




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2020

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (10.10 am): I echo the words and sentiments of the Minister for Local Government in relation to the work of the Electoral Commission of Queensland. These are unprecedented times. We know that there have been challenges for the system. No-one could have predicted the sort of demands that we are now seeing on the electoral system. All of the initiatives that have just been outlined by the Minister for Local Government for local government elections equally apply to the two state by-elections.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General is taking decisive action to stem the flow of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yesterday, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Queensland and the Chief Judge of the District Court of Queensland announced that all new trials that required a jury would be suspended. This approach mirrors the approach taken by other Australian jurisdictions, including Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

While the suspension will not impact any trials that have already commenced, the suspension is a necessary step to keep our community safe. Juries need to be reflective of the community, but we cannot reasonably expect older members of the community to partake in jury service for extended periods of time when they may be at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. Indeed, there is a risk that had jury trials proceeded many prospective jurors would simply not have shown up.

The courts have indicated that community safety will be their priority and they will continue to monitor expert advice. I can advise that the heads of jurisdictions are working very closely with the heads of Queensland Corrective Services, the Queensland Police Service and youth detention centres to determine going forward how matters will be dealt with before the courts and how we deal with and respond to the best health advice we receive on a daily basis.

I can also advise the House that as at Saturday, 21 March our JPs in the Community Program will be suspended until further notice. Our JPs play a vital role in our community. Since the early 2000s they have been providing signing services free of charge at our courthouses, at our public libraries and at our major shopping centres. However, the reality is that the vast majority of our JPs are retirees. My director-general has issued this directive in accordance with expert advice. This suspension will assist in ensuring the health of our JPs as well as the broader community.

Members of the community who need a justice of the peace or a commissioner for declaration to witness a legal document are still able to make individual arrangements. I ask members of this House and any person requiring further information to visit www.qld.gov.au/jps or phone 1300301147. Let us aim to keep all of our community safe.