




Speech By  
**Tim Mander**

**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

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

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (7.46 pm): I rise to speak to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Bill 2020. These are extraordinary times and they require extraordinary measures to address them. I say from the outset that the opposition will support this bill. That does not mean that we support the processes in bringing this bill here tonight that have been outlined by the Manager of Opposition Business and nor do we believe that this bill is comprehensive enough.

Life is changing in Queensland. Life is changing in Australia. In fact, life is changing all around the world. On this side of the House we know that there is no chance that we can seal ourselves off from other countries and escape contact with this virus. There is no way Queensland can avoid the coronavirus pandemic, but we can take steps to control how quickly and how far this disease spreads. This is a once-in-a-100-year event. We have not seen this type of thing in Australia since the end of the First World War. We must step up to the challenge. We need to keep Queensland running and we need to keep Queensland functioning. We also need to defend our values and what makes our state and our country great.

One of those things is our democracy. The Labor government's actions in rushing this bill through tonight without proper examination or debate by the opposition are nothing short of shameful. This is a significant bill which covers 11 acts or regulations. It deserves proper scrutiny and proper debate. The 11 acts or regulations we are amending are the City of Brisbane Act 2010, the Constitution of Queensland Act 2001, the Economic Development Act 2012, the Electoral Act 1992, the Local Government Act 2009, the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Act, the Local Government Regulation 2012, the Planning Act 2016, the Public Health Act 2005 and the State Penalties and Enforcement Regulation.

The bill will amend the Public Health Act to strengthen powers of the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers appointed under the act for the COVID-19 emergency to implement social distancing measures including regulating mass gatherings, isolating or quarantining people suspected or known to have been exposed to COVID-19 and protecting vulnerable populations such as the elderly; provide that the compensation provisions that apply to declared public health emergencies do not apply to the COVID-19 emergency; and amend the State Penalties Enforcement Regulation 2014 so that penalty infringement notices can be issued for the offences of failing to comply with a direction made by the Chief Health Officer or an emergency officer in relation to the COVID-19 emergency.

The bill will also amend the Planning Act 2016 and the Economic Development Act 2012 to ensure important services may continue to be provided to the community. It will amend the City of Brisbane Act 2010, the Local Government Act 2009, the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Act 2018, the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 and the Local Government Regulation

2012 to provide flexibility, if required, for the election date for the 2020 local government election and statutory processes for the conduct of the election to help minimise serious risks to the health and safety of persons caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill will amend the Electoral Act 1992 to provide flexibility, if required, to facilitate the holding of state by-elections in a way that helps minimise serious risks to the health and safety of persons caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It will amend the Constitution of Queensland 2001 to allow meetings of Executive Council to be held via technology such as teleconferencing or videoconferencing.

The emergency powers available to emergency officers under chapter 8 of the Public Health Act include directing a person to stay at or in a stated location. The Public Health Act enables an emergency officer to detain a person while they receive medical treatment. The emergency officer or a person nominated by the emergency officer may enforce the detention order using force reasonable in the circumstances.

I would like to seek some clarification from the health minister as to why additional provisions are required about compensation for loss or damage because of an exercise or purported exercise of powers in connection with a declared public health emergency. Whilst I acknowledge that in a pandemic situation there is a possibility for a significant proportion of the population to be directly affected by the exercise of powers under the declared public health emergency, however these provisions are uncapped.

As the Manager of Opposition Business has already declared, it is extraordinary that this legislation has been dropped on this House in the manner in which it has been. We should have been able to examine the bill tonight to allow more scrutiny, but it is clear that the government is trying to avoid scrutiny especially when it comes to its inadequate economic response—a response too weak that Queenslanders must feel that this government does not have their backs.

As I mentioned yesterday, we in Queensland are the most vulnerable state economy in the country because of the woeful economic record of the Palaszczuk government over the last five years. Our economy is in no state economically to fight this virus. The Palaszczuk Labor government is failing to protect jobs and failing to support Queensland businesses that are going to the wall because Labor will let a health crisis become an economic crisis.

Queensland continues to be the jobless and bankruptcy capital of Australia with the highest unemployment rate and the highest bankruptcies in the nation. This was all before the coronavirus hit. Queensland is going bankrupt under Labor, with almost 4,239 bankruptcies occurring in Queensland over the last year accounting for nearly 30 per cent of all bankruptcies. There are 171,500 Queenslanders out of work under this Labor government. We can only imagine how that will increase over the coming weeks and months.

Labor has smashed Queenslanders with nine new or increased taxes in two years—taxes which are toxic for jobs and growth. The Queensland businesspeople have delivered a devastating verdict on the Palaszczuk Labor government with the CCIQ Pulse survey finding business conditions the worst on record. Just this week almost 70 per cent of Queensland businesses surveyed by Roy Morgan said they believed Queensland is already in recession. Now more than ever we need economic leadership which the Palaszczuk government is failing to provide.

Yes, we will be supporting this bill but, given that Labor has left Queensland behind, I intend to introduce a number of amendments because the LNP does have Queenslanders' backs. We will act because the Labor government will not. Our amendments will include introducing an electricity price ceiling so that households and businesses do not have to pay any increases in power bills during the declared public health emergency and for a period after as determined by the government, as has happened in other states. We will lift the payroll tax threshold from \$1.3 million to \$6.5 million from 1 April to 31 December 2020 to provide instant relief for around 15,000 Queensland businesses.

We will introduce the power to allow the minister to provide an extension for retail trading hours and provide a temporary extension to the core trading hours for non-exempt shops during the public health emergency. We will freeze current registration of motor vehicles for the financial year ending 1 July 2020. Finally, we will introduce a bulk water price ceiling so that households and businesses do not have to pay any increase in bulk water bills during the declared public health emergency and for a period after as determined by the government.

Madam Deputy Speaker McMillan, I am sure you are like many members on this side of the House who have received countless emails and countless phone calls from concerned businesses and individuals. I heard from a mum in my electorate whose son is doing an apprenticeship and has just been let go because of the effects of the virus and the restrictions that are being placed on our society.

I heard another case today of a security firm that looks after security at stadiums—that will not be needed anymore because we will not be gathering in stadiums—and they are still forced to pay WorkCover. The WorkCover people are being very bureaucratic in their response in saying, 'It's business as usual. If you don't pay it, we will be sending the debt collectors after you.'

This type of thing is causing great concern for Queenslanders. That is why we believe that the response by the government is not broad enough nor comprehensive enough. That is why we will be introducing these amendments—amendments which reflect what has happened in basically every other jurisdiction in this country. The reason we cannot do this is the \$92 billion debt that we are heading towards. Who knows what it will be after this economic crisis. The Treasurer herself said this morning that it could cost the economy \$10 billion over two years which is frightening, particularly when our economy is in such a parlous state.

I would also like to pay tribute to our health workers—our doctors, our nurses, our health professionals—all those who work in hospitals for not only the work they have done up until this point but the work they will do over the next six months. We on this side of the House would like to wish these people good luck and give them our best wishes. We are behind them. We know that they will face extraordinary challenges over the next six to 12 months. It is important that Queenslanders recognise this and get behind them. We from the opposition will support anything the government puts forward with regard to supporting those people because they are literally our front line in this war. It is very important that they are well equipped, that they are well resourced and that they know they have the full support of the Queensland public.