




Speech By
Hon. Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (3.17 pm): Everything we do here in this parliament is about the people of Queensland, and what a remarkable and admirable group of people they are. I say this because Queenslanders throughout the course of this pandemic have demonstrated on a personal level and a statewide level the qualities that speak to our inclusive and democratic traditions. If there is one thing we have learned through this unprecedented period, it is that all Queenslanders truly value the role of our first responders and are appreciative of the contribution our first responders make.

It is important in this debate to highlight the efforts of our first responders—our police and our fire and emergency services officers, volunteers and staff—and their contribution, and what a contribution they have made protecting Queenslanders. They did so on the borders, they did so in the airports and they have done so in the hotels ensuring a world-class quarantine operation. We owe an enormous debt to our police and our fire and emergency services volunteers, officers and staff. For many months, they were on the borders. They saved lives. There is no higher calling than that. Their contribution was a marathon effort. Through the cold of winter, the heat of summer, rain, hail, whatever, they never shirked their responsibility to keep Queenslanders safe.

While much attention was focused on the efforts of our police, fire and emergency services volunteers, officers and staff on the border on the Gold Coast, there were other places where they did the hard yards. Police also endured very challenging conditions on the border with the Northern Territory and also in western parts of our state on the borders with New South Wales and South Australia.

I often say our emergency services and our police are world class, and this recent period has shown that that is in no way an exaggeration. What we have seen during the pandemic is another expression of the ability, capability and willingness of our police and emergency services to step up and deliver when their fellow Queenslanders need support. Obviously the powers in this bill support the good work of all government agencies but particularly our police and our fire and emergency services agencies in the work that they do to keep us all safe.

We must always look around the world to be reminded of the true professionalism, dedication and focus of our first responders. We have been kept safe because of their efforts. When we look around our nation, we witness a superior level of protection provided by our police and fire and emergency services, by the people on whom we rely on a daily basis.

At the outset of this global health emergency there were grave fears the virus would enter our correctional facilities with devastating consequences. Those devastating consequences would be particularly felt by our correctional officers—those officers who contribute to the safety, the peace and good order of those correctional facilities. However, we have been fortunate in that this has not happened in Queensland. That is a triumph—a triumph due to the dedication of our correctional officers, a triumph of their planning and foresight and their unflinching discipline.

The commitment of the Queensland Corrective Services team has been remarkable in forward planning and its ability to react in a flexible and creative way to the challenges posed by the pandemic. If honourable members have a look around the world they will see the consequences of poor planning in relation to correctional facilities, which have truly been devastating. In the United States thousands upon thousands have been impacted. Middle Eastern countries simply released their prisoners because they could not manage the impact of the pandemic on correctional populations. Even in New South Wales they released prisoners early to minimise risk. None of that has happened in Queensland.

Right now we do not have community transmission of the virus in Queensland. How does that translate internationally? One country just recorded over 200,000 new cases in one day. Worldwide over 600,000 new COVID cases have been diagnosed on a daily basis in the last week. This is a tragedy. Those saddening figures underline the remarkably effective approach Queenslanders have adopted in responding to this epidemic.

The extension of the emergency powers in this bill provides an abundantly sensible approach. What we have witnessed in Queensland is the ability of all Queenslanders to respond to a crisis. We have experienced many natural disasters before and we are used to tough times here in Queensland. We know how to dig deep and do the right thing, and that is what we have seen during COVID. Just as we respond to floods, cyclones and fires, no matter the challenges that are thrown at us, Queenslanders know how to deal with adversity.

Our defining characteristic as Queenslanders is that we are a team. No matter the challenge, Queenslanders stand shoulder to shoulder with each other, and that is certainly what we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Right now Queensland is safe when it comes to COVID-19 thanks to the efforts of Queenslanders and the efforts of our police, fire and emergency services volunteers, officers and staff and their commitment to one another. I commend the bill to the House.