




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (3.28 pm): I rise today in support of the bill before the House, the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As a fifty-fifty Kiwi, can I express my excitement about the Trans-Tasman bubble that has opened up. Like many members of this House who have New Zealand relatives, I have not seen my grandparents for over a year. I am really glad that I visited them in January last year because they are in their 90s and live in Auckland. I know they were well looked after by the New Zealand government during the lockdown. I am really excited to be able to go and see them. My dad is even more excited because his parents are no longer well enough to fly.

I know I am not the only one because Queensland is home to more Kiwis than any other state in Australia, so it is fair to say that this bubble is more important to us than to any other state. Of course, this bubble is only possible due to the excellent management of both governments. This excellent management means that Queenslanders have great faith and great trust in our Chief Health Officer and her decisions.

One of the biggest decisions in our day-to-day lives is a small one but we notice it every day—that is, the decision to introduce social distancing and to get rid of handshakes. After a year of no hand shaking, I am really enjoying the alternatives. I am enjoying the lack of sickness in my office and in families, due in part to not shaking hands anymore. I am actually quite keen to keep up with alternatives like elbow bumping. We have a large Indian community in Mount Ommaney, so we do a lot of namaste greetings as well.

Our exceptional record in Queensland, keeping Queenslanders safe, belies the situation unfolding around the world. Recently a friend returned from the UK, where I understand that more than one in 10 residents have been impacted by the virus. For months at a time she left her home only to go for walks alone, because she was lucky enough to be able to work from home. She would make a weekly trip to the grocery shop. She said that even that was an exercise in fear. She was one of the lucky ones, because she is at home now. For months UK hospitals were full of people who were not so lucky. She was able to enjoy the hospitality of the Howard Springs quarantine facility. She said to me that she really enjoyed it. She certainly supports the Queensland government's proposal to build a similar facility in Queensland for Queenslanders and anybody else who needs to come home.

We know that the virus does not discriminate. It does not care if it is Christmas and you have not seen your family all year. The virus does not care if it is your wedding and your grandparents cannot get a flight to join you. Our Chief Health Officer has known that from the start. She has made the tough decisions in line with the fact that the COVID virus does not discriminate. She has always acted to address the issue with the seriousness it deserves.

It is worth remembering and recognising that back in January 2020 Queensland was one of the first states in the world to recognise this as a health crisis. We have asked Queenslanders to make big sacrifices. The vast majority of Queenslanders have understood why these sacrifices have been

required. Our Chief Health Officer and our Premier understand that these sacrifices have been hard. Queenslanders bunkered down while people in other countries did not. We have seen the benefits, which we are experiencing today. We can now limit our lockdowns to three days, as we saw just before Easter, while other nations are only just beginning to emerge from month-long lockdowns.

One group heavily impacted by the pandemic is small business. Many members of the House know that I am incredibly passionate about my small business community. One of the earlier iterations of the bill introduced the Small Business Commissioner, Maree Adshead. I know that she is doing a fantastic job advocating for the needs of small business alongside our Minister for Small Business, Di Farmer. It is really important that we have that role. It is so critical that small businesses are represented in considerations around COVID.

One of the policies covered in this legislation is about continuing, as we started last year, to allow eateries and cafes to sell takeaway alcoholic beverages along with meals. Over the last year I have read a number of articles about alcohol consumption during lockdown, in particular about whether people were consuming more than normal. Obviously, it was a very stressful time.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Ms PUGH: I take that interjection from the member for Pine Rivers. Many people were consuming more alcohol than normal. It is really important that we weigh that up and decide whether or not the health detriments outweigh the business benefits. We know that one of the key contributors to overconsumption of alcohol is a low unit price. Most takeaway beverages from these venues would have a significant mark-up to cover staffing costs, preparation costs et cetera. It is good that in this case that is not a pertinent issue. Of course, due to bottle shops being considered an essential service right from the very first lockdown, it is unlikely that people who want to drink to excess would do so by going to a restaurant and ordering a takeaway cocktail or a nice bottle of wine marked up at restaurant prices. In allowing this policy, the potential health issues had to be weighed against the need to keep businesses ticking over. I think we landed in the right place.

In my contribution last year on this same policy area, I mentioned that for many restaurants the sale of alcohol is the difference between profit and loss. It is a non-negotiable for most licensed venues to be able to sell alcohol, because without the revenue they get from alcohol it is very difficult to turn a profit. I know this from having worked in and around the hospitality industry most of my adult life. I am really pleased that we were able to provide that lifeline to hospitality businesses and small business.

I finish by thanking my fantastic community for their dedication to following the guidelines. In Queensland we know—we have known it from the start—that we are all in this together. When it comes to disaster recovery, I think every single member of the House will agree with me when I say that no-one does it better than Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.