




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (4.23 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. I will reflect a little bit. We are in a unique circumstance with something that Queensland has not faced before, but this is what we built our laws for, because we knew that these things were coming. Since Queensland was created as a British colony we have recognised, right from the beginning, that we need powers to restrict infectious diseases within our borders. Queensland, even before it was a separate colony, restricted the entry of ships with fever, imposing quarantine on them in Moreton Bay, on their passengers and on the islands of the bay including Peel Island. In the flu pandemic, often mistakenly called the Spanish flu, that started around 1918, Queensland also put in place these quarantine provisions on our overland borders to protect Queenslanders. This is a key part of our history in protecting Queenslanders from disease.

A key part of our law was to have powers for someone to carefully, scientifically and soberly make decisions to protect Queenslanders. No doubt there was a colonial chief health officer or equivalent who received letters from those who had come all the way from England on a ship with infections and who, within sight of Brisbane, were complaining that they could not come in to see their family. Chief health officers then had to make hard decisions in order to keep Queensland safe. At that time there might have been members of parliament who tried to undermine that tough decision-making process, but I will speak more about that later. It is vital that all members of parliament support the extension of these provisions and emergency measures to be used when needed.

We have seen that other countries are still devastatingly affected by this disease. Highly infectious diseases can quickly multiply. They do not do so in a linear fashion, increasing by a set number or even a set percentage of the population each day, but instead increase exponentially as each person infected acts as a new vector of transmission. That is why we have seen it get out of control, in some cases multiple times, in countries such as England in the UK, where we see that over 123,000 people have died.

I put that into perspective. We all know the history of London during the Blitz, when thousands of raids rained down bombs upon English homes. During that time 43,000 UK civilians were killed. This time the bombs have rained down on English homes killing 123,000—and we are still counting. Each day there will be a new toll, a new raid of this disease. We have seen this incredible number. It has had a profound impact on every community in the UK. As a way of giving Queenslanders and members of this place a reference of the impact in human terms, the total number of students, teachers and assembly attendees in a school would be about 800. In the UK, one in every 800 people has died. Next time you are at a large school event, look out across those 800-odd people and think of one of the families grieving an untimely death. Think of the many families who would have had family members hospitalised and still suffering in recovery. This is not just about the school community in your community. Every single group of 800 within our communities would have been affected by deaths, hospitalisations and suffering.

Speaking of school communities, I recognise Parklands Christian College and the leadership of Principal Gary Cully and Pastor Mike Warman. A cleaner who worked at that school had crossed our border to go to Victoria, lied, crossed back across our border and brought the infection to Queensland. The school was simply wonderful, because it went to great lengths to ensure that the entire school community were tested. In fact, the night before that happened, my son had played at the nearby Park Ridge Soccer Club with children from that school so he and I went to get tested along with the community. That testing meant that we knew we were keeping the community safe. It is also a credit to the principal and the school community that they had kept the school safe and that there was no new transmissions in that school, because they were following the rules.

I recognise every Queenslanders, because we all made a special effort to keep ourselves safe. I also recognise the staff in this place who did such a good job of keeping us safe by ensuring we followed the rules, kept things clean and stopped the spread.

As the member for Keppel said, some Queenslanders have had to make a much greater sacrifice than others. There are those who have had to quarantine and those who have tried to travel interstate in order to see a sick relative or to attend a funeral. Indeed, some of the border MPs recognised that people on the border made an extra sacrifice. I recognise that they went above and beyond what other Queenslanders had to do in order to keep us safe.

As I said earlier, many years ago there would have been people who were held up at Peel Island when they came across our borders on ships and they would have complained that they could not get to Brisbane if they wished to. I want to put a different perspective. When we put these rules in place, we asked the Chief Health Officer and the team that made the assessments to try and keep Queenslanders safe and to assess the risk of those who wanted to come across the border. Other members, in particular the member for Oodgeroo, were attacking them for those decisions, saying that they had no compassion for Queenslanders. They had extraordinary compassion for Queenslanders.

No doubt when they listened to those stories firsthand it was deeply heart-wrenching for them, but they also knew that they needed to have compassion when looking at the consequences of making those decisions in order to make a difference. Whenever I had someone ring me—I felt deeply for them because they made extra sacrifices—I spoke of the difficult decisions that the Chief Health Officer and the team had to make and I told them that they were not without compassion, but in this place so many people have said that the government was heartless and that the government had no compassion. However, it is not easy for those people to recognise that there is a false compassion in taking the risk of letting someone into the state who is infected and possibly seeing funerals as a result of that decision.

I want to thank the Chief Health Officer. I want to thank that team of people that had to make those tough decisions but who were not without compassion. They felt deeply for every Queenslanders, especially those who had to make those extra sacrifices. When I had these conversations with people who had been through these things, I asked them if they wanted politicians to be making that decision. Did they want politicians to be able to play perhaps a compassion card? We recently had the Prime Minister write letters about individuals and I asked if they wanted the Prime Minister to make individual decisions. After I explained the process that they were going through, every single one of those people said that, no, they wanted someone to soberly and scientifically assess the risk that was presented to Queenslanders. That is why we need to get behind the Chief Health Officer, not make these sideways remarks that undermine these decisions and say that the public servants making these tough decisions have no compassion.

I want to thank the Chief Health Officer and the team, as I said. I especially want to thank the police who had the difficult task of being on the front line to communicate this politely, professionally and with great enthusiasm, and they do a great job in keeping us safe. I want to thank all of those public officials who did the hard work during this time, people like the nurses who took risks to take the swabs in order to get people tested. I want to recognise the fact that every Queenslanders made a difference.

The vaccine is coming. That is a really encouraging thing and I encourage every Queenslanders to get the vaccine, but we still have trials and tribulations. We still need to maintain these standards to ensure that we keep transmission to a minimum. We need to back our Chief Health Officer and know that those making the decisions have enormous compassion in their hearts for all Queenslanders to ensure that we can continue to be the best place to be. Recently I was at a business forum organised by the local Baptist Church. The Baptist minister, Peter, asked us to think of one thing we were thankful for and almost half the audience said that they were thankful that they were in Queensland because we are safe and can do what we want, and that is due to every Queenslanders.