




Speech By  
**Joan Pease**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021

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

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (2.31 pm): I am proud to stand in this place to talk on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Positions) Amendment Bill. May I clarify some of the comments made by my esteemed colleague the member for Southport with regards to the Mental Health Commissioner, who was thrilled at the Palaszczuk government's commitment and funding to supporting people with mental health, both at the beginning of the pandemic and also as a part of our Unite and Recover strategy. With regard to the human rights, the Human Rights Commissioner, who spoke on the day, very clearly outlined that the human rights of people were not being breached during COVID because the right to life is the most important and overarching aspect of the Human Rights Act.

On 29 January 2020 the Queensland government declared a public health emergency under section 319 of the Public Health Act 2005 due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in China. The declared public health emergency was extended to 31 December 2020 through regulation. Throughout 2020 the Legislative Assembly passed several pieces of legislation to amend the Public Health Act and the Mental Health Act to support the Palaszczuk government's response to COVID-19. Due to the rapidly evolving situation, amendments were made either through urgent bills or amendments during consideration in detail. Sunset clauses were included so that the amendments were not permanent but would expire after a set date, generally 12 months after commencement.

The Palaszczuk government has been a global leader in the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are the envy of the world. A large part of our success can be attributed to our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young. By following Dr Young's advice and giving her the emergency powers needed, the Palaszczuk government has been able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in a swift and decisive manner. If we had not provided emergency powers to the Chief Health Officer to issue directions to limit and respond to the spread of COVID-19, I have no doubt that many more Queenslanders would have contracted the virus. I am actually really thrilled to hear those in the opposition agreeing with that today, because that was not the case during the previous government. How many times did they call for the borders to be opened? Sixty-four I think it was.

**Honourable members:** Sixty-four.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you very much: 64.

This bill will allow the current legislative response measures implemented by the Palaszczuk government to continue for a further six months until 30 September 2021. The bill will continue the amendments made by the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act 2020. These provisions give emergency powers to the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers to make directions to limit and respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland. These powers have been critical to the success of the Palaszczuk government's health response as they allow for the implementation of requirements to restrict the movement of people and for people to enter hotel quarantine.

The objectives of the previous bill were to: amend chapter 8 of the Public Health Act 2004 to allow for the Governor in Council to extend the declared public health emergency for up to 90 days, which received assent on 7 February 2020; increase powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland under the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act 2020, which received assent on 19 March 2020; the chief executive to delegate their powers to the Chief Health Officer or a person with expertise or experience in public health issues and improving the operation of the provisions of emergency officers (medical) to support the Queensland government's response to COVID-19 under the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Act 2020, which received assent on 25 May 2020; and a person to be required to enter hotel quarantine at their own cost. Amendments were also made to the Mental Health Act 2016 through the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Act 2020 to allow declarations to be made about a mental health service through an expedited process and mental health patients to be granted leave to comply with mental health directions. The bill extends the expiry dates of these provisions for a further six months, until the end of September 2020 and also aligns the expiry date for the amendments made to the health portfolio legislation.

As we have heard, the committee invited stakeholders to make submissions on the bill, and we received 124 of those. We also received a briefing from the Queensland health department on 18 December. Can I say that support for both the bill and the Queensland Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, was acknowledged as competent, professional and trustworthy and was responsible for keeping Queenslanders safe from the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an overarching response in the submissions. There was also recognition, particularly at the public hearing, that without a strong health response the economic impact would far exceed the current economic difficulties being experienced in Queensland.

The bill was supported by professional organisations in the health sector with the AMA of Queensland expressing overall support for extending the CHO's powers until 30 September 2021 and extending the amendments to the Mental Health Act and Public Health Act—hotel quarantine. Further, the AMA Queensland congratulated the Queensland government on the work done to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in Queensland, noting that Queensland acted quickly in enforcing lockdown restrictions and closing borders to the states with high community transmission rates, leading to no further community transmission in Queensland to date.

Whilst the act of closing the borders was highly criticised by other states and territories, the Queensland government continued to act in the best interests of the health of Queenslanders and followed the CHO's evidence based medical advice. This support was reflected by other stakeholders, including the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Lung Foundation of Australia and the Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland, who also acknowledged that the delegation of authority to the CHO during the pandemic was an important mechanism and had a timely effective response to COVID-19. Similarly, the Queensland Hotels Association and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council also supported the bill. The Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland outlined its support for the extension of powers to extend to public health emergency as did the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association and the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union.

Further, the Queensland Police Service explained the need for the bill from a policing perspective. If they had not had these sorts of powers, they would not have had the authorities needed for their work at the borders to keep people from coming out of the hotspots or put them into quarantine. Being able to respond quickly in an evolving and fast-moving health crisis is paramount to protecting Queenslanders. The Chief Health Officer outlined that the advice on health that she received was based on a large range of expert health advice including the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, or the AHPPC, which is advised by experts in multiple fields. At its core, it has every Chief Health Officer from every state and territory in the Commonwealth.

About 60 people sat on that committee in advising our Chief Health Officer and working together. There are also multiple committees that sit under the AHPPC such as the Communicable Diseases Network Australia, the Infection Control Expert Group, the National Emergency Medical Service and the Public Health Laboratory Network.

I thank the Premier; the Deputy Premier; the current health minister; our wonderful Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young; first responders; our frontline health workers; all of our frontline workers, such as people who worked in the retail industry and the like; and all of the businesses that responded to the evolving and changing face of restrictions, requirements and guidelines. I congratulate them on how quickly they responded and I appreciate the great work that they all have done. They have followed the expert advice of our Chief Health Officer and have worked to keep Queenslanders safe. This bill will ensure Queenslanders' health and ensure we all are in safe hands. I commend the bill to the House.