




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (3.42 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020, introduced in this chamber by the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services last year. We are incredibly fortunate to live in Queensland where our world-class health response has meant that COVID-19 has not drastically spread throughout our community as we have seen happen in other countries.

As the Assistant Minister for Health and Regional Health Infrastructure, I would like to put on the record my thanks to all of our health workers in our hospitals, our paramedics, our police, our teachers, our supermarket workers, all those working in the health department and all those who kept going during COVID-19. The work they did was extremely important to all of our communities. Because of the work that they have done, our health system has not become overwhelmed with rapidly escalating numbers, and Queensland has not contributed to the death toll arising from COVID-19 since 18 April last year. That is really important.

Every loss of life is tragic, and it is really distressing to see that more than two million people have now died since the pandemic began. I extend my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19 in Queensland, interstate and overseas. Because we live in such a multicultural country, I know that in my community of Mackay there are many families who have lost family members overseas. This is really tragic. It has hit home even though those people were not living amongst us.

The amendments to the health portfolio legislation introduced by the Palaszczuk government and passed by this House last year grant powers to effectively limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19. That is so important for our community. The powers are essential so that we can act on the knowledge provided by experts through the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and other experts to rapidly implement the public health measures required to respond to the emerging situation presented by COVID-19.

While I am on the subject of experts, I want to pay tribute and thank our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, for her ongoing dedication and expert advice. While I know there is a whole team of people right across Queensland fighting this virus, it is through Dr Young's advice and leadership that Queensland is in such an enviable position to continue to fight COVID-19 in 2021. On behalf of my Mackay community, I say thank you to Dr Young.

On 29 January 2020, the Palaszczuk government declared a public health emergency for what is now known as COVID-19. The declaration of a public health emergency under the Public Health Act 2005 allows for powers to be provided to emergency officers to respond to the public health emergency—in this instance, to respond to the highly contagious virus. When the declaration was made, the Public Health Act only allowed for the regulation to be extended for up to seven days. On 5 and 7 February 2020, the Governor in Council made a regulation to extend the declared public health emergency relating to the virus for two further seven-day periods.

On 7 February 2020, the Legislative Assembly passed the Public Health (Declared Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act 2020 to allow the Governor in Council to extend the declared public health emergency for up to 90 days instead of seven. On 19 March 2020, the Legislative Assembly passed the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act 2020, which provided emergency powers to the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers appointed under the act.

The bill inserted these amendments into chapter 8 of the Public Health Act as they relate to the declared public health emergency for COVID-19. Further regulation extensions of the declared public health emergency to support the operation of chapter 8 of the Public Health Act continued throughout 2020 and into 2021. The most recent regulation was made by the Governor in Council on 17 December 2020 to extend the declared public health emergency until 31 March 2021.

Further extensions of the declared public health emergency may be required. Effective public health response measures must be readily available to support the Queensland government's response for as long as there is an ongoing risk to public health from COVID-19. This bill does not seek to pre-empt the decision of the Governor in Council to extend the declared public health emergency but proposes to allow the amendments made to the health portfolio legislation to continue for a further six months.

This bill will continue the COVID-19 response framework if the public health emergency is continued by the Governor in Council. The bill extends amendments, including powers provided to the Governor in Council to extend a declared public health emergency for up to 90 days instead of seven; emergency powers provided to the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers to make decisions to limit and respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland; and a framework to allow for the recovery of costs from a person required to enter hotel quarantine. The bill also extends the amendments made to the Mental Health Act 2016 which allow for authorised mental health services to be declared through an expedited process—that is, without gazettal—and to allow mental health patients to be granted leave to comply with public health decisions and directions. Other technical amendments to the Public Health Act are also being extended to support the operation of Queensland's health response to COVID-19.

The extension of these frameworks for a further six months achieves an appropriate balance to ensure that these emergency measures are not extended for too long or indefinitely. While the act's time frames in relation to when the pandemic will end remain uncertain, there is a possibility that a further extension of these emergency powers past September 2021 may be required. We must not look at our success and become complacent before we have further success in combating the virus. The rollout of vaccines in the coming weeks and months will be critical to this success. Until the rollout is well underway and we can evaluate its success we must continue to be cautious, vigilant and ready to rapidly respond when an issue arises.

We all need to go back to our communities and encourage everybody to be vaccinated when the vaccine comes to our community. I know that as soon as it gets to Mackay my family and I will ensure that we make appointments to have our vaccinations. We need to ensure that the Palaszczuk government has the tools it needs to respond. We must extend these emergency measures for a further six months. We need to remain on the front foot. I commend the bill to the House.