




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 15 September 2021

MOTION

Queensland Border Restrictions

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.34 pm): I rise to speak on the motion for one good reason: I was hoping that we could have a debate in this House and talk about those Queenslanders who are stuck in other jurisdictions. I have some sympathy about the decisions that are made in this difficult time, but one thing we cannot ignore is those real stories. I am sure every member in this House has constituents who are stuck—

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I will not take interjections because I am more concerned about how important it is that Queenslanders get home. It may be that this debate could have been about how we could do better and how we could show respect to those making exemption decisions. I think it is also important that we talk about real stories about real Queenslanders, particularly in my electorate, to put a human face to this issue.

I want to talk about Alison and Ben. Alison is desperate to get her son home to the Burnett. They live in Childers. He is stuck at the university in Armidale on his own. He is the only student left in his accommodation wing. Over months Ben has applied for multiple exemptions, and all were denied.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock.

Mr BENNETT: I will take the interjection from the member for McConnel, who is consistently interrupting. This is a serious issue. I am trying to talk about my constituents and I would appreciate—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member resume your seat. Member for McConnel, I ask you to cease those conversations and quarrelling across the chamber. I cannot quite work out, due to the masks, who you are quarrelling with but, whoever it is, can you cease as well.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! That is not an invitation for further interjections.

Mr BENNETT: I want to highlight the issue with Ben and what he would have to go through to get home. He would have to go to Sydney and he would have to fly to Brisbane and quarantine for two weeks. This is a uni student desperate to get home. There are a lot of risks around his mental health.

I want to talk about Brad whose two kids arrived in Brisbane from a non-hotspot in New South Wales. They had their border passes all correct, but at the airport the border police made them fly straight back to Sydney to fill out more forms. He had to book two new flights and all three arrived back in Brisbane. The issue is that they are looking for compensation, and for the last couple of months we have had no response from Queensland Health in terms of restitution.

I want to talk about Gemma. She flew to Melbourne after receiving a desperate call from child protection services in relation to a domestic violence issue. Upon receiving the call, Gemma rushed to Melbourne and assisted her daughter who was escaping from DV. After some time, Gemma was

comfortable to come back to Avondale, just north of Bundy. She booked a ticket and flew into Brisbane on 7 September. Unfortunately, Gemma did not realise that the border had been closed while she was in transit. She quickly filled out an application at the airport, and on it goes. She is back in Melbourne. She had to fill out more forms, stay three nights and now she is stuck in limbo in Melbourne being escorted all over the countryside by well-meaning police, wasting their time as well as everyone else's.

I am trying to get my head around the costs associated with this. Emily came to talk to me. In August her father became unexpectedly ill. She lives in Tweed Heads. She applied for an exemption to enter Queensland to see her dying father up our way. The exemption was finally granted, but sadly it was too late and her father had passed away. The issue then was that she was stuck across the border and left to grieve by herself, as the first exemption was no longer valid. For days she waited for a response and it finally came. I am told that the exemption was granted after she had to cough up an alleged \$10,000 to get that said exemption.

I want to talk about Teagan. Teagan and her partner have been stranded in Moree for weeks. They travelled interstate to provide end-of-life care for Teagan's partner's mother. After receiving multiple rejections to their exemption requests, Teagan and her partner applied for a Queensland border declaration on the understanding that they, as schoolteachers, would be considered to be essential workers. Upon arriving at the border, they were promptly turned around and they are still stuck in some dodgy accommodation in Moree—not that I am saying anything about Moree.

Today I got a call from the federal member for Parkes. Warwick who lives in Woodgate is stuck in Lightning Ridge, which is in the Parkes electorate. The member for Parkes is really worried about Warwick's mental health because this gentleman cannot navigate the requirements around what an essential worker is and his health is deteriorating. We have a lot of politicians all over the country trying to do the right thing. That is why I think debating this motion was going to be important if we could have kept to the original motion and showed real empathy and respect to those people in our electorates—and all of you have such people—who are now caught up in these border issues.

If we could acknowledge that it is not as easy as it should be, I would have expected the motion to continue to be debated instead of being deflected to other issues that are not important. These people from my electorate who are stuck in New South Wales and other jurisdictions are important. It is incredibly frustrating. I give a shout-out to my staff who have to try to navigate these really emotional and serious issues. They wear their hearts on their sleeve every day as we deal with this continuing issue.

We can do better. I ask the minister to put some effort in. We can all work together to make sure those vulnerable people who are stuck in other jurisdictions through no fault of their own can come home to enjoy the people they love and the area they love, which Queensland.