




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (3.49 pm): On 16 June 2021—which seems a long time ago with the events now occurring in New South Wales—the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Health and on 18 June 2021 the bill was referred to the committee for detailed examination. We reported back on 6 August. On the date of introduction of the bill many Australians were beginning to hope that we faced a different challenge. On 16 June there were no reported cases in New South Wales. However, the very next day the New South Wales government reported two cases. Steadily, cases increased in New South Wales and New South Wales, using its powers under its own act, attempted to use contact tracing to control the outbreak. The government also called on the people of New South Wales to be careful. However, these measures proved insufficient and now, from just this one case, there are over 10,000 cases in just the last 10 days. Our thoughts are with the people of New South Wales. We urge them to act collectively and to get onto the outbreak. We have seen deaths nearly every day. The entire Economics and Governance Committee—indeed this House—sends our thoughts and prayers to the families that are suffering this sudden loss.

Many Queenslanders, some at the urging of the member for Mirani, wrote submissions to us that were obviously put in before the New South Wales outbreak saying that no health measures were required at all. Some now looking at the results in New South Wales probably regret that they put that submission in to the committee. Today 116 people in New South Wales found out they have COVID-19. Unfortunately we know that there almost certainly will be other undetected cases amongst the people of New South Wales. However, other submitters, despite the cases in New South Wales, continue to be convinced that COVID is not something the government should be involved in and taking action to prevent.

At a recent by-election I took the time to have longer conversations with people who handed out for the antivaccination, antimask party to better understand their views and where they were coming from. I read the submissions from many opposed to the continuation of the health orders. Very few, it seems, had read the bill or our report to recognise that most of the provisions of the bill are actually not about restrictions—and those restrictions in the emergency powers are in the original Health Act and its history goes back over 100 years—but about suspending existing regulation to enable Queenslanders to continue to do normal activities in a safe way. The submission of the Law Society recognised this and made commentary about the potential continuation of some of those issues.

Many submitters made clear they felt the government should never use lockdowns as a tool to reduce COVID-19. I want to make it clear that the committee, indeed every member of this House, does not want to have lockdowns. We try to not have them. Equally, I am proud our government has had the strength to act early, firmly and to keep lockdowns as part of the toolkit for keeping cases down. It has not only reduced infections, hospitalisations and deaths, but has meant a quicker bounce back to the Queensland economy and this is especially true for the small businesses of Queensland. Queensland

business can have confidence their government can take the measures necessary to protect their businesses, their families and their communities. By acting early we have had fewer lockdowns than other states that have relied solely on testing, QR codes and contact tracing alone. Many submitters objected to testing, QR codes and contact tracing as an invasion of privacy. I note that the more sensible parts of those objections are being responded to by the Minister for Health who respects that this is an unusual measure that is for the health of Queenslanders alone.

For people who do object to these measures, can I put it simply: if you are going to visit your mother or grandmother this weekend, would you not want health tracers to tell you as soon as possible, rather than wait till Monday, that you were actually at an exposure site? Would your mother not prefer that? Would not the small business that you might also have visited want this done as efficiently as possible? Some said we should rule out lockdowns and they nominated areas like Texas and Florida as states to follow. They said they admired open borders and the governor trying to make local school mask mandates illegal, effectively telling residents the impact and danger of COVID was over in Florida. Their policy was a disaster for Florida families and it would be a worse disaster for Queensland families. I hope that those who wrote advocating for the Florida-style policies would not choose Florida as a model now. In that state, that had stabilised at the time of submissions, their own government is reporting over 21,000 cases a day and, very sadly, 246 deaths a day—that is 1,700 families a week losing a family member. This is more than the peak of cases they had last winter. Florida has had over 44,000 deaths. When I wrote the first draft of our report there were 42,000 deaths. I looked it up again and it is now 44,000. That is 44,000 grieving families profoundly and permanently damaged by an untimely, difficult and often lonely death. The sad truth is that in some of these cases a family member may have even been the one who brought the disease to their doorstep. Would they not want to know as soon as possible so that they could have prevented it?

Our state remains under pressure from international arrivals. We have no control over the federal government allowing people into our state from overseas well above the cap the federal government agreed to. This has created an overload on hotels that set up quarantine for international arrivals. We recognise the federal government decision has created this extra strain on domestic travellers coming back to and moving to our state. It is good to hear that from Saturday some of this load will be relieved and we can once again safely quarantine domestic travellers. This is a priority for all Queenslanders. I recognise the difficulty this presents for those who have travelled within areas of New South Wales that the New South Wales government has restricted and we thank them for what they have to endure to keep their fellow Queenslanders safe.

Some submitters have also called for the current COVID vaccine to be stopped. The committee has carefully examined the facts on the COVID vaccine. I agree with the member for Mundingburra, who made a quite eloquent plea after examining the evidence, that we fundamentally disagree with the antivaccine lobbyists and advocates and that all Australians should take the advice of their doctor and get a vaccine. I am proud that I am helping to protect Logan and protect myself. I am even prouder of my mother who acted as early as she could after speaking with her doctor to do her bit to protect herself and the community.

I note from a question in question time today that the member for Mirani discourages the currently approved and available vaccines for another yet-to-be approved vaccine simply because it is being developed in Australia. This approval process is being managed by the federal government. I say this not to blame them. I think they are doing a great job doing this carefully. I went to the COVAX-19 website which says they have done the early immunogenic studies in mice, monkeys and ferrets and they are beginning some trials, but it is not quite as Australian as the member thinks. The secondary trials will be completed in Iran and then they are hoping that the vaccine will be produced by the CinnaGen company and renamed SpikoGen and manufactured and rolled out in Iran. We hope that this is a fantastic vaccine and another part of our armoury and we very much support both the federal government and the university in South Australia that developed it, but we are taking this carefully because that is right for the people of Queensland.

The Economics and Governance Committee recommends to the parliament that the parliament pass the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill. It contains vital measures to keep Queenslanders working safely and gives us the best chance to prevent the disasters that are currently engulfing Sydney and growing parts of New South Wales. What we can say with certainty, whether in relation to delta, international arrivals or the difficulties in quarantine, is that there are uncertainties to face in the future. That is why we need to be responsive and have these powers in order to keep Queenslanders safe.

The Premier reminded us this morning that Queensland is the only state on the eastern seaboard of Australia not under lockdown. We know that if every Queenslanders gets vaccinated and follows the basic guidelines our Chief Health Officer has given us we are more likely not to need lockdowns in the

future. I am proud of a government that says if we need to act firmly and quickly to prevent a major outbreak then we should have the ability to do that. This legislation gives us that ability. I am disappointed that some in politics would provide false hope about where we are going. Unfortunately, and with great regret, we see how serious the outbreak in New South Wales is, how debilitating it is for their economy and small businesses. This government has a plan. The plan is to do everything we can with the best advice we have to keep Queenslanders safe, to keep small businesses open and to fight every day for the health of Queenslanders.