




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 25 February 2021

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Wellcamp Airport, Quarantine Facility

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (2.38 pm): I rise to speak on an issue that is causing a great deal of concern and division in the greater Toowoomba region. It will come as no surprise that I am referring to the COVID-19 quarantine facility to be located at Wellcamp Airport. Recently I met with representatives from the Wagner group and heard about their plans for the construction of the facility and their role in the management of the facility. The Wagners explained that international arrivals would land at Wellcamp, disembark from the aircraft and be transferred by a bus to the proposed 1,000-bed quarantine facility where they would go through the usual customs declarations and medical checks. They would then be escorted to their respective rooms for the required two weeks of quarantine. May I say at this point that that is far more information than I have received from the Premier's office or from any representative from the state government, despite being the local state member. We discussed various other aspects of the facility's design: water requirements, sewerage, garbage, food preparation and so on. However, John Wagner clearly stated that the medical obligation and accountability is the government's responsibility and he could not speak on their behalf.

It is not in doubt that the Wagner group has the capacity and capability to construct the facility to whatever standards are required; it has a proven track record. The question is around the management of the facility by the state government. It goes without saying that there will be cases of COVID-19 in the proposed Wellcamp facility, including the UK and South African strains. Where will these people be hospitalised? If they are to be taken to the Toowoomba Base Hospital, this would place added pressure on its already stretched capacity. What happens if there is a transmission to a staff member or member of the public?

Toowoomba attracts people from Moree to Kingaroy, Charleville to Gatton and all places in between for medical appointments, education at boarding schools, shopping, accountancy and legal appointments, among other things. The potential impact on a much larger area than just the Toowoomba Regional Council precinct is very real.

The residents of the Toowoomba region, South-West Queensland and north-west New South Wales have reason to be concerned and need answers. Instead, we are seeing reports in the media that the Premier has determined that this facility will be built regardless of public concern. The *Brisbane Times* of 23 February 2021 states—

Queensland's Premier has ordered the federal government to just get on with it and approve the proposed facility.

We saw the Deputy Premier in a spat with the New South Wales and federal governments over a \$30 million quarantine bill, stating—

We will not be paying that bill, not while the Commonwealth refuses to endorse our plan for a national quarantine centre.

If the concerns of the public had been answered you could understand this gung-ho attitude, but at this point in time we have many questions and no answers. The government needs to come clean with the people in the Toowoomba region and provide some certainty.