




Speech By  
**Bart Mellish**

**MEMBER FOR ASPLEY**

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

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (4.40 pm): This Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill does what it says on the tin: it extends expiring provision of acts, specifically some of those acts which have come about as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Queensland acted early and we acted swiftly on the global health crisis in 2020. On 29 January last year we declared a public health emergency under the Public Health Act 2005 due to the early advice on the COVID-19 outbreak in China at the time. Of course, back then we largely called it coronavirus, not COVID-19, and we have all learnt an awful lot about it since that time.

As these amendments were made through an urgent bill or as amendments during consideration in detail, sunset clauses and expiry provisions were inserted into the act so the amendments were time limited. This bill extends the expiry dates of these provisions until 30 September 2021 and also aligns the expiry dates for all the amendments made to health portfolio legislation to support the Palaszczuk government's health response to COVID-19.

Despite overall low numbers of COVID-19 in Queensland, recent events in other Australian jurisdictions and continued large-scale outbreaks around the world serve as a clear reminder of how rapidly it can spread and overwhelm hospital systems. Certain risks for community transmission in Queensland, such as interstate cross-border travel, will remain for as long as the virus continues to circulate in Australia. Having the ability to respond at short notice to an evolving situation will continue to ensure public health objectives are met while also balancing the social and economic needs of the community.

In Queensland we have done incredibly well. With a population of just over five million we have experienced only six deaths. Compare this to similar areas of population in the western world and the results speak for themselves: Wisconsin, with a population of 5.8 million, has had over 6,000 deaths; Alabama, with a population of 4.9 million, has had over 9,000 deaths; Louisiana, with a population of 4.6 million, has had over 4,500 deaths. Going over to Scotland, with a population of 5.4 million, there have been over 7,000 deaths and in Wales, with only 3.1 million people, over 5,000 deaths. To have only six deaths in Queensland is an incredible outcome.

In Europe over the last year we have seen countries previously held up as role models for progressive democracies making disastrous health decisions and sabotaging their economies. We are seeing terrible outcomes in the UK on a health and economic level which they are only now starting to come out of. Here in Queensland we have seen our exemplar health response feeding into a nation leading economic response. It is easy to forget how well we are doing. Just over a week ago I was talking to a number of friends living in Europe, London, Germany and in other countries and I was saddened to hear about the constantly changing restrictions—pretty severe restrictions in some cases—many of them are still facing and have been facing for over a year in some instances. Many of them are desperate to get out and see their friends, to socialise and even to go back to work. I am so proud of our response here in Queensland and, indeed, in Australia and that these challenges are

hopefully behind us at this point. We are able to go about our lives in a very open and relaxed way in Queensland in 2021 which seems light-years away from what I was hearing out of Europe and largely the rest of the world.

We are now thankfully moving into the vaccine rollout stage which is very good to see. It was, however, very concerning to hear this morning worrying news in relation to two residents of Carseldine within the Aspley electorate. In the federal government's rollout of the vaccine into nursing homes two constituents of mine, an 88-year-old man and a 94-year-old woman, were given incorrect doses—up to four times the recommended dose according to some reports. This afternoon we hear that the doctors may not have even been properly trained. This needs to be sorted out by the federal government. How can this happen on day 2 of the rollout? We need public confidence in the vaccine rollout and we need it to be carried out properly.

As the situation relating to COVID-19 continues to evolve across Australia and internationally, it is difficult to determine with absolute certainty how long these emergency response measures will be required. An extension of these amendments until 30 September is considered to be the least restrictive and reasonably available way to allow for the continuation of our health response to respond to any emerging threats. Whilst they are broad, the emergency powers are clearly defined and subject to limits, including that the person giving a direction or order must reasonably believe that it is necessary to assist in containing or responding to the threat of COVID-19.