




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (FURTHER EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (4.32 pm): I rise in support of the bill before the House—the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021. The public health and other legislation amendment bill amends health and other portfolio legislation by extending the expiry date of most of the temporary legislative amendments made to support Queensland’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main features of the bill are designed to protect the health, safety and welfare of Queenslanders, mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community and facilitate the continued functioning of Queensland’s institutions and economy as far as possible. The bill extends measures supporting Queensland’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic until 30 April 2022, with two measures extended for an additional two months to provide a transitional period. Without these extensions, these measures will expire in September 2021.

Amendments to the Public Service Act will include issuing directions to require physical distancing, restrict movement and gatherings, require persons to quarantine or self-isolate and implement other containment measures. The measures also authorise the sharing of confidential information for contact tracing, encourage compliance with quarantine requirements, border restrictions and other public health directions by providing appropriate penalties for contraventions.

I note the public health and other legislation amendment bill went before the Economics and Governance Committee and, as a member of the committee, we reported back to the Assembly in report No. 11 in August 2021. The committee has indicated through its recommendation that the bill be passed.

During the examination of the bill, the Economics and Governance Committee received 588 submissions. There were written briefings on the bill from Queensland Health, and written advice was requested and received from Queensland Health on issues raised in the submissions. There was also a public hearing held with stakeholders so they could outline their views regarding the bill. Of note and interest to the committee, at the public briefing on the bill the Chief Health Officer, Dr Young, said—

At this point in time we are still learning and this is a very different pandemic to the normal pandemics that we have had over the last 100 years. It is so different to the one 10 years ago because we are getting these variants of concern. You do not normally see that. They are happening so rapidly. We are getting mutations ... that is making these viruses become more infectious.

We are having to learn and modify our response and then modify it again.

Here is the key. Dr Young said—

... if you are going to lock down you do it hard and fast, you do it early, as early as you possibly can so then you can do it for the least amount of time. You need to be able to respond really fast and just do it then.

Effectively what the Chief Health Officer is saying is, ‘Don’t open the borders to the virus. Cut off the source.’ It could not be any clearer. Obviously this is something that the LNP does not want to, or just refuses to, understand.

This is why this bill is so important. It allows for rapid response to the ever-changing environment. What this bill is about is ensuring the government has the flexibility to be nimble in the face of an ever-changing environment to stay on top of COVID. This decisive legislation is about ensuring that business and industry in this state are protected from the ravages of COVID-19, about ensuring people's health is protected and about protecting the jobs of all Queenslanders including those in regional Queensland.

As I have gone around the electorate of Hervey Bay since the election—visiting community and sporting groups; attending functions, schools and retiree villages; and doing my mobile offices—I have been stopped by people from all walks of life, and the message is very clear: my community want a measured and controlled response to managing the virus. I get calls every day in my office saying we should keep the current directives in place and keep following the medical advice from the Chief Health Officer to ensure that COVID does not wreak havoc on the electorate of Hervey Bay, on our region and on our state.

People acknowledge that this comes at a cost—anything hard does—but my community say to me that the No. 1 consideration they expect from government is to manage their health and ensuring that our health system is strong, robust and able to manage when and if an outbreak occurs. They recognise the strain on our frontline workers who are fighting this battle every day—our vaccination staff, our nurses, our doctors and our contact tracers. They know that the Premier, with the advice of the Chief Health Officer, is doing the right thing. They know that the government's strong health response is not only keeping them safe but it sets the foundation for a strong economic recovery. They know we have a plan to keep Queenslanders safe during and beyond this pandemic. It is about ensuring that we show leadership, taking the necessary and tough decisions and not shirking responsibility, giving the community what it expects from a strong government. It is not about exposing them to a pandemic by asking for borders to be opened 64 times.

These amendments are about being considered and measured and, above all, staying ahead of the COVID-19 wave and ensuring that Queenslanders come out of this pandemic healthy and safe. Unlike those opposite, we on this side know what the most important issue at this time is, and that is keeping Queenslanders safe. It is also about ensuring that the state manages any further outbreaks quickly and with the authority of the appropriate legislation, and this bill does that. It is about keeping Queenslanders safe and delivering our COVID economic recovery plan and, in doing so, keeping the Hervey Bay electorate safe and strong. I commend this bill to the House.