




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 1 September 2021

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021 being led by the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services and, in particular, the amendments to the bill that relate to the appointment of the people's long weekend holiday on Friday, 29 October 2021 for the City of Brisbane, Moreton Bay and Scenic Rim local government areas. Thanks to the decisive action taken by our Premier, on the advice of the Chief Health Officer, and because of the tremendous efforts of Queenslanders, we have been able to contain the COVID-19 delta outbreak and stop it from sweeping across our state. The extensions contained within this amendment bill will further enable us to keep Queensland safe.

However, as has been the case for so many of our community and family events, the Royal Queensland Show—the Ekka—was cancelled due to the recent COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown in South-East Queensland. Thankfully that lockdown was not prolonged, unlike what we are now seeing in New South Wales and Victoria, and our thoughts are with them. On Wednesday, 4 August, following the announcement that the 2021 Ekka would not go ahead, the government announced that the Ekka holiday for Brisbane, which was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 11 August, would be repealed and a new public holiday would be scheduled on a later date in 2021, with that date to be determined by the government. We acted very swiftly.

Sixteen local government areas also have a show holiday linked to the Ekka. We wanted to ensure those LGAs were provided with the opportunity to reschedule their show holiday. My department liaised with those councils, asking if they would like to proceed with their existing show holiday or join the City of Brisbane and move their show holiday to a later date. Of those councils, the Scenic Rim Regional Council and the Moreton Bay Regional Council took up the invitation to move their show holiday and adopt the new public holiday.

On Tuesday, 17 August, only a few days later, the Premier announced that the replacement public holiday will be held on Friday, 29 October 2021, making it a people's long weekend in the City of Brisbane, the Scenic Rim and the Moreton Bay local government areas. This gave ample opportunity for people to plan. When looking at the school holidays that end on 5 October, the examination period that finishes on 16 November and then schoolies, in all of the discussions that we had we saw only a small window of opportunity for a Monday or a Friday and we took the path of least resistance. The date was carefully chosen. No matter how many times you say it, they make out that it was just plucked out of the air and decided upon. However, I have not heard one of them voting against it or voicing any objection to it. The economic boom that this will produce is incredible, exactly as we saw last time. However, all we hear from those opposite are allegations that are completely baseless. I challenge them to mention a date and I will give them 10 reasons why they cannot have it.

The date was carefully chosen after consultation with a range of stakeholders, including businesses and tourism industry operators. The new date was also the best option in terms of the school calendar. We were well aware of the year 12 exam period from 19 October to 16 November and took

those important dates into account. That is why we chose one of the days with a minimal number of students undertaking exams. For example, on 29 October around 6,800 year 12 students were scheduled to take exams as opposed to nearly 27,000 year 12 students on other days. In some cases, those exams are two day exams, so that would have disrupted them for two-day exams.

As if we did not consider every single detail in making this decision! They are a joke. We are not a joke, because we make the right decisions. The three year 12 external exams that have previously been scheduled for 29 October have now all been rescheduled within the existing exam period. There are now no external exams on 29 October.

In New South Wales, schools are not even going back until 25 October. They are still closed. In fact, kids probably will not be back until 9 November. The school year is over. What have they done with their exam period? They have shifted the whole thing back—not one day but the whole thing. It is incredible. Did they go out and consult with all the schools, principals, teachers, students, parents and staff? No. They unilaterally said, 'You're not going back to school until 9 November and, guess what, your whole exam period is moving back.' Honestly, those opposite are a joke. It is, frankly, embarrassing when you hear them carping about things they know absolutely nothing about. Thank God they are not in charge. Could you imagine the chaos if they were?

Unfortunately, it is no secret that our tourism industry and small businesses have done it tough this year, especially after the Morrison government decided to axe JobKeeper. Creating this people's long weekend in October is just the boost Queensland businesses and the tourism sector needs. We are giving thousands of Queenslanders a chance to explore their own state or perhaps just take the time to catch up with family and friends in local businesses.

I am delighted to advise that there has already been extraordinary support for this announcement. Almost immediately, leading travel operators recorded massive spikes in their website traffic, with Queenslanders rushing to book holidays right across the state. Dozens of destinations have recorded huge jumps in booking interest. This trend is seen right across the state. Searches for Gold Coast accommodation were up almost 6,000 per cent. Where all are the Sunshine Coast MPs supporting this long weekend? Searches for Sunshine Coast accommodation were up almost 3,000 per cent. I have booked and, I tell you, you cannot get a booking for that weekend. Try to get a booking for that weekend, I challenge you. Yet those opposite come in here and talk absolute rubbish. Searches for Fraser Coast accommodation were up 2,000 per cent.

Mr Bleijie: Stay at my place.

Ms GRACE: Thank you for the invitation, member for Kawana, but I just might say no!

Mr Bleijie: I'll Airbnb you my spare room.

Ms GRACE: It is fantastic to see that Queenslanders are already looking to make the most of the newly created long weekend—I ain't that hungry, member for Kawana—but Queenslanders do not need to spend the night away to help support local businesses. Just getting out and about in your local community will help boost economic activity. Visit your local cafes, restaurants and retail outlets.

To make the necessary legislative change to provide for the 29 October people's long weekend public holiday for the City of Brisbane, Scenic Rim and Moreton Bay regions, the Holidays Act under my portfolio needs to be amended. The amendments introduced today in the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill give effect to the announcement by the Premier.

These amendments also provide that, by notice published on the department's website, as industrial relations minister I am able to substitute another day for the public holiday if it is considered necessary or desirable to do so, having regard to the COVID-19 emergency. A copy of that notice must also be tabled in the Legislative Assembly within 14 sitting days following this publication. I can honestly say that I hope 29 October does go ahead and we do not face a delta outbreak in Queensland. The amendment also includes a minor and consequential amendment to the Industrial Relations Act 2016 to ensure the public holiday is recognised for industrial relations purposes, such as for public holiday penalty rates and leave entitlements.

I take this opportunity to thank the RNA. This is a second year in the row that the Royal Queensland Show has been cancelled. We all love going to the Royal Queensland Show. It is one of my fondest memories as a child. The People's Day public holiday will remain on the Wednesday during any future Ekkas in Brisbane; the RNA have my assurances of that. We have taken this opportunity to reschedule because, unfortunately, we were in a lockdown and had to cancel that public holiday. The RNA were very supportive of that. I thank the CEO, the chair and all of the board members, who were very supportive of the move we have made.

This long weekend will be an outstanding economic boost. I look forward to it myself. I commend the bill to the House. I know that the 2021 people's long weekend will be a terrific long weekend in Australia's favourite holiday destination. Why would you want to be anywhere else but Queensland?