




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.04 pm): I rise to speak to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. At the outset, I will acknowledge that the LNP will not oppose this bill and the extension of provisions outlined within. I respect that the extension of these provisions will enable the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers the necessary powers to limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland.

The bill extends the expiry dates of the following provisions until the end of the day on 30 September 2021 and also aligns the expiry dates for all the amendments made to health portfolio legislation: the Governor in Council to extend the declared public health emergency for up to 90 days; increased powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland; the chief executive to delegate their powers to the Chief Health Officer or a person with expertise or experience in public health issues and improving the operation of the provisions of emergency officers (medical) to support the Queensland government's response to COVID-19; and a person to be required to enter hotel quarantine at their own cost.

With the passing of this bill, the necessary powers to safeguard Queensland against COVID-19 are provided. We respect that the health advice must be followed, and the LNP is unequivocal on that matter. We respect, and we will follow, the expert medical advice. In the submissions received by the committee there is a prevailing sense and acknowledgement, particularly from key industry groups and peak bodies, that the medical advice must be followed. There is also a strong sense that with the extension of these provisions may come the need for further sacrifices on behalf of Queenslanders.

The LNP understands that, when elements of these provisions are enforced, the social and economic impact can be devastating. We have seen that pain in all corners of the state. Queenslanders have lost a lot to COVID-19. The LNP is acutely aware of this, and so too should all members of the chamber. The LNP know that all Queenslanders want to be kept safe from COVID-19 and that the medical advice must be followed. With that said, I do wish to make some remarks on the government's communication of restrictions with Queenslanders and the transparency of the decision-making process. I do this in the spirit of constructive criticism and in the hope that this will be improved in the future should harsh restrictions ever be required again.

I do have concerns with how the government communicates the message to Queenslanders and sharing how the decision is made to impose or to lift these restrictions. The LNP has consistently called for releasing the advice the government receives. We will continue to do so, and this is the reason why: it will allow Queenslanders to know why hard decisions are being made. Being open and transparent with the advice takes out the uncertainty and the guesswork for Queenslanders. It means that businesses and families can plan ahead. It means that Queenslanders can have confidence in the decisions they make, whether it is business or their personal life.

In their written submission to the parliamentary Health and Environment Committee, the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland very simply put, 'The criteria and process for lifting lockdown restrictions were ... unclear.' I agree with them. I understand the need to set lockdown laws, and that is governed by the expert medical advice, but without knowing what criteria needs to be met before imposing or lifting a lockdown creates undue stress on people far and wide. I do not think it is too much to say that Queenslanders should know the criteria; they deserve to know.

In the recommendations included in their submission, the CCIQ made the point that greater consultation with industry representative bodies is necessary before imposing new restrictions. That point is something the LNP has consistently heard from all different corners of the state, and it has merit. Again, it comes down to the government being able to communicate their decision-making clearly and rationally to Queenslanders, without shock or surprise.

Queenslanders deserve better than an announcement on breakfast TV made on a whim that the borders will reopen or close. There must be transparency in the process. Queenslanders all over the state have spent many long weeks and months apart from the family and friends since March 2020. These situations are made all the more difficult not knowing when domestic borders will close or reopen. I myself have not seen any of my children who live in Victoria and New South Wales for more than 12 months. With my own circumstances put to one side, making the advice publicly available would give people the confidence to book or delay travel if they knew the criteria for opening or closing the border. It would save a lot of heartache and it would let people appropriately plan. I genuinely feel for those who have been impacted by this, as it has impacted my own family as well.

Hopefully, as the Chief Medical Officer has foreshadowed, border closures may soon come to an end with the rollout of the vaccine now commenced. There are also still questions to be answered over how the Hotel Grand Chancellor hotel quarantine breach occurred. Yes, the government has released a report put together by the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Health, but how the virus was able to escape still remains a mystery.

This point also goes to the government's on-again off-again quarantine camps. There are people in parts of the state who have been left feeling extremely anxious at the thought of these facilities being built in their communities without knowing what processes and controls will be in place to stop the virus escaping again. We heard that the government put together a dot point plan for the Commonwealth to review, but Queenslanders are still left in the dark with respect to how a facility like this might function. I can understand the anxiety that some in the community feel when the government has not been open about how the virus escaped hotel quarantine in January. The expert medical advice will dictate whether or not these facilities are suitable or not. As things stand, it appears to be a case of the government picking up a problem and putting it somewhere else should these quarantine facilities be built elsewhere.

On the subject of communication or lack thereof, I wish to address disgusting and alarmist comments made in this chamber yesterday by the member for Greenslopes. In his contribution to the appropriation debate, when referring to me the member said—

She gives comfort to the anti-vaccination movement when she comes into this place and peddles the line that there will be inequity in access to COVID-19 ...

This type of comment from the member for Greenslopes is both appalling and disturbing. Given that the member is also a nurse, I find it totally unconscionable and irresponsible that he would even think to say such a thing. People on both sides of this chamber should know better than to give oxygen to vaccine conspiracies and anti-vaccine movements, but clearly the member for Greenslopes does not. Yesterday in my contribution to the debate on the vaccine rollout I said:

I urge those opposite to do the right thing and make sure these vaccines are spread equitably across this great state so that all Queenslanders have the best chance of a healthy 2021, reunited with their families and friends.

How one could possibly draw the inference that my comment 'gives succour' to the anti-vaccination movement is beyond me. I made the point that I, like many Queenslanders, hope that the vaccine is rolled out as quickly and equitably as possible. In his remarks the member spoke about destroying confidence in the vaccination process. Sadly, the only person doing damage to that process is the member himself by making such irresponsible statements. I have written to the Speaker about my concerns over the member's comments, which are entirely inappropriate and simply untrue. I believe that he has wilfully misled the House and is seeking to score cheap political points over an issue that is far too serious for that.

As parliamentary representatives it is incumbent on us to ensure our remarks are accurate and maintain public confidence in the state's rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. With commentary like this from its own members there is no wonder so many in the community think the government's messaging around COVID-19 restrictions needs improving. On top of improved communication and improved

transparency also comes the need to apply restrictions consistently. When thinking about celebrity exemptions from hotel quarantine, it hardly seems fair that the average Queenslander is forced to wait 14 days in hotel quarantine but Hollywood stars do not. If we are really all in this together, as the Premier has said, then we must truly be all in this together. It should not matter if you are Matt Damon or Matt from Mudgeeraba: there should not be a rule for some and not for others. It is the government's duty to apply these rules fairly and consistently.

Our message on this side of the chamber is simple: we respect the expert medical advice and we will not stand in the way of that advice. However, the LNP believes that it is incumbent on the government to be more transparent and to better communicate when new restrictions are in force. When they are in force they should be applied consistently and fairly.