




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

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.39 pm): Today I rise to make a contribution to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021. The primary focus of the bill is to allow the government to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks through enabling Queensland Health to undertake the following: one, increase the powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland, including by issuing directions to require physical distancing, restrict movements and gatherings, require persons to quarantine or self-isolate and implement other containment measures; two, authorise the sharing of confidential information for contact tracing; three, encourage compliance with quarantine requirements, border restrictions and other public health directions by providing appropriate penalties for contraventions; four, increase the period for which a regulation may extend a declared public health emergency from seven to 90 days; and, five, enable fees to be charged for costs associated with the mandatory quarantine of persons in government provided accommodation.

In essence, this bill allows the government to continue with its strategy to manage its response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is for this reason that the LNP will not oppose this bill. First and foremost, the LNP wants to protect Queenslanders from COVID-19. The LNP understands 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. This bill and the others which have gone before it, sharing similar titles, are arguably some of the most impactful laws which this chamber has and will debate for some time. Their implications are far reaching and are felt in every corner of this great state. They impact every Queensland family and every Queensland business. All of us in this place must remember that.

The last time similar laws were debated was in the first quarter of this year. Some things are still the same, but many have changed. The position which Queensland now finds itself in is very different to when this House last debated similar provisions. At that point in time the vaccine rollout here in Queensland had yet to begin in earnest. The experiences and lessons learned internationally from other countries that had begun their vaccination effort were not yet known. Soon enough in Queensland we will have access to an ever-increasing supply of vaccine which will be supplied from three different pharmaceutical manufacturers. I want to take a moment to remind Queenslanders that the vaccine offers our ticket out of this situation. It is safe and it is proven to work and I myself am now fully vaccinated. I urge anyone who has not had theirs to take action. Now is the time. Ring your GP. Visit the pharmacy. Make an online booking through Queensland Health. Roll up your sleeves and get the jab. With that said, Queensland now has its opportunity to transition away from how we have been living for the past 18 months. The vaccine offers us that opportunity.

Without taking our eye off the ball, now is the right time for Queensland to start looking to the future. It is the responsibility of the government to provide a step-by-step road map grounded in expert advice that shows Queenslanders the path out of this pandemic. We have long been told that we are

all in this together. If we are, Queenslanders should know what the plan is. If the advice the state government is receiving differs from the national plan, then Queenslanders ought to know. That is not controversial; that is fair and proper and most will agree.

Given these changing circumstances and with our access to the vaccine, the LNP will move a number of key amendments. The LNP will move a series of amendments which would see the extraordinary powers given to the government and Chief Health Officer expire on Friday, 10 December 2021. At the outset, let me say that that does not mean that they cannot be extended if the situation requires it. Another amendment to the bill proposed by the LNP would see the expert health advice received by the state government which is used as the rationale for implementing public health directions released publicly. The amendment would see that the medical advice is published on the Department of Health's website.

The government will cry foul and make this sound like the LNP is trying to defy the health advice and that we do not listen to medical experts. That could not be further from the truth. These amendments are not about that at all and if those opposite try to peddle that view then they are denigrating the public discourse on this issue. The amendments put forward an aspirational target for the transition away from restrictions. They also seek to increase the level of transparency in government decision-making so that all Queenslanders can understand why certain restrictions or mandates are imposed.

The date of 10 December 2021 has been chosen as it will provide the Queensland parliament with the option and the flexibility to extend the powers if circumstances dictate that that is what is required. The final parliamentary sitting week of 2021 runs from 30 November through to 2 December. This would allow the parliament to debate and pass a new bill allowing for an additional extension prior to the provisions expiring if expert medical advice determined it was necessary. Let the parliament come back and extend these powers if necessary. Let the parliament do its job. After all, as elected representatives that is our job and that is what these amendments are all about. It is not extreme nor is it wrong for these laws to be debated again before the year's end. It would be fair and proper to review the powers as our state moves towards an 80 per cent vaccination rate in December. Another check and balance by the Queensland parliament is not an assault on these powers. It is responsible and appropriate oversight which all Queenslanders expect of all members in this chamber.

I want to take the time to acknowledge the sacrifice of Queenslanders up and down our state. The LNP understands that when elements of these provisions are enforced the social and economic impact can be devastating, and it is. As I touched on earlier, the consequences have been far reaching, and that point is not lost on us. By extending these powers, it means loved ones and friends are separated. It means that businesses can be left without customers, without income. It means livelihoods are lost and sometimes, tragically, lives. We do not want to see these restrictions last a second longer than they need to, and it is not because the LNP defies the health advice. If those opposite try to peddle that view, it is shameful. Rather, it is because lives and livelihoods depend on these laws receiving constant attention and review.

We have heard heartbreaking stories of businesses going to the wall, families separated, staff retrenched. We know the seriousness of the threat that COVID-19 poses, but we must also consider the consequences—the consequences on our economy, on our people's personal finances, on the social fabric of Queensland and, most importantly, on the health and in particular on the mental health of Queenslanders. To not even talk about them and to not even debate them would be wrong, and that must be acknowledged. There are people who have suffered for the greater good and their voices should be heard.

Finally, I want to talk about transparency. It is incumbent on the government to be more transparent and to better communicate when new rules are enforced. Releasing the advice that the government receives will allow Queenslanders to know why hard decisions are being made. It means that businesses and families can also plan ahead. The LNP has long advocated for the medical advice to be released, for communication to be improved and for the decision-making process to be more transparent and consistent.

Without a transparent and consistent process, people are left confused and uncertain. Look no further than the NRL entourage coming to Queensland this week. We need to restore confidence. That can be done by letting Queenslanders know how and when decisions are made. That is why the LNP will move an amendment stipulating that the health advice is released. I have circulated the amendments proposed by the LNP in my name which I have touched on throughout this contribution. I look forward to those amendments being discussed during the consideration in detail of the bill.