




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR KEPPEL**

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

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (4.01 pm): The Palaszczuk government is absolutely committed to ensuring the health and safety of all Queenslanders, and I rise today to speak on this bill which will continue the incredibly important work to ensure their health and safety through this global pandemic. It was 29 January 2020 when Queensland declared a public health emergency and we were the very first state in the country to do so. It was the same day as the first case was diagnosed in Queensland. Since then, it has been a turbulent time with many, many difficult decisions. Who knew that we would have to ban dancing or close pubs? Try explaining to a three-year-old that the playground is closed: 'But it doesn't have a door, Mum,' Odette told me. There have been very tough decisions, and I want to acknowledge the pain and suffering experienced by many, many Queenslanders who have sacrificed so much in order to keep us all safe.

I hear stories of Queenslanders who have missed funerals of loved ones, who have missed weddings and births of family and friends' children, who have missed out on the trips they have been planning and saving for their entire lives, whose businesses have suffered terribly—all in the name of community health and safety. These are Queenslanders who missed out on incredibly important parts of their lives in order to keep us all safe. Queenslanders have been incredibly selfless. They have put the health and safety of all of us ahead of their own needs and wishes, and 'selflessness' is really the word to describe Queensland's collective response to this global pandemic.

I would like to join the chorus of members in this place in congratulating the Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, and also the Deputy Chief Health Officer, Dr Sonya Bennett, for their leadership, guidance, professionalism and expert advice in navigating through this pandemic. I acknowledge and thank Queensland Health, all of the healthcare workers on the front line, the Queensland Police Service, paramedics, aged-care workers, local disaster management groups, the public health units, cleaners, retail staff who kept food and supplies on the shelves, truck drivers, the Defence Force, teachers, early childhood educators, farmers, fruit pickers, miners and the resource workers who kept our economy going, and going strong at that. The workers kept our health safe and the workers kept our economy ticking over.

I would also like to put on record in this place my gratitude to the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service, including chairman of the board, Paul Bell, all of the board members and the CEO, Steve Williamson, who work together with Dr Julieanne Graham, Sue Foyle and the executive of the CQHHS. In particular, I acknowledge Dr Gulam Khandaker and the Public Health Unit of the CQHHS, the epidemiologists, the contact tracers and the public health officers.

Who would have thought that there would be over four million cases and over 100,000 deaths in the UK, or that there would be 28 million cases and over 500,000 deaths in the USA. More American lives have been lost than in World War II and Pearl Harbor combined, and now we have a global death toll of over 2.5 million. Despite the overall low numbers of COVID-19 in Queensland, recent outbreaks

both here and in other Australian jurisdictions and continued large-scale outbreaks around the world demonstrate how rapidly COVID-19 can spread and overwhelm hospital systems. New strains are proving to have a greater viral load and, in turn, spread faster.

Risks for community transmission in Queensland—such as new strains, interstate cross-border travel and Australians returning home from overseas—will remain for as long as the virus continues to circulate in Australia. As the situation relating to COVID-19 continues to evolve in Australia and around the world, Queensland Health and the Chief Health Officer have said that it is difficult to determine with absolute certainty how long the emergency response measures, particularly the emergency powers provided to the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers appointed under the Public Health Act 2005, will be required. Therefore, this bill seeks to extend the amendments until 30 September 2021. This is considered to be the most effective way to allow for the continuation of the Queensland government's health response to respond to any emerging threats of COVID-19 in Queensland. I note in relation to the provisions in this bill that we would not have been able to react so swiftly to the case in Brisbane earlier this year without those provisions in place. Acting swiftly has been one of the greatest defences that we have against this virus, and that is why this bill is so incredibly important.

We now have the benefit of not one but two vaccines being rolled out across Australia. There is no doubt that COVID-19 changed our lives. For us to live our everyday lives more freely, we need the added protection of COVID-19 vaccines. Australian medical experts are looking carefully at the clinical trial results, along with data on quality and manufacturing of the vaccines. The Therapeutic Goods Administration only approve vaccines when we have enough evidence that they work and are safe. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Therapeutic Goods Administration on their work. This pandemic has definitely shone a light on the important work that the TGA do and the way in which they work so rigorously to keep Australians safe, even outside of a global pandemic. The TGA safeguards and enhances the health of the Australian community through effective and timely regulation of therapeutic goods. Before a COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use in Australia, it must pass the Therapeutic Goods Administration's rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of its safety, quality and effectiveness.

Queenslanders have shown that they trust the health professionals. They have taken the health advice over the past 12 months and acted selflessly in their response to this pandemic. It is now time for Queenslanders to continue to trust the health professionals and get vaccinated. This bill is integral to the continued fight against COVID-19 in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.