




Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

---

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2021

## **COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (4.58 pm): I rise to support this bill. Without this COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill extending the date, the smooth running of government, of our institutions and of local governments would not be able to continue in the manner they have been able to during this COVID-19.

There is no doubt that we are in a world health pandemic. Even though we are back to normal in this great state—as much as we can be—we also know that we are not out of the woods yet. As we know, COVID-19 is developing into a more contagious strain and we are seeing that coming in from overseas in cases from the UK and other countries as people enter Australia. We are finding that those strains are more contagious than the original COVID-19 that came into the state so we need to extend this regulation-making power to accommodate what may happen between now and the extended date of 30 September. The legislation seeks to extend the expiry date to 30 September, although we can change that to an earlier date by regulation. I think that is an important part of this bill before us.

I have been a member of the cabinet emergency disaster committee and we looked at COVID-19 when it first came onto our shores. It certainly made its mark. I was very proud to be a member of the first government to declare an emergency due to COVID-19. I think I had my first meeting with Dr Jeannette Young on the Australia Day holiday of 2020. That was the day before school started. We were asking questions about the need to keep our students safe and the need to keep families safe who were housing some of our international students as well as general inquiries about this new COVID-19. I can inform the House that it did not come with any guidelines or a manual and it did not come with any manner of ways we needed to go about it as a community in Queensland, in Australia for that matter or overseas.

We have seen the mighty effort of the Palaszczuk Labor government in dealing with COVID-19 in not only keeping Queenslanders safe but also making the necessary changes through legislation and regulation making. That has enabled government departments to continue to work and it has allowed the Chief Health Officer to implement various requirements under a health directive to ensure that we keep all Queenslanders safe. That included, for example, allowing court documents to be filed electronically rather than being paper based and allowing meetings for P&Cs to take place electronically. Most of it was to be face to face, but we legitimised those meetings. I never knew about Zoom and all those other kinds of meeting platforms before COVID-19. Those regulation-making changes made simple changes to allow P&Cs to continue their work electronically rather than face to face, which could not be done under the health directive. Instead, they could hold Zoom meetings that counted towards their quorum and were legitimate meetings. Many groups, many government departments and many government authorities used these regulations to conduct business. We need to extend these provisions because, honestly, I do not believe we will be completely out of the woods until the vaccinations are rolled out.

I take the point that the member for Pine Rivers made in her contribution to this debate that quite clearly the states are going to be required if we are going to get anywhere with vaccinating Australians in a timely manner. Quite clearly, the Commonwealth does not implement on the ground; they are incapable of doing that. That has been demonstrated by the fiasco we have seen federally not only with ordering supply but also delivering it on the ground. It is the states that are going to be the ones to come in—I am absolutely positive of it. That is why we are meeting twice a day, because the federal government is incapable of doing it and that has become abundantly obvious.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Ms GRACE:** I hear those opposite interjecting. They cannot handle the truth. Honestly, when it comes to COVID-19 is there anything the federal government has done right? Whether it comes to aged care or getting people—

**Mr Nicholls:** I think at the last election.

**Ms GRACE:** We did not have COVID-19 at the last election, but we do have it now. I take that interjection. Good luck with the next election. That is all I have to say. I will take the interjection from the member for Clayfield.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Walker): Direct your comments through the chair.

**Ms GRACE:** Good luck with the next election. When it comes to aged care, the federal government was an absolute debacle. When it comes to bringing home Australians, we see they were not home for Christmas and 36,000 are still overseas unable to make their way home with no solution whatsoever. When it comes to protecting our borders, the federal government is very strong on a leaky boat coming over the sea. However, my goodness, they cannot stop people with COVID coming into this country, which is causing the outbreaks of the other strains. When it comes to vaccination, they cannot even order enough vaccines. When it comes to rolling out the vaccination, they cannot do that. Is there anything that this federal government can do?

The only thing they could do, and I welcome it—we all did—was JobKeeper. They gave the money to the employers to keep people employed and they threw a lot of money at it. We know that now some employers are making huge profits and are benefitting from JobKeeper. I think that is another issue that will be debated federally somewhere along the line. Contrast that with the state government and what we have been able to do in keeping Queenslanders safe and making sure that our situation is nowhere near as bad as other countries around the world. We see so many countries at the moment in their third and fourth waves.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you know that I have an Italian background. We rang our family at Easter time. They are into their fourth round in Italy. They were in lockdown; they had been locked down for ages. They were confined to their homes and, for Italians, Easter is a time of celebration. I notice the member for Hervey Bay nodding, being a fellow of Italian background. They were in their homes unable to get together. Schools were still closed. Over 50 per cent of students around the world have not been attending schools for many months and half of those schools are still closed. Contrast that with what we have been able to achieve here in Queensland. No wonder we were returned as the Palaszczuk Labor government at the election last year.

We see hospitals around the world and ICU units, particularly in India—and I feel for India. They are having a huge outbreak at the moment. Their ICU units are completely overcrowded and they are creating temporary wards—and I see the member for Greenslopes is nodding; I think he has seen it as well—in all kinds of areas just to provide a bed for those suffering from COVID-19, let alone those who have been dying around the world from this terrible strain.

These regulations have enabled us to get on with our economic recovery plan, to put in place what is needed to get people back into jobs. We were very pleased with the latest job figures: 5.9 per cent and a very high participation rate. Not only have we gained all the jobs we lost but also we are streets ahead of any other state. That is an absolutely incredible record. However, if we listened to those opposite sometimes, we would think that the exact opposite is the case. They just cannot come to grips with what this government has done in ensuring we not only kept Queenslanders safe but also delivered for every Queenslanders and got on with the business of government as well.

Another provision of this regulation-making power is around health and safety. We drafted regulations very quickly so that cafes and restaurants could open. We were able to have codes done very quickly so they could be used by the restaurants and caterers. I thank those peak employer organisations who worked with us to help those restaurants, cafes and retailers. All of those opened up under the industrial relations codes that helped them to have a safe workplace.

I congratulate the committee. The member for Logan is a wonderful chair. He always does a great job. I congratulate the minister. We are extending these provisions to 30 September. These are required. This is all about keeping Queenslanders safe and this is all about our economic recovery and jobs for Queenslanders. With that, I say that I support the bill.