




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.17 pm): I wish to make a short contribution on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. As has been said before, the LNP will not oppose the extension of the provisions outlined in the bill. The LNP respect the extension of those provisions to enable the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers to have the necessary powers to limit or to respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland.

Firstly, I put on the record my appreciation for the Chief Health Officer, Jeannette Young, for giving us a briefing this afternoon on where we are at with the vaccine. I congratulate her and her staff for the job that they have done over the past 12 months. I also congratulate Jeannette Young, her husband and her two children, who have probably not had a wife and mother for 12 months as she put herself into what was probably an incredible situation in her career.

Ms Pease: Under terrible scrutiny from your side of the House, might I add.

Mr MILLAR: I will take that interjection. I am trying to express an opinion and I am congratulating the Chief Health Officer for what she has been able to do. Over the past 12 months she has done an amazing job, as have all the people who work beside her.

I also congratulate the health professionals in my seat of Gregory. The Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service is headed by Paul Bell and CEO Steve Williamson. The Central West Health board chair is Jane Williams and the CEO is Jane Hancock. I acknowledge the magnificent work they were able to do to reassure the community in Western Queensland and the Central Highlands that we were going to get through this. I put on record my thanks to Tony Rayner, the mayor of the Longreach council, and Mitch Murphy, the CEO. We held fortnightly hook-ups with community leaders to reassure the community that we were going to get through this.

I place on the record first my appreciation for all the doctors, nurses, administration workers and all involved in Queensland Health right around the state for the wonderful job they have done. It has been an incredibly difficult year not only for Brisbane, South-East Queensland and places where the COVID-19 virus was confirmed but also for Western Queensland. Although we did not have cases of COVID-19, it was because of the actions of Queensland Health and the way that their plans were conducted over the last 12 months that places like regional Queensland were able to continue to function as best they could. I thank the staff of Queensland Health for that.

There have been some lessons learned in case this happens again. To put it simply, we have to make a distinction between Eagle Street, Longreach and Eagle Street, Brisbane. What I mean by that is: we were under the same restrictions that Brisbane was for a while. I congratulate the people involved in the health department for sorting that out as quickly as they possibly could. The Birdcage Hotel in Longreach was shut down for three months. Gavin Ballard, a good mate of mine and an excellent

publican, was struggling just doing takeaway sales. Takeaway sales work well in Brisbane because of the volume of population, but the takeaway sales in Longreach just barely kept the lights on because the refrigeration still had to continue.

If we can learn something from this it is that, from a geographical perspective, especially in Western Queensland, the restrictions needed to be tinkered with. They were eventually. There was an understanding from the decision-makers in Queensland Health that there were different situations to consider. We saw an example of that a couple of months ago when Brisbane went into lockdown and the rest of Queensland was able to operate as normal. I congratulate all on the fantastic work that has been done.

There have been some casualties throughout the COVID-19 pandemic from an economic perspective. In some places such as my own electorate, some businesses and small cafes which rely on heavy tourism traffic have not been able to continue operation. A couple of well-noted restaurants in my electorate have had to close down. I really do feel sorry for them.

Sporting groups also suffered difficulties, certainly in Western Queensland and the Central Highlands. Kids' Rugby League and other important sporting groups out there were not able to get off the ground straightaway. They are coming back now. It is good to see kids getting out there and playing in teams and sporting groups starting to come together.

While the LNP will support the passage of the bill, we understand that when elements of these provisions are in force the social and economic impacts can be devastating for some areas. We have seen the pain in all corners of the state. Queensland has lost a lot to COVID-19. The consequences have been far-reaching. That point is not lost on me, not lost on us and not lost on many people out there in the community.

In our support for the bill, the LNP acknowledges the sacrifices which many Queenslanders have made and will continue to make. We have to continue to be vigilant when making decisions, but overall I think the decisions made to date have been good. I congratulate Jeannette Young on the work that she has done. In the briefing we had this afternoon, she was able to clarify a lot of things that we need to know to pass onto our communities.

I place on the record now that I believe every Queenslanders should get the vaccine. We have to stop those people who are out there peddling misinformation, either for their own political purposes or because they just do not have the knowledge they should show. My grandfather caught polio. It always weighed on his mind because my aunty caught polio as well. The significant scientific medical research we have been able to do with vaccines in Queensland, in Australia and the world is important—

Mr Nicholls: The triple antigen, the whooping cough.

Mr MILLAR: I take that interjection from the member for Clayfield. Whooping cough is a devastating disease. It breaks your heart to see the images or video of children who are suffering with whooping cough. I will always encourage vaccination. My kids have all been vaccinated, as they should be. I find it disturbing and it makes me angry when people spread misinformation about vaccinations on social media.

Firstly, we need to recover healthily. If we have a healthy society, we have a good society. Then we need to get Queensland back on track with regard to operating as normally as possible. We need to eventually open the state and international borders. I know that the agriculture minister is aware of the struggles at present to find enough fruit pickers to pick valuable crops in Queensland. To see this you only have to look at what is happening in Gayndah and the worry they have there.

Let's get on with this. Give the Chief Health Officer the powers that she needs to be able to continue her good work. Let's make sure that everybody is vaccinated and make sure we get Queensland back on track after COVID-19.