




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 17 November 2021

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION (COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE—PERMANENCY)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.35 pm): I, too, rise to make a contribution to the Justice Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response—Permanency) Amendment Bill 2021. In a nutshell, this bill is about providing some permanency for some of the innovations that were implemented through COVID which have proven to work well and which bring us into the 21st century in terms of use of technology, expectations from consumers and so forth. I do not wish to speak to every part of the bill, because I think there are plenty of people who have gone before me and made an eloquent contribution. I particularly note the member for Clayfield, who is always a treat to watch in the House when he wants to deliver a point.

Mr Stevens: A treat?

Mr LISTER: That is right, member for Mermaid Beach. I would like to speak to the document reforms. These strike me as being quite sensible, really. It is about using technology to enable people without undue inconvenience, and also with the ancillary benefit of providing fewer face-to-face opportunities for the transmission of COVID, to conduct the business of legal documents. As has been said to me by a number of people, we sign off on contracts online. If you have leased a car in recent times you will know that it is all done in a day, because the documents are sent to you online and you provide an electronic signature. That seems to have been very effective. There appears to be no reason that cannot be used in signing and witnessing legal documents.

There was also the innovation of having a nurse be able to witness advance healthcare directives. This is another convenience method which in certain circumstances could be very valuable to people who are vulnerable and in need of being able to produce a directive like that.

I will talk about the liquor reforms. COVID had a very significant impact on our restaurant and hospitality industry. I would say that all of us have in our electorates much beloved providers of food—restaurants, takeaways and so forth. We get to know them in our electorates. In today's busy world, a lot of people do rely on access to restaurants and takeaways to keep their schedule going—once or twice a week. I know that if it has been a tough week in parliament and I get back and find that my wife, Belinda, has been busy driving to Warwick to take the kids to swimming lessons, pick them up from school and so on, it is really nice to get a takeaway. This innovation seeks to reduce regulatory barriers and support the recovery of small business from the economic impacts of the pandemic. Restaurants and takeaways that do food delivery or allow takeaways can now sell up to 1.5 litres of wine with a takeaway order. That is good for those restaurants, and I sincerely hope that that does assist those who have been impacted by COVID to recover.

I have a counterbalancing concern particularly with regard to my electorate of Southern Downs in that there are a number of small pubs that depend on takeaway liquor sales. On the balance of public interests, I do understand that this reform is a necessary and valuable one, but I have not forgotten the many pubs in my electorate that serve very small communities and for whom they are the centre of the community—that is, if you take the pub away from some of the small crossroad villages in my electorate,

you no longer have a community. I am talking about pubs like the Maryvale Crown Hotel run by Mick and Annie; the Blue Cow Hotel at Allora run by Denise; the Yangan Hotel Motel; the Sandy Creek Pub, which is quite a famous one just outside of Warwick—a great spot to have a drink with Kev; and the Karara Tavern, and I was there seeing Pete just on the weekend.

The Coronation Hotel at Toobeah is run by Michael Offerdahl. He is also known as the mayor of Toobeah, and rightly so—he has a thumb in just about every pie—and that is a cherished institution locally. Without the pub there, Toobeah would hardly be a speck on the map. Others I refer to include the Talwood Hotel and the Victory Hotel in Cecil Plains owned by the Volz family, who have been involved in country pubs for many years, and the Ballandean Tavern run by Naomi and Chris.

These are the smallest of them and none of these pubs have poker machines. They have very onerous costs associated with keeping their doors open. Some of them pay up to \$40,000 a year to be able to insure their business. It is not uncommon for pubs in these circumstances to forego insurance and self-insure simply because the turnover of the business in a small area cannot justify the cost of full insurance. They also pay licensing fees, and I acknowledge that the government has waived the licensing fees during COVID. When they are reintroduced—and no doubt that will happen down the track—these small businesses would still be paying the same licence fee that a large successful pub like the Breakfast Creek Hotel would be paying. They have high staff costs because of their smaller size of operations with smaller economies of scale. They are at a disadvantage against the big guys in that sense.

Then there is the cost of general inputs such as electricity. Keeping the lights on and the fridges going has become increasingly expensive for these small pubs. There may be some impact on their businesses, particularly when country based locals go into a major centre like Goondiwindi, Stanthorpe or Warwick for a takeaway and they might choose to grab some wine from there rather than over the counter at their local pub. I am alert to that. I do not think it will be an entire elimination of their business of over-the-counter sales, but I would be very concerned to see any further expansion of the ability of dine-in licensed premises being able to provide takeaway liquor. The pubs in my electorate and our communities depend on them and they depend on having a monopoly in certain areas because they pay for that. They pay for the privilege to be able to sell alcohol for takeaway purposes.

A number of constituents have come to me in recent times, many of whom have been motivated by concerns over what they have seen in Victoria in terms of the legislative response to COVID. They have said to me, 'James, I want you to make sure that you don't let the government take any of our rights away.' I want to assure those in my electorate that this particular bill is, in that sense, quite innocuous. It does not propose to limit the freedoms of individuals and it is not something which I would have concerns about in terms of the freedom of action of the people whom it is my duty to represent. I want to assure my constituents that I am alert and vigilant to the possibility that there could be gradual encroachments on the liberties of Queenslanders necessitated or proposed in dealing with things like COVID, but I assure my electors that I do not see that to be the case with this bill.