




Speech By  
**Adrian Tantari**

**MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY**

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## **COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.29 pm): I rise in support of the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. There is no denying that COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on our world over the past 16 months. The upheaval caused by the pandemic has reached into every community of our great state and our country and has tested our strength and our resilience over the long days of lockdown and restrictions. COVID-19 has required the Palaszczuk government to act quickly and decisively to ensure that communities remained safe and resilient when dealing with this deadly viral threat to us all. The COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill was introduced into the Legislative Assembly in March by the Attorney-General and, on introduction, this assembly agreed that the motion be declared an urgent bill and expedited for consideration.

The stated objectives of the bill—which seemed to get lost on some of the former speakers on the other side—are as follows: to extend the operation of various legislative measures implemented to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 public health emergency to apply up until 30 September 2021 or an earlier date as prescribed, as required to support the ongoing response to the pandemic and its effects; to allow local governments to decide by resolution at a meeting other than a budget meeting what rates and charges are to be levied for the 2021-22 financial year; to provide flexibility for the various measures to facilitate holding local government by-elections and fresh elections in a way that helps minimise serious risks to health and safety of persons caused by the COVID-19 health emergency; and to extend the operation of temporary local government and committee meeting provisions that allow for such meetings to be held via audio or audiovisual link, or to be closed to the public for health and safety reasons associated with COVID-19, and to require the use of real-time public viewing or listening to meetings where audiovisual links are used.

In drafting these proposals, the Palaszczuk Labor government undertook extensive consultation with key stakeholders on the policy proposal to further extend the application of the temporary legislative measures in response to the pandemic and its effects. The key stakeholders approached included many peak groups and I will note just a few: the heads of court jurisdiction, the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, the Bar Association of Queensland, the Real Estate Institute of Queensland, the Queensland Hotels Association, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Queensland Human Rights Commission, the Crime and Corruption Commission, the Electoral Commission of Queensland, the Queensland Family and Child Commission, the Queensland College of Teachers, the Office of the Independent Assessor and the Small Business Commissioner. As the committee report identified, most if not all agreed to the amendments being put forward in this bill.

Queensland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been supported by the implementation of a suite of legislative measures designed to protect the health, safety and welfare of Queenslanders, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community and to facilitate the continuing function of

Queensland's institutions and economy to the extent possible. As a first response to the pandemic, the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act 2020 was urgently passed by this parliament in March 2020.

This legislation gave effect to a series of measures which included amongst other things: to strengthen the powers of the Chief Health Officer to implement social distancing measures, including regulating movements and gatherings and establishing isolation and quarantine arrangements and associated enforcement provisions; to provide for changes to the planning framework to allow businesses to operate outside normal hours for approved activities and conditions; to implement a series of amendments to facilitate the holding of the 2020 quadrennial local government elections and state by-elections in a way that minimised serious risks to the health and safety of persons caused by the COVID-19 emergency, including increasing the flexibility of postal voting processes; and to provide for expanded electronic voting and other alternative arrangements and to provide for the suspension and termination of the poll if required. Further to this, two legislative reforms were progressed. The COVID-19 Emergency Response Act was enacted, and this was quickly followed by the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Act 2020, which amended over 20 different acts across the statute books.

The majority of measures in the emergency response contained within the acts and amendments mentioned were initially due to expire on 31 December 2020. However, in recognition of the continued uncertainty surrounding the effects, and in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020 extension act was enacted as well to extend the operation of the measures in the ER act and amendment act that were considered still to be required.

The extension act achieved this by establishing a newly termed 'COVID-19 legislation expiry date' applicable to these acts and related secondary instruments which is set to 30 April 2021 or an earlier date prescribed by the legislation. In addition, the extension act inserted a limited number of new measures, also subject to expire by the COVID-19 legislation expiry date, including establishing a power to make transitional regulations to facilitate the return from modified to ordinary arrangements and amendments to provide for state government by-elections to be conducted in a COVID-19 safe manner.

The swift and decisive actions taken by the Palaszczuk Labor government through this COVID period by amending the various pieces of legislation to fight back against COVID-19 were exemplary. If it were up to the opposition to manage this health and economic crisis, the result would have been very different to what it is today in Queensland. Queensland would have had a virus rampant through our community, our borders would have remained open for too long and the virus would have escaped our control. We would have been like the rest of the world facing the pandemic, particularly those places that were too slow to act. Our hospital and health services would have been overrun, our retail and tourism sectors would have been smashed and our community would have been in continuous long-term lockdown. It goes without saying that the people of the electorate of Hervey Bay and Queensland would have been devastated.

Those opposite—in support of their leader who called for our state borders to be opened 64 times—would have been faced with the devastating choice of having to reconstruct an economy that would have been destroyed by their ill-considered border position. In stark contrast and due to the strong leadership of the Palaszczuk government, Queensland now has an economy that has rebounded stronger than anywhere else in Australia. The Palaszczuk Labor government has created the jobs and opened up the Queensland economy once again—all this in double quick time—because of the robust, safe and continuing strong health response that puts out the virus spot fires and keeps all Queenslanders safe.

While the staged rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations has now commenced—albeit somewhat haphazardly because of the federal Morrison government's botched management of the vaccine delivery—and given the ongoing risk posed by COVID-19, the Palaszczuk government has identified that there is a continued need for a temporary legislative framework to deliver Queensland's plan for economic recovery and to set up Queensland for the future. There is uncertainty surrounding potential outbreaks of COVID-19, and the rapid unpredictable imposition of restrictions remains.

On introducing this bill, the Attorney-General stated that, while the bill's extension to the COVID-19 legislation framework recognises that we may continue to feel the immediate effects of the global pandemic for months to come, its time limited nature is an important safeguard which ensures that, if the need for these measures dissipates before 30 September 2021, they can be extinguished as quickly and effectively as possible.

This legislation is a timely reminder that the people of Queensland are not out of the COVID-19 woods. We must continue to fight this insidious virus for some time yet, and we must have a legislative framework that is flexible and robust. It is important at this time to ensure that the people we are sworn to protect are kept safe whilst governing can continue. The legislation introduced by the Palaszczuk Labor government does just that. It acknowledges the environment we now live in and it responds accordingly, giving the appropriate checks and balances to ensure the suite of legislation being extended by this amendment bill has the rigour required of legislation for this time.

The amendment does what it sets out to do. It supports and acknowledges the agility and flexibility required of government to position our statutes so that the impacts of the virus do not cripple our state. This amendment bill shows that the Palaszczuk Labor government is versatile, flexible and focused on the things that matter. It sets out a strong path. It shows strong, appropriate and measured leadership which is delivering Queensland's plan for economic recovery and setting up Queensland for the future. I would like to congratulate the Palaszczuk Labor government for showing its strength of leadership during this period, while those opposite showed nothing but infighting and division. This is good legislation at the right time, on time, that is keeping the electorate of Hervey Bay and Queensland safe and strong. I commend the bill to the House.