




Speech By  
**Brent Mickelberg**

**MEMBER FOR BUDERIM**

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

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (6.17 pm): I rise to briefly address the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill and note that the LNP will not be opposing the extension of provisions outlined in the bill. The LNP acknowledges the considerable sacrifice made by all Queenslanders, none more so than the thousands of small business owners and employees who have had to deal with months of uncertainty and considerable financial impact. Businesses have gone to the wall and businesses will continue to go to the wall as a result of COVID public health constraints. That is the reality of the sacrifices that some Queenslanders have made in keeping us all free from the scourge of COVID-19.

In my contribution today I wish to specifically address the concerns of small businesses across the state. The overwhelming issue expressed to me by small business owners across the state and by members of my community more broadly is a desire for more transparency in relation to government COVID decisions. Transparency and better communication will result in greater acceptance of these very significant decisions.

The LNP has long called for the medical advice to be released and for the decision-making process to be more transparent and consistent. The government needs to do a better job of communicating the basis of decisions made under this legislation. Uncertainty around how and why public health decisions are made has created fear. I acknowledge that governments of all colours have learned much over the last 12 months dealing with the impact of COVID-19 and I accept that during the early stages of the COVID response detailed information was no doubt difficult to come by, but we are now 12 months down the track and I would be very concerned if a criteria has not been developed that details the conditions under which major decisions like border closures will be made.

Uncertainty creates fear and the best antidote to that fear is information. That uncertainty has had a considerable impact on businesses across the state and it continues to have a considerable impact. During their submissions to the committee hearings into the bill the CCIQ indicated its support for this bill, but they also expressed concerns in relation to the need for greater transparency, saying—

... we consider that there is an opportunity within these powers to also require a transparent framework for that decision-making. For example, if we are looking at three-day, seven-day, 28-day lockdowns or longer what does that mean, and is there an opportunity for the CHO through these powers to have a requirement to have a framework that is publishable that does outline what that looks like? We consider that we are at a point where we do need more understanding.

This month I visited Currumbin and participated in a small business forum organised by the hardworking member for Currumbin, Laura Gerber. It was attended by more than 100 local business owners. The message was really clear: businesses in Currumbin and the border regions are still hurting, and wider community uncertainty around potential future border closures has caused a considerable drop in trade for businesses on both sides of the border. People are avoiding border areas like Coolangatta and it will take time for confidence to improve.

Just as the economic impact of COVID-19 has disproportionately affected some industries, so too have regions like Currumbin been disproportionately impacted. Such regions deserve better state government COVID support when they are impacted by short-notice decisions like imposing a hard border closure. Echoing the calls of the member for Currumbin, local businesses have requested the state government consider measures such as creating a dedicated lane to facilitate cross-border travel for local residents and businesses should future hard border closures be imposed.

The final issue I would like to address today is in relation to the mandatory electronic sign-in requirements. While I am supportive of the government's directive to mandate electronic contact information collection at all hospitality businesses, concerns have been expressed to me from both businesses and, more particularly, from elderly residents in my electorate who have found the implementation of this directive problematic. I understand that all Australian states and territories have made QR code based check-in apps which can be used by numerous businesses and venues to keep records of visitors. This has been expressed to me as being of particular benefit for the visually impaired and the disabled.

It is my view that the state government should be doing more to support small and medium businesses in this regard. The failure to streamline and deliver consistency to this process has meant that people are left standing in queues having to type information into their devices and staff are often required to assist patrons, taking them away from their core duties and increasing costs. Many elderly residents have told me that they have just given up going out because of the confusion that different systems and requirements has created. In my view, it is time for the state government to assist businesses to comply with its own mandated requirements by introducing a statewide process as other Australian states have done.

In summary, I acknowledge that the powers in this bill provide the CHO and emergency officers with the ability to respond to COVID-19—and they should; they are important powers—but there needs to be an improved focus on transparency and on communicating the rationale of the decisions contained within this bill to all Queenslanders.