




Speech By  
**Rob Molhoek**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

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

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (2.21 pm): I would like to add my thanks to the committee secretariat and committee members for their work over the summer break, as mentioned by the member for Thuringowa. It was interesting to turn up in the second week in January and have to prepare for a hearing on that Friday. It was an important hearing and an opportunity to voice the concerns of Queenslanders and also investigate thoroughly the need for the extension of these powers.

I would also like to put on the record my thanks to Jeannette Young and the team in Queensland Health who have led the Queensland government response. I know for them it has been particularly challenging. It was a privilege to listen to her presentation and her responses and to hear some of the detail that she and her team went into in dealing with some of the challenges. I might add that there were some conflicting views in some of the submissions that were presented, and I will talk more about that in a moment.

On behalf of my colleagues, I would also like to express a special thanks to all of the emergency services workers and frontline staff—the nurses, doctors and first responders—who have had what could only be described as a fairly harrowing year. We heard in some of the submissions, particularly from the nurses' union and others, about some of the challenges of upskilling, training and managing PPE and other protocols during the early stages of the pandemic when so little was actually known. As the chair said, I add my thanks to all of those involved.

I particularly want to single out Mark Wheeler, the head of the Gold Coast police response. Mark certainly spent a lot of time down on the border with border management issues, and I know the member for Currumbin, who is the Deputy Speaker in the chair at the moment, had to deal with many challenges down there with her constituents, let alone without the normal annual twilight zone that everyone enters around daylight savings. I know that you and your team in the Currumbin office have had a lot to deal with. I want to pass on my thanks to Mark Wheeler, the police officers, the volunteers from the SES and other volunteers on the Gold Coast who contributed significantly to border control.

The shadow minister and member for Mudgeeraba outlined earlier the LNP's response—that is, we will not criticise or oppose the extension of these powers, although we do believe it is incumbent on the government to be more transparent and to better communicate as the new rules are enforced. The committee received about 113 submissions, and while those of substance from some of the major organisations—like the AMA, the nurses' union and some of the organisations that are very much at the front line of this—were very complimentary, there were members of the public and other interest groups that expressed concerns about the timing of some of the announcements and the lack of understanding and the rationale behind some of the announcements. There is an old saying in marketing—that is, communicate, communicate, communicate, and then when you think you have communicated enough, communicate just a little more.

It was pleasing as a member of the opposition to be invited to a briefing with the Chief Health Officer today. She outlined the program for Queenslanders, which is available online. I note that 47,000 first responders are to be vaccinated in the first wave of vaccinations, depending on the timing of the supply. They will be followed by all of those Queenslanders who are aged 70 plus, and then I get a look in in the next round—which I think they are calling 2a—which is perhaps April, May or a little further down the track for all those aged over 50.

**Mr Minnikin:** Surely not.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Thank you, member for Chatsworth. I will take that interjection but I am over 50. Once all of those aged over 50 are vaccinated, it will go to all other adults with the hope that the vaccinations will be completed by Christmas—although the Chief Health Officer did say that there was still more research and work to be done in respect of whether children should be vaccinated and when that should occur.

Needless to say, the pandemic has had a huge impact on Queenslanders, and I feel it is important to bring before the House concerns raised by the Mental Health Commissioner around how Queenslanders are coping and to give a few statistics. One of those is that, during the pandemic, Queenslanders and Australians actually consumed more alcohol. Nationally, we saw an increase of some 26 per cent, or \$3.3 billion, in extra alcohol sales during the pandemic. One of the concerns that was raised by Caterina Giorgi from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education in Australia is that there has been some significant predatory marketing tactics undertaken by some online businesses and some of the major retailers of alcohol in Australia over the last year. I would suggest to the House that, beyond this legislation, at some point we should be looking at adopting some of the legislation that other states are now considering around home delivery and digital marketing tactics undertaken by retailers of alcohol online.

In December alone, retail stores around Australia—65 per cent of which are owned by Coles and Woolworths, I might add—turned over almost \$2 billion, making it the highest earning month in Australian history. There are some significant challenges there. In the Mental Health Commission's *Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan: 2018-2023*—and these statistics are a few years old—it was concerning to see that one in five Queenslanders over the age of 14 actually drink alcohol at risky levels. I suspect that if we had more current statistics available to us we would probably be a little alarmed at just what that has looked like over the past 12 months. The government's response to COVID needs to dig deeper in terms of how we deal with mental health, alcohol and other drug addictions.

We heard some other statistics from the Mental Health Commissioner that I thought were quite interesting. During the pandemic we saw a 20 per cent increase in calls to triple 0 in respect of mental health issues, and I think that is concerning. We saw an 11 per cent increase in the presentation of people struggling with mental health issues to emergency departments across Queensland. Queenslanders are feeling the pain and the strain of this. We saw a 24 per cent increase of children's calls to Kids Help Line and we saw through that a 21 per cent increase amongst 12- to 18-year-olds calling for greater support and looking for more information.

During the public hearings we had the opportunity to ask a lot of questions. I will be honest; there were two lines of questioning that we thought we would run. One was going hard and asking lots of very challenging questions and the other was to perhaps take a slightly more conciliatory approach, which is the approach that I took on the day.

**Ms Boyd:** What happened on the day?

**Mr Minnikin:** Something happened on the road to Damascus!

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I am not taking those interjections. The rationale for our questioning was the belief that Queenslanders deserved to see the full health advice and all of the reasons behind some of the decisions. Of course, that hearing came very briefly after that snap lockdown of three days, which was inconvenient but understandably necessary. I think Queenslanders rightly want to have access to the information and reasons. They want to know what is behind the decisions that are being made.

We did hear in some of the submissions real concerns around human rights. It was pleasing to hear from the Human Rights Commission that, while they have had an increase in complaints, they have been managing and dealing with those in a fairly meaningful manner. While there were some concerns raised, they did not believe there were any significant breaches of human rights throughout the process of last year.