




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Coronavirus, Policy

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.35 pm): We have battled here in the chamber over a number of situations relating to border closures and exemptions that as MPs we had no say in. This month has delivered relief, with some of our residents now in home quarantine after months stuck over the border. However, many more of our constituents need to be allowed home, including teenagers who remain stranded in great distress. The date for the reopening of our border—17 December—has been announced and we are thankful on behalf of so many. However, valid questions have been raised that need answering urgently as our businesses and residents prepare for this reopening, including around mandatory vaccinations and vaccinated-only venues.

Firstly, what are the legal implications for businesses with some of these directives, including the exclusion of Queenslanders unvaccinated, without a federal or state government mandate or directive in place? Understandably, businesses are concerned about the implications—legally and morally—as well as the impacts on their staff. Could they be sued for refusing access and service? Do they face the prospect of further anger from customers, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated? This is unfair on them as it is leaving a decision to these businesses that should have been determined if not at a national level then at least at the state level or not at all.

In addition, how do they deal with what may be indirect discrimination as outlined in various anti-discrimination and disability acts if they do not make reasonable adjustments for those with adverse physical or mental conditions? How do they enact processes to handle this? What about WorkCover and business insurance impacts? Then they have the issue of the Privacy Act relating to the storage and sighting of individual health identifiers which have strict regulations surrounding them. Who will monitor all of this? Will we continue to source from our fatigued police resources that have had to accommodate border and hotel quarantine duties over many months, leaving diminished policing in some communities whilst domestic violence rises?

In amongst all of this is the ending of financial support for businesses come 17 December, when borders open. This is causing much angst when there has been no guarantee that there will be no further lockdowns or border closures. We must have either guaranteed support for both the business and their staff in the event of future lockdowns or no future lockdowns. Which is it?

Ultimately, what are the moral obligations for us as a society? To segment and isolate Queenslanders by denying access and service to those who cannot or choose not to vaccinate is deeply concerning and confronting to so many. What happens in communities where the facility or venue is the only one? What happens to businesses that have been hanging on a knife's edge for months, turning customers away when they cannot afford to? We as MPs should seriously think about this. Informed choice is to be encouraged—not punished—in developing knowledgeable, responsible and compassionate individuals and communities.

Over many months there has been a pandemic of misinformation and omission of information. Due to a lack of response from governments, my office researched many claims ranging from potential human rights conflicts to discrimination. In addition, I interviewed Dr Ian Norton, from Respond Global, who has worked extensively on global disease outbreaks. This provided responses to my residents' questions on the virus, vaccines, alternative therapies and preventive measures. These have been invaluable for those who have become disorientated by what may seem on the surface credible information and sources but are not, with concerns amplified by recent court actions. With conflicting information coming out daily, more questions arise for Queenslanders, including: why has an Australian vaccine had to seek crowd funding; what is the appropriateness of mandating vaccinations; and where is the fine line between informed choice and coerced 'choice'?

We are one country and need unity and clarity. This includes a national approach regarding legal implications or protections for businesses on government determinations, clarification on claims from our own vaccine developers and consistent criteria on travelling between states. Currently Queenslanders who have booked interstate trips are now having travel companies postpone these journeys to next year due to inconsistencies. However, international travel is on the horizon. Our communities and businesses need answers to avoid further confusion and anger in the coming weeks. Also, determinations which segment or isolate our society by vaccination status or labelling as 'vaxed' or 'not vaxed' need to be reconsidered as this is not who we are or what we aspire to and nor does it address vaccine complacency or hesitancy.