




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.13 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the bill that seeks an extension of the powers of the Chief Health Officer. Like the LNP opposition, I will also be supporting this bill. I would like to add to the warm comments made by other members in relation to the Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young. I have had personal dealings with her in relation to the operation of her powers and the closure of borders and so forth in my own electorate. Within her scope of responsibility she has been open and, wherever possible, obliging to me and also to the two mayors who share my area and the border country along it, the Hon. Lawrence Springborg, the Mayor of Goondiwindi Regional Council, and also the mayor of Southern Downs Regional Council, Councillor Vic Pennisi.

I would like to state for the record that at no stage have I ever advocated for the opening of borders contrary to medical advice. I have always supported the closure of the borders. However, representing as I do an electorate that has about 450 kilometres of border country which is fairly richly inhabited along the way with towns on both sides that have a mutual community where the border previously has meant very little, it has challenged me and my staff and we have had to do a great deal of work.

Whilst I do support the Chief Health Officer in having the powers that the House is proposing to give her, it is important that members such as myself and mayors such as Councillor Pennisi and Councillor Springborg have the opportunity to be consulted before important decisions are made. Obviously, there are occasions when decisions have to be made very quickly such as in the case of outbreaks of COVID and so forth. However, I do not accept that in all cases decisions have been made about matters for which there was no possibility of foreseeing the action to be taken. I would like to give an example to the House of some of the ways that border closures and restrictions of all sorts have impacted my electorate.

I think it would be fair to say that those good and true folk who live in towns like Wallangarra, Texas, Goondiwindi, Bungunya, Talwood, Stanthorpe and Killarney have been affected more than the average Queenslanders because of the closure of the borders. They have stoically accepted the closures and have worked around them as best they could and, like most Queenslanders, they have been happy to play their part in the fight against COVID. However, I still think that more can be done in any future actions to contain coronavirus and to save Queenslanders that will make our lives a bit easier.

I will give some examples of the effects of the border closures. Whilst I support the closure of the border when it has to be done, I do not support there being hundreds of kilometres where there are no crossings. There are operators of farming businesses, small businesses and contractors who need to travel on both sides of the border. In many cases they have had to drive very long distances in order to reach a manned checkpoint to be able to exercise their right to cross the border with whatever exemption they were operating under. The lack of crossings meant that in many places emergency

services such as fire brigade, police or ambulance could not possibly get to an emergency on the other side of the border as quickly as they can when the border is open. That was not a problem for highly populated areas like the Tweed Heads-Coolangatta border in my electorate.

Mr Power: Just take an ambulance into New South Wales.

Mr LISTER: The interjection from the member for Logan was immensely helpful. Perhaps if he understood anything about my electorate and the border country he would not have—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Walker): Members, direct your comments through the chair.

Mr LISTER: We need to remember that in my electorate people do have to travel a long distance to get across a border. If they are waiting for an ambulance to cross the border because they have had a heart attack or a car crash and it takes 10 or 20 minutes longer for that ambulance, whether it be a New South Wales ambulance coming to Queensland or a Queensland ambulance going to New South Wales, they might die; that is the honest truth. On a number of occasions I have written to the state government, to the Premier, about these issues and I have not had any success in getting additional border crossings opened. That is something I would like the House and the government to consider.

We saw the ban on fishing and water activities which occurred earlier in the coronavirus response. Within I think two days—and I beg the pardon of the House if I am a day or two out—the Minister for Transport and Main Roads had revoked the ban because there had been an enormous response from people who fish and use boats and so forth—

Mr Krause: Overreach.

Mr LISTER:—and it was overreach at the time; that is correct. Where there were votes that the Labor Party were concerned about, that was reversed. However, in my electorate where there are Sunwater dams and so forth, Sunwater persisted in keeping them closed for weeks in spite of my attempts to get the then minister for natural resources, mines and energy to intervene in the name of common sense.

Mr Krause interjected.

Mr LISTER: I will be getting to that. I take the interjection from my honourable friend the member for Scenic Rim. I will be getting to licensed armourers.

In my electorate there are a number of businesses—many in fact—that geared up to support inland fishing. They supply tackle, bait and so forth and a lot of other things. Their business dropped off straight away. It was just stubbornness and a lack of empathy for the bush, which meant that the giant system that we face on the other side did not extend the same courtesy to people in the bush.

I also refer to the impact on individuals who need to cross the borders when they are closed: schoolchildren, small businesses and contractors who need to work on both sides of the border, farmers and those in emergency services. At length, the government did come up with arrangements that would enable exemptions for certain categories; however, we found that the processing system for permits and so forth took a long time to catch up. There were institutionalised assumptions in the process that an exemption for someone crossing the border for agriculture could only be for a person coming from a New South Wales postcode to a Queensland postcode. It took quite some time to get some common sense injected into that. A number of farmers and contractors were needlessly disadvantaged in the process.

As my friend the member for Scenic Rim said, armourers and gun shops were closed. I fail to see—and we are still waiting for any evidence that this was necessary—why closing gun shops was necessary in the fight against COVID. This did not just close retailers of firearms, parts and so forth; it also closed the part of their business that sold tents, lubricating oils, tow bars or whatever else. It took a lot longer to get corrected than it should have. What about wine tastings? In my electorate of Southern Downs we are fortunate to have the Granite Belt, which provides a magnificent experience if people are interested in wines and wine tastings.

Mr Molhoek: And Anna's.

Mr LISTER: And Anna's Restaurant. I take the interjection from the member for Southport. He knows that they are great. We all do. If you operated a winery, a B & B or something like that on the Granite Belt, you were savagely impacted. To conclude that a wine-tasting area is the same as a pub is false. I wrote to the government and I mentioned it in parliament, but, again, it was very slow to introduce these changes. Innocent small businesses—people who work hard to employ people, to make

a living for themselves, to generate taxes that they themselves pay and that their staff pay to provide for police, schools, teachers, nurses, welfare measures and so on—are disadvantaged by these measures. It is no small matter. I urge the government to bear these things in mind in the future.

I assure the government that I will not politicise any approaches made to me asking for advice on what the impacts of a proposed action might be. I would greatly appreciate if my role as the elected representative of the people of Southern Downs was respected by the government in that apolitical context.

I encourage all Queenslanders to take the COVID vaccine. I know that a number of people in my electorate have expressed concerns about it. I will have no trouble taking it. I had a briefing from the Chief Health Officer and the health minister today and am confident that it is perfectly safe. We all ought to take it for the public good. I thank Councillor Vic Pennisi; Councillor the Hon. Lawrence Springborg; and my staff, Ian Jackson, Virginia Marsden and Ryan Burton-Ree, who did an enormous job over the initial six months or so of border closures, lockdowns and so forth which really hurt people. They did an enormous amount of work to solve problems, and I am most grateful to them. I also thank Wendy Bourne, a senior adviser in the Premier's office, who worked closely with my office. Wendy was a Trojan. She put a great deal of hard work into getting the best possible outcomes for the people affected. I am grateful to her. For the benefit of the House, I will table the letter to the Premier in which I complimented her.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 9 September 2020, from the member for Southern Downs, Mr James Lister MP, to the Premier and Minister for Trade, Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, regarding Ms Wendy Bourne [186](#).