




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2021

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.07 pm): As the previous speaker and our shadow minister alluded to, this is an extension—third time lucky—of the COVID-19 emergency measures. Without a doubt, it is absolutely necessary to have this further five-month extension of the COVID-19 legislation to 30 September. The reason it is absolutely necessary to have an extension of the COVID-19 legislation is the total incompetence of the Labor government to run health in Queensland.

I was with leading health professionals in Queensland last week who explained to me the absolute incompetence of the government to have health workers in our hospitals doing shifts treating quarantine people and then moving across to do work in other parts of the hospital, causing the hospital to shut down. It is absolute incompetence. That little exercise in incompetence by this Labor government led to an immediate shut down three days before Easter. Their incompetence caused the Gold Coast to haemorrhage millions of dollars. That is why this COVID-19 legislation is absolutely needed.

There is no doubt in my mind that there will be a recurrence of the government's failure to contain hotel quarantine measures. We do not have community transfer throughout Queensland. What we do have is people who come back from overseas in hotel quarantine being organised by—

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order, members! Interjections will cease or I will start warning members.

Mr STEVENS: I can almost guarantee that members opposite will let COVID escape into the community again—probably through the security workers. I understand that they are now not allowing health workers to work double shifts, from working with hotel quarantine patients to then working in another part of the hospital. Hello—that was not the right measure. That is health movement 101 at university. I understand that they have stopped that now. This is the incompetence of the Labor government through the health system. That is why this legislation needs to be extended to 30 September.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mermaid Beach, I draw you back to the long title of the bill.

Mr STEVENS: I understand that the incompetent Labor Premier in Victoria wanted a two-year extension to similar measures to what we have before us today.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, you will cease your interjections.

Mr STEVENS: The five-month extension that we have before us today is absolutely essential.

Mr Power: Have you had the vaccine yet?

Mr STEVENS: I take that interjection because I am lining up for my AstraZeneca vaccination next week. I am very supportive of the processes involved. I am going to my GP. He is going to charge me, and I am happy with that. People can get the vaccine at the medical centre at Robina. They do a great job.

I am 100 per cent supportive of this legislation for the reasons I have outlined. The committee did hear from some concerned people, particularly about the local government budget measures that our shadow minister will talk about later. They were worried that there might be an opportunity for some mayors or councillors to use this legislation to attempt measures outside of the normal budgetary process. It has not been used to this point in time.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Logan, you have had your go. Your interjections will cease as well.

Mr STEVENS: There were concerns that there might be an opportunity for mayors and councillors to use this rating opportunity to proceed further. However, we were assured through departmental officers that the minister has the final say on any of these matters and can stop any untoward or inappropriate money grab, if you like, from ratepayers to pursue a project or whatever—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, I am going to start warning people momentarily.

Mr STEVENS: I am very familiar with local government. I do not know if you know that I was the mayor of the Gold Coast at one stage.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Logan, you are warned under the standing orders.

Mr STEVENS: It is a very important measure. It has not been utilised to this point in time. It would be rare that councils would have an excuse to go back and hit ratepayers, particularly when we have the normal May, June, July rating period coming up. There should now be a way forward in their budgetary processes to not have to resort to this extra measure. I am quite sure that the presenters to the committee were not of the understanding as to why this measure was put in place.

An important part of this legislation is that local government elections can be held if there are issues to do with COVID outbreaks. I understand that we have had seven by-elections in local government since the COVID emergency started. It is appropriate that we cater for the fact that there may be a COVID outbreak again. I hope not but, as I said earlier, if it is not controlled appropriately then we could see mutant strains out in the community which will be very hard to contain. That is why we will probably come back again in September looking for a further extension, which, as Mr Speaker said, would be appropriate through the sunset clauses. We can do that in our September sittings if necessary.

One of the issues that I raised with the committee—and I will raise it again in the House—is that some people are using this emergency legislation to further their economic interests. I have some difficulty with that. I refer to the capacity of home delivery services to deliver alcohol, along with a burger and chips. They can deliver a sixpack. There are concerns within the community that some people might avail themselves more of their alcoholic habits and create problems through the utilisation of this legislation to allow home delivery of a cold sixpack along with their burger. I am sure that the advantages, particularly for small business that have suffered enormously throughout this whole 12-month COVID period—just over 12 months now—outweigh those concerns.

This legislation is required. I am happy to support this legislation. The LNP will be supporting the legislation in the interests of containing future outbreaks that may occur. I think they will probably occur—I hate to say it—unless there is better management by this government of the health issues I raised earlier in my speech today.

This legislation does, as it states in the report, affect some human rights and fundamental legislative principles. However, there is good reason for them to be affected. I am sure that people will understand the necessity of this legislation to assist in dealing with further outbreaks of this COVID-19 disaster. To be honest, we have been treated very well here in Australia because of the Morrison government's immediate shutdown of the international borders.

COVID is kicking up again around the world. It is mutating. It is a major problem. Talking about the Olympic Games is a furphy when we are still worried about getting to the Japanese Olympic Games this year.

