolation: Karen Thompson, Nina Shen, Sunny Qiu and Brian McEvoy.

I thank the key responding HHSs that have screened over 1,100 arrivals at international airports—the Gold Coast, Metro North, Metro South and Cairns and Hinterland—as well as all HHSs for their preparedness. They have responded quickly to all requests, which has allowed us to respond.

I thank the amazing people in the strategic communications team who have been keeping Queenslanders up-to-date with the latest information at any time of the day or night, including Natalie Patch, the acting executive director; Jane Martin, the director of marketing and communications; and Elise Meakin, the acting director of media and digital.

I thanked some agencies earlier but other key agencies in this response are the QFES, the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Housing and Public Works, the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. They have all worked together. I would like to thank their ministers, their directors-general and all of their staff.

The Red Cross is assisting us to care for the welfare of people who are currently in isolation in Queensland. Some of them do not have support networks around them. The Red Cross is assisting us to make sure that they have food, they have supplies and they have all that they need so that that period of isolation is as accommodating as it possibly can be.

I want to thank all members, including the opposition and the member for Mudgeeraba, for working with me to get these laws introduced, considered and hopefully passed very quickly. I believe in her speech the member only asked me to address one question. I will attempt to answer that now. It is my understanding that orders like this under the current act have only been used once before. That is my advice from the Chief Health Officer. She tells me that she can only recall them being needed once before.

I understand that since I issued that order last week and while there have been events where it has been considered it may be necessary to use those powers, the people involved have all voluntarily accepted the direction of our health officers. The extent to which that agreement has been underpinned by a knowledge that we have powers to force them to do that, my suspicion is that having that there encourages people to comply. As to the question of what kind of scenarios they were, they relate to individuals who have been in mainland China and are not unwell but have been asked to remain in isolation and, for whatever reason, have been reported to us as not remaining in isolation. Sometimes they have been in an accommodation or hotel environment. The advice I have at this stage is that they have all complied with the request. I hope that addresses that question from the opposition health spokesperson.

In closing, I urge all Queenslanders to listen carefully to the advice of our Chief Health Officer. If you have visited China in the last 14 days and are sick please immediately see a doctor. Please call ahead so that they can prepare for your attendance. If you cannot call or see a doctor please contact the fantastic staff at 13HEALTH. They will be able to advise you whether you meet the criteria for concern for novel coronavirus. They will be able to triage you in terms of urgency. They will be able to tell you where to go and how to get there if you need assistance.

The amendments proposed in this bill will allow our hardworking officers to continue their outstanding work in managing and containing the threat of novel coronavirus without the need and uncertainty that would be caused by weekly extension regulations that would need to be progressed to the Governor in Council. I thank the Governor for his accommodation in attending that extraordinary Executive Council meeting yesterday to ensure that we were not left without an order in place.

This bill, if passed today—and I assume now it will be—will allow our health staff to plan and provide advice on the arrangements that we need to put in place to manage the spread of novel coronavirus over the next few months. Until the threat to public health reduces it will allow us to communicate very clearly with the public that these powers exist and will remain in place for a period of time. It is critical that these amendments progress as a matter of urgency. I thank all members of the House for their indulgence and for supporting the passage of these urgent amendments so quickly this week and within the time frames we requested. I commend the bill to the House.