




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

MOTION

Amendments to Sessional Orders

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Leader of the House) (9.37 pm), by leave, without notice: I move the following amendment to sessional orders that take effect immediately—

Insert after sessional order 1A—

“Change to sitting date or time

- 1B. (1) Notwithstanding standing order 49, sessional order 1(a) or the House having already adjourned to a specified time and date, the Speaker, upon advice from the government of the state, may set an alternative day or hour for the next sitting, and must notify each member of any change.
- (2) The Speaker’s notification to each member may be by electronic means.
- (3) This sessional order expires on 17 September 2020.”

I know that this is a significant change to our existing sessional orders. The fact is that under our current arrangements, certainly while we are sitting, the sitting calendar can be changed, the next adjournment debate and time could be changed by the government and by the parliament, but when parliament is not sitting and it is scheduled to return on a set date and time there is no mechanism other than the Governor proroguing the parliament to alter that date and put parliament off.

Around the world we are seeing regions within countries and whole countries go into lockdown. No-one in this chamber could stand here today and say that they can absolutely guarantee that an area of this state, the state or the nation would not be locked down.

We are not in a position to make those decisions about what will happen over the coming days, weeks and months. However, if we do not provide a mechanism within the sessional orders then, despite us potentially being in a national or state lockdown, we would still have to recall parliament and go against everything that has been directed for health reasons to protect our community and Queenslanders. This is a gap. It is a gap that potentially needs to be addressed longer term, but we have put a sunset provision on it so that parliament must sit within six months. On the question of the date, a parliament must sit within six months. That is why that date is there.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: This is not a game being played here. The federal parliament’s standing orders contain a power for the Speaker, while the House is not sitting, to alter the future date with no criteria and no sunset date. It is a power that has existed for a very long time. Has it ever been abused? Not that I am aware of. Has it been used? Absolutely. When I was a federal member and my colleague—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mrs D'ATH: Those on the other side may want to listen, because this is an important change. If they are seriously concerned about this change, maybe they should listen to the reasons why it needs to occur. I have seen the power being used federally. The federal parliament was suspended because

of the Victorian fires. People were dying and action needed to be taken. Ministers needed to be elsewhere. There were members whose own offices, homes and constituents were at risk. It was considered that they were best placed dealing directly with the fires and not meeting in parliament, and the parliament did not sit for that reason. That power allowed that to happen at the request of the government, and the Speaker of the day supported it. This should be used in a very extreme and rare circumstance, but if no mechanism is there—

Mr Hunt: 'Trust us!'

Mrs D'ATH: We should trust the Speaker of the House and put faith in the Speaker of the House. Their concern is about giving the Speaker this authority, yet the government of the day can change the sitting calendar when they want. Let's not get too carried away saying, 'We can't possibly change when parliament is sitting.' The government of the day—whichever party is in government at the time—can do that already, so let's not make this out to be more than what it is.

We have a national and global emergency going on at the moment. We have a national and international health pandemic happening. The premiers and the Prime Minister of this country have come together to form a national cabinet. They are meeting regularly. Decisions are being made not just daily but hourly to keep the people of Queensland and Australia safe. Around the world people have been dying from this disease. We have to be flexible. We have to be nimble and able to change circumstances and we need the mechanisms to do that. To say that we should have to go to the Governor to prorogue the parliament, simply to defer a sitting date to deal with a potential lockdown or other directions from health professionals, is irresponsible. This is a reasonable amendment with a sunset clause attached to it—

Mr Millar: Twelve months—no, six months.

Mrs D'ATH: It is not 12 months. I take that interjection. The member should read the motion before he starts interjecting.

Mr Watts: Hopefully it will get circulated before we vote.

Mrs D'ATH: I read it out. It is not very long. The Manager of Opposition Business was well aware of it. I make the point that this has been provided to the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr Bleijie: In draft form; not the final motion.

Mrs D'ATH: The final motion has not changed from the draft. Come on: let us not play games with important issues like this.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: The behaviour of those opposite in many of the debates over this week, but this one in particular, is irresponsible.

Mr SPEAKER: Members to my left will cease their interjections. If any member wishes to seek the call, they can seek the call and they must be relevant to the motion, which I believe the Leader of the House is doing.

Mrs D'ATH: It is childish and it is irresponsible. The people of Queensland and the people of Australia want all members of parliament—their politicians, their parliamentarians—to show some maturity and some professionalism in the way we go about our jobs and how we deal with this crisis. This is one of those moments when we have to make decisions as to how the parliament can function going forward. Right now there are parliaments that are adjourning without setting future dates. I will be moving a special adjournment that will set the next sitting date as scheduled. It will not be open-ended. Other parliaments are leaving it open-ended. I am setting the next sitting date as planned in the calendar. This mechanism is important. I ask those on the other side to, just for one moment, put aside the party politics, listen to what I am saying and support the motion.