




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (6.30 pm): I rise to give my contribution to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. I acknowledge that the purpose of this bill is to extend the expiry date of provisions in several pieces of legislation to 30th September 2021 and align generally with the expiry dates for all of the amendments made to the Health portfolio legislation regarding the Queensland government's health response to COVID-19.

While the LNP will not oppose the passage of this bill, and indeed the bill has received support from healthcare industry stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge that other industry groups and peak bodies have indicated concerns. It is appropriate that I give those concerns a voice in this chamber because it must not be forgotten that when these powers are exercised the oppressive measures exercised as a result of them, necessarily enabled through these provisions, do result in a devastating social and economic impact. The need to consult and engage with industry and the community when such oppressive measures are acted on cannot be underestimated. It is something that I fear the government has not done very well to date and that I for one would like to see improved.

The concerns raised by some of the submitters to the committee should not be ignored. They are concerns around the inconsistencies in decision-making arising out of the public health directions and the lack of community consultation, the lack of engagement, the lack of clear communication and the lack of transparency by the state Labor government during these unprecedented times. Queenslanders have lost a lot to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the Currumbin electorate which thrives on showcasing its natural beauty through tourism and hospitality. While the rest of the state has somewhat bounced back, I have seen firsthand how our border community is still suffering.

Many people in the Currumbin electorate go about their lives with one foot in Queensland and one foot in New South Wales. When the COVID-19 border blockades are enforced, their daily lives turn into a disaster. Insane border queues clog all of the roads—the M1 and the local roads. Those people are simply trying to go to work, trying to go to school, trying to get to their health service. They are not travelling interstate; they are going about their daily lives. My community continues to live in fear of another abrupt lockdown followed by mixed messages and rumours sending the community into a spiral of anxiety and panic. We have seen droves of people lined up at our office who need assistance with border passes or help interpreting the new rules that might be handed down at short notice.

A major contributor to the fear in my community is that the Labor government does not communicate the rationale behind the enforcement of the public health directions. Concern around the lack of transparency is a common thread in the submissions to the health committee. While the LNP will not oppose the extension of these powers, we believe it is incumbent on the government to be more transparent and to communicate the rationale when the rules are enforced. Let us be clear: this is not about questioning the health advice. The opposition has been very clear on that. We will always follow the professional health advice relating to COVID-19. This is about the government not keeping

Queenslanders in the dark. This is about the government informing Queenslanders about the criteria used to trigger border lockdowns or to trigger restrictions imposed on a community. This is about the inconsistencies in the application of that power.

A large number of constituents have reached out to us expressing their displeasure with the lack of explanation and the lack of rationale when oppressive measures are enabled through these provisions, particularly the business community. The small business community in Currumbin has suffered significantly with each restriction that is imposed. In part, that is due to their proximity to the border. They are stressed and anxious. They feel forgotten on the border of Queensland. We know that being kept safe is a priority and Queenslanders respect that. Queensland businesses on the border respect that. We respect the health advice and we know it must be followed. However, we want it delivered in a clear, transparent and consistent way so that people are not left confused and uncertain and so that businesses have the confidence to continue, knowing that people will come.

Having rules apply to some and not to others—as was the case with celebrities allowed hotel quarantine exemptions and other exemptions and social distancing with crowd caps allowed at major sporting events when ordinary Queenslanders who were doing the right thing were overlooked—is a bitter pill for the community to swallow. Queenslanders have been treated like mushrooms by this state Labor government. They have been kept in the dark when it comes to the decision-making around these restrictive decisions imposed on them. The lack of transparency greatly impacts business confidence and the daily lives of each and every person, particularly in my border community of Currumbin. It is a hard time for anyone to plan ahead in this constantly changing environment and the effect it has on small business is huge.

The concern over the lack of engagement with various industries was noted in the CCIQ's submission on this bill. The increased powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit or respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland was only conditionally supported by the CCIQ.

Ms Grace interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Order, Minister!

Mrs GERBER: I am not taking the minister's interjections. People simply wish for some consultation to happen. That is echoed by the business community of Currumbin. I held a small business forum in Currumbin to which over 100 small business operators came to voice their concerns and to be heard because they feel like they are not being heard by this state Labor government. COVID-19's impact on the business community of Currumbin is nothing short of devastating. Businesses in Currumbin know they have to play their part in keeping people safe, but at that forum they consistently told me that they want greater transparency. They just want to understand what the triggers are for the restrictions that will be imposed on them so that they can plan for their businesses. They also want to know that people from across the border who want to come to Currumbin can make plans to do so.

There remains no clear criteria available to the public that determines when the powers will be used or ceased. Given that the powers granted in the legislation have the ability to cause significant economic and social strain, it is important that a balance be struck between Queensland's health and Queensland's economic health. Clarity and certainty regarding the decision-making process is key to that. The reason people in my community are so anxious is because Labor refuses to release to Queenslanders their decision-making process. Labor refuses to lay out for people the trigger points for the health restrictions.

The mental health of my community has greatly suffered due to the lack of consistency and certainty around the decision-making involving health restrictions. The government needs to restore confidence in Queenslanders by informing them how and when decisions are made so they can regain their business confidence and go about their daily lives without being crippled by anxiety that at any moment the border may be slammed shut and their local roads cut off.

The LNP will support the passage of this bill, but the government must do better in communicating and consulting with the community and industry when strict measures are enforced under the powers given in these provisions.