




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (12.39 pm): As a member of the Economics and Governance Committee, I also rise to speak to the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This bill is the latest iteration of legislation to support Queensland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has been 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 to the extent possible'. Simply put, this bill and the three incarnations before it provided temporary powers to modify legislative requirements by regulation or other secondary instruments to reduce physical contact between persons; modify statutory time frames where necessary; ensure the continuation of court and tribunal proceedings; and authorise bodies to take actions or do things electronically or take certain actions relating to leases and tenancies.

We have all been reminded of the unpredictable and highly contagious nature of this virus, having just experienced another lockdown recently, and I acknowledge that until the majority of our population are vaccinated, the COVID-19 health emergency is far from over. Extraordinary measures are called for in extraordinary times. However, it is important that when things return to normal, these measures can be dissolved easily and quickly. The government must not continue to pass emergency legislation without using the proper planning, policy and consultative processes.

Having said that, the LNP members of the committee welcome that consultation with key stakeholders was more concerted than previous efforts of the government, particularly as the bill relates to the appropriate and democratic election of public officials and the management of local government revenue streams and annual budgets.

A total of 33 stakeholder groups were consulted with including peak and specialist legal bodies, the hotel industry, REIQ, QHA, RSL, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, QCC and industry representatives amongst them. There was general support for the bill, in particular, that the Small Business Commissioner be made permanent. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, CCIQ, saw scope for more permanent implementation of some of the temporary legislative measures as part of a broader move towards a more business-friendly government, expressing support for the bill but as part of a larger piece of work.

Mr Matt Dunn from QLS advised the committee that some of the measures, such as electronic signing and witnessing of certain documents, offered significant access to justice benefits, especially for those in regional and remote areas. Mr Dunn also suggested that these constructive measures be retained beyond the COVID-19 legislation expiry date.

In its submission, the National Retail Association acknowledged the importance of the continuation of the approach seen over the last 12 months that enables greater flexibility in negotiations between tenants and landlords, with thousands of commercial tenants having to still make rental payments while their on-premise operations have been severely limited by lockdowns.

Takeaway liquor authorities welcome the extension of the provision for temporary power of the Commissioner for Liquor and Gaming Regulation to issue a takeaway liquor authority, a TLA, allowing a licensee to sell takeaway liquor as specified in the TLA regardless of the limitation on their current licence or permit. In many cases this provision has allowed businesses to innovate and survive.

While also supportive of the extension of the power to enable changes to operating conditions, the QHA, the Queensland Hotels Association, argued that hotel businesses were disadvantaged, particularly those in regional areas that are not tourism towns, slicing the profit pie even thinner. The QHA also commented that the amendments may be inconsistent with the government's policy on tackling alcohol fuelled violence.

The committee noted that the bill introduces additional layers of regulation to ensure a level of transparency is maintained where local government meetings are closed, making it a requirement that meeting agendas are to be published prior to meetings and for meeting minutes to be properly made available for public inspection following a meeting. Queenslanders expect that local government, like all governments, is accountable with transparent and effective processes, decision-making in the public interest and good governance. This was threatened by the rushed passing of the 2020 emergency response legislation. As such, the committee called upon the Attorney-General to make clear during her second reading speech that councils' engagement of the extended temporary meeting provisions be in accordance with these established aims and principles and be supported by the prompt compliance with requirements to make meeting audio and audiovisual recordings and minutes publicly accessible.

The overall success of the government's economic response to COVID is questionable. The fact that the Queensland Labor government invested the least of all states in terms of COVID spend per GDP does not make its response swift and strong, as we recently heard from the member for Hervey Bay. Rather, Queensland ranks fifth in the country on overall GDP spend. What is more, the Palaszczuk government's COVID-19 stimulus package amounted to just \$8.8 billion, compared with New South Wales' investment of \$29 billion and Victoria's \$13 billion. Queensland's response falls grossly behind the federal government's direct contribution to Queensland of \$27.9 billion.

The Palaszczuk government certainly did not get Queensland moving during the pandemic either, with just \$4 million spent on travel vouchers compared to \$520 million in New South Wales and \$40 million in Victoria. Queensland is ranked the sixth lowest investor in infrastructure per capita as a percentage of total budget spend with only Western Australia trailing behind. Queensland is the second worst performing in the country—clearly not strong. In fact, the opposite is true: incredibly weak.

The Queensland Labor government's shameful backlog of infrastructure projects has set a new embarrassing record, with just 12 per cent of Queensland's 2020-21 budget being spent on infrastructure. This compares with 20 per cent investment by the New South Wales and Victorian governments. Again, contrary to the government's claim and what Labor would have Queenslanders believe, their response has not been strong.

In February this year Queensland's unemployment rate was the highest on the mainland at an appalling 6.1 per cent, with 15,000 more job vacancies pre COVID. The total number of vacancies hit 53,500 with a whopping 49,000 of these jobs in the private sector. I acknowledge the current unemployment rate at 5.9 per cent, but 21,000 full-time jobs disappeared from Australia in the last reporting period, with 16,000 of them from Queensland alone.

Border closures wiped \$13 billion off Queensland's precious and vital tourism industry. Sadly, Queensland topped the charts again for all the wrong reasons, scoring the highest number of personal bankruptcies in the country last financial year; a staggering 4,458 livelihoods and lives have been affected. If that was not bad enough, finding rental accommodation is nearly impossible with current rental vacancies on the Sunshine Coast being 0.5 per cent, Gold Coast 1.3 per cent and Bundaberg 0.4 per cent. Queenslanders are out of work and more and more are facing homelessness. What is Labor doing about it? Not much!

Two-thirds of Queensland's new debt is being used to cover day-to-day operational expenses and is not being spent on capital investment where it is needed to create jobs and build wealth. Capital investment in the year to December 2020 was down—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order, members. Member, I draw you back to the long title of the bill, please.

Mr PURDIE: Sadly, Queensland's economic response to COVID-19 has been far from swift and strong, and the unemployment rate proves that Labor has failed to protect Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House on the condition that the emergency legislation does not continue to replace properly considered legislation and policy.