



Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 17 November 2021

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus Vaccination, Indigenous Communities

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.06 am): When people fly into the Aboriginal township of Doomadgee in the state's far north-west, it is easy to be forgiven for thinking they are entering a completely different world. The Gulf of Carpentaria stretches to the north, ancient riverways snake their way to the coast, and the town itself is but a spot of corrugated iron roofs and red dirt lined streets on a vast landscape of salt pans and flood plains. Like so many other Indigenous communities in Queensland, from the state's south-east cities to the tropical islands in the turquoise waters of the Torres Strait, the 1,800 residents of Doomadgee could also be forgiven for thinking they have more pressing matters to deal with than the spectre of COVID on the horizon.

Two weeks ago I was in Doomadgee to talk with elders, council and health workers on the importance of the vaccination program and protecting their community from COVID-19. Today COVID is on the doorstep of Doomadgee, with the outbreak in the Northern Territory posing a serious and very real threat. Health teams and disaster management groups are on high alert and testing is underway after families from the hotspot of Robinson River, four hours drive away, attended a funeral of a respected Aboriginal elder in Doomadgee. This morning I understand the federal government have issued a biosecurity direction for the Robinson River area to prevent any person from entering or exiting the homelands to try to stop any further spread of COVID-19 in the community.

I note that the Premier and my fellow cabinet ministers have also been working hard to encourage the lifting of vaccination rates in discrete Indigenous communities and supporting the local leadership and elders. Last Wednesday I met with Indigenous mayors from across Queensland and applauded them for their own terrific efforts, some of whom have faced both hostility and complacency, to work with the families and leaders in their townships to get the job to protect themselves and their elders. I know I speak for all members of the government when I publicly congratulate the stand-up First Nations men and women who are leading the way for their mob, as together we prepare to tackle one of our greatest challenges yet.

Last week over 10,000 First Nations people in Queensland were vaccinated, but there are still 76,000 unvaccinated and out of those, 47,000 are under the age of 30. Aboriginal footy legend Johnathan Thurston, who has since transcended his last-gasp victories and heroics on the footy field to become a true statesman for his people, penned it beautifully when he wrote a personalised letter to the 2,500 people of Yarrabah. JT wrote how he was deeply concerned about the low vax rates of 54 per cent first dose and 30 per cent double dose in Yarrabah, the nation's biggest Indigenous township and in your electorate, Mr Speaker. In a stirring battle cry, JT urged the fans of this year's grand final winning Yarrabah Seahawks to show their 'never say die' spirit. It is time to draw on our stoic Queensland spirit and prepare for the destructive scale of the storm that is barrelling towards us. It is time to be vaccinated.