




Speech By
Joan Pease

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2021

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (3.43 pm): On Sunday the mighty Wynnum Manly Seagulls and Dolphins supporters enjoyed a great day at Kougari Oval, and what a day for the mighty Seagulls—our first game back at Kougari where all the locals came together to support our footy heroes and together we celebrated the wins on the day. How amazing to be back and how thankful we all are that we have our health and we could in fact come together to support the mighty Seagulls. Queenslanders have done an amazing job of supporting each other and following health guidelines and I am really proud to be part of the Palaszczuk government which has ensured that Queenslanders are safe, that we are healthy and that we can respond quickly to the impact of the COVID-19 emergency.

During 2020 two significant legislative reforms were progressed—the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act 2020, the ER act, and the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Act 2020, the amendment act. The ER act established regulation-making powers to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 emergency and a legislative modification framework of general application across the statute books, allowing legislative requirements to be modified in a range of areas, and the amendment act made temporary changes to substantive laws in a range of portfolios.

The ER act, all regulations made under the ER act, amendments to a number of acts made by the amendment act and several statutory instruments made under powers inserted by the amendments in the amendment act were initially to expire on 31 December 2020. However, in December 2020 the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020—the extension act—was passed, extending the impending expiry of the legislation that was still required to the newly termed COVID-19 legislation expiry date. In the extension act, the COVID-19 legislation expiry date was set at 30 April 2021 or an earlier date to be prescribed by regulation.

Without the passage of further legislation, the substantive heads of power under the ER act and all instruments enacted under it, as well as the majority of amendments under the amendment act and discrete new provisions introduced by the extension act, will expire on 30 April 2021. The COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 11 March by the Hon. Shannon Fentiman, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

On the introduction of the bill, the Assembly agreed to a motion that the bill be declared an urgent bill and referred it to the committee for expedited consideration for report to the Assembly by 14 April 2021. I acknowledge the great work of the committee and its secretariat which undertook this work and progressed it through the system quickly, so I thank them very much for that. During its examination of the bill, the committee invited written submissions on the bill from the public, of which there were 10 received. The committee also received a public and a written briefing on the bill from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning.

The bill's purpose was to support Queensland to continue to function during the pandemic as we need to maintain the flexibility provided by the legislative framework introduced in 2020. The COVID-19 Emergency Response Act 2020 provides temporary powers to modify legislative requirements by regulation or other secondary instruments to reduce physical contact between people; to modify statutory time frames where necessary; to ensure the continuation of court and tribunal proceedings; and to authorise bodies to take actions or do other things electronically or take certain actions related to leases and tenancies. The modified arrangements for making affidavits, statutory declarations, general powers of attorney and deeds are supported by the Queensland Law Society and these temporary arrangements have modernised the way in which these legal documents are created. Allowing these documents to be witnessed over audiovisual link has improved access to justice for Queenslanders from both a cost and efficiency perspective which is particularly beneficial for vulnerable people and the people who live and work regionally or remotely.

Other temporary amendments were made to various legislation across the statute books by the Justice and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Amendment Act 2020 to enable appropriate responses in the context of the public health emergency. These measures were initially to expire at the end of 2020 but, as I have already said, in December they were extended and now we need to extend them past 30 April 2021.

In practice this legislative framework has given Queensland the flexibility for additional attendance requirements at corrective services facilities, body corporate meetings to be attended remotely with electronic voting, P&C meetings to be held electronically, and administrative costs to be reduced for impacted industries such as the tourism industry. These are just a few of the examples of how the legislative framework supports the functioning of businesses and government institutions disrupted or impacted by the COVID-19 emergency.

This bill ensures that any COVID related legislation that is still required to respond to the COVID-19 emergency continues by amending the definition of COVID-19 legislation expiry day to 30 September 2021 or an earlier date prescribed by regulation. Extending the expiry of the provisions until 30 September 2021 will allow for consideration of any impact the national vaccination effort may have on the ongoing need for COVID-19 related legislation. Further extension of the expiration is safeguarded by the existing provision allowing for an earlier expiration date to be prescribed by regulation and the ongoing ability for responsible ministers to repeal measures under regulations.

Recognising its extraordinary nature, the legislative framework is time limited to ensure that it remains operational for only as long as it needs to be. What this means is that without legislative amendment these measures will expire on 30 September. This bill will extend the amendments made to all impacted acts and subordinate legislation that are still required to respond to the public health emergency until 30 September 2021. This means that if the need for these measures dissipates before 30 September 2021 they can be extinguished as quickly and as flexibly as possible. This is another important safeguard.

Due to the Palaszczuk government's speedy and robust response to this global pandemic, Queensland is now seeing our economy growing, Queenslanders are healthy and we will continue to respond in a manner that is based on science and advice from experts. Like all Baysiders, we are looking forward to supporting our local community and our local sporting clubs. I take this opportunity to thank the Chief Health Officer, our health workers, our frontline workers and all Queenslanders who have worked so hard to ensure that my community, in fact all of Queensland, is in the position that we are in today where we can go and enjoy a game of footy and support our local club, or go to our Anzac Day services coming up this weekend.

This is all due to the Palaszczuk government's careful and appropriate response to the pandemic, unlike those opposite who called for the borders to be opened 64 times. It is disappointing to hear those opposite make such disgraceful claims about our response. A look around the room at their benches shows that Queenslanders obviously supported my government. Queenslanders have shown their support in the ballot box, many voting for Labor for the very first time. I commend the bill to the House and I look forward to the mighty Seagulls' home games throughout the season. We will see you on the weekend, Tigers!