




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (4.22 pm): I will make a brief contribution to this latest COVID-19 emergency response bill. I think most members of this House very much look forward to the day when we no longer have to speak to legislation related to this pandemic, but, for the moment, we all know just how much COVID-19 continues to dominate the way we live and why it is so important to be ready for the rapidly changing nature of this virus. We are lucky in so many ways when it comes to where we are at with this pandemic—with our remote geography and fast closure of international borders over a year ago now giving us a massive head start on the horrific experience of so many other countries. We are so fortunate to have been able to avoid that.

This bill includes necessary and appropriate moves to extend the emergency measures in place for a further five months, particularly because we know how quickly outbreaks can take hold. It is imperative at those times that relevant department, services and businesses can respond swiftly and appropriately to them. I will not repeat much of what has already been said, but I agree that many of these measures are sensible and sound. They rightly allow the government to adapt to the circumstances of the virus as it changes while not being too overbearing. I will flag the contributions to the committee by the Queensland Law Society and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland which pointed out that there are a number of measures which should be considered for permanent adoption.

Innovation and adaptation are one of the very few positive outcomes of this virus. It has forced governments and, to an even greater extent, businesses to improve their use of technology and to modernise their processes. The CCIQ referred to this leading to government that operates in a more business-friendly way, with more rapid decisions being made and greater flexibility for access to things like meetings and in executing documents.

The Queensland Law Society shared at the public hearing—

We also note that some of the measures introduced in response to COVID have had an enormous practical impact in improving access to justice, particularly for those who cannot easily travel to execute documents. The process to implement these measures as a response to COVID was necessarily urgent and we support a comprehensive and considered review of these measures with a view to retaining beneficial measures permanently after an appropriate period of consultation. We would ask for that consultation process to start as soon as possible so that by the end of six months, if as we would all hope the legislation does not need to be extended, those permanent changes can be ready to take place at that point.

I take the same view. The pandemic has forced some areas of government into the 21st century—a century that we are all well into by now. We need better regulations, more consistent, business-friendly decisions and greater accessibility for people in remote areas or facing sickness and disability that may keep them at home.

Even when it comes to simply signing legal documents, we have the technology now to enable that to be done remotely. Such a measure could be easily brought in permanently. Similarly with remote access for meetings, businesses have been doing this for years. There is no reason government cannot adapt to a more flexible approach going forward. I still find it extraordinary that it is only through this emergency legislation that a school P&C can meet electronically.

We are a year into this so surely the government should have some idea of what changes should be brought in permanently. The progress unfortunately has been slow. One big example of that more broadly is the Check In Qld app which only appeared a year into the pandemic and will only become mandatory for hospitality businesses from the start of next month. We should have had that operational early last year rather than relying on businesses to develop their own systems.

It is possible to make government easier to access. New South Wales has really shown this during the pandemic. Their government's app is a one-stop government shop which includes digital licences and the excellent Dine & Discover vouchers to help their hospitality sector recover. People can also pay their car registration, fines and demerits through the one app. Queensland has struggled with going digital and making government more innovative, but this pandemic where so many things have been forced to go this way is the chance to do it better.

Another example in my area is the smart ticketing trial on our beloved light rail system. That only includes Mastercard and American Express and only allows people to purchase adult tickets. I really would not have thought it would be that difficult to get a digital go card option, particularly for concessional card holders. We have a chance to modernise. I ask the government to bring these systems and processes up to speed, working through the legislative changes as needed.

COVID has forced us to look at things differently. We are all getting used to adapting to the constantly changing landscape of restrictions and closures. Businesses are reducing their commercial tenancy footprints and allowing for more flexible work at home arrangements to continue permanently. That is probably why literally everyone is moving to the Gold Coast—places like Currumbin, Mermaid Beach, Labrador and Parkwood, which are great suburbs. That is why everyone is wanting to call the Gold Coast home. There is no better place to call home. Government is no different, and work needs to be done on deciding what changes should be permanent.

To wrap up, I put on record my thanks to everyone who works at my electorate's largest employer—Gold Coast Health and the Gold Coast University Hospital—for their outstanding professionalism handling the front line of this virus, even treating Tom Hanks around a year ago. To all of our fantastic small businesses who have been on such a roller-coaster ride over the last year and to everyone in our community who has stepped up: thank you.