




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (4.14 pm): It is unfortunate that the government has limited time for the debate of this legislation, given the extent of its impact on the lives and freedoms of honest Queenslanders. There is no doubt that there are many members in this House who quite rightly want to debate aspects of this legislation and its effects on their communities. Whether they are representatives of border communities affected by it, those in tourism destinations, or those who are in or close to the centre of Brisbane, they want to debate this legislation and the impact it is having on their families and their communities—communities that are looking for certainty and a plan from this government to end the need for this type of legislation. What we want, surely, as a parliament and as a community, is an end to this type of executive authority that seemingly arbitrarily curtails liberties and freedom to live our lives without the types of Big Brother controls far more typical of despotic regimes.

Government members interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: It takes a while for them to understand. Of course vaccinations are essential, and in this regard I fully support efforts to increase the vaccination rates, having successfully survived both AstraZeneca doses without even a sore arm—no hesitation, no excuses, no worry about the flu or a dog bite or a tetanus needle. Just get on and get it done.

Mrs D'Ath interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: We hear the old anti-vaxxer over there who did not want to take one and only took one when the media said, 'What's going on here? Why hasn't the minister got the vaccination? They are telling everyone else to do it.' It was a case of 'do as I say, not as I do'. Then we had the Premier waffle on with the excuse about having to travel or the dog bit her or she was biting a dog or something—I cannot remember what it was. It was equally disbelieved by everyone.

Ms Pease: Come on, Tim. You're better than this.

Mrs D'Ath: You should be better than that.

Mr NICHOLLS: Taking advice about being better than anything from those opposite is the last thing anyone wanting to advance the cause of democracy in this state would want to do! This is a government that hides behind the veil of secrecy every time something goes wrong. How long did it take for the Griffin report to come out? Why are we still waiting for a report into Frankie Carroll? Why are we still waiting for a report into the Brisbane South State Secondary College and its process? This government hides behind secrecy. That is why the debate about the need for this legislation is so important.

Success in opening our borders depends vitally on increasing vaccination rates. Success economically for the longer term relies on the government having a clear plan as to when borders will open, when lockdowns will be limited, when our businesses can reliably plan for the future and when Queenslanders can be assured that they will be able to come home to family and loved ones. This government, so far, has no such plan or, if it does, it is again keeping it secret.

Given the opportunity twice in question time today, the Premier failed to tell Queenslanders the plan of this government. She tried diversionary tactics and she tried the fear campaign, but not once did she say, 'This is what our plan will be.' Queenslanders are not foolish: they understand that the plan might need to change—they understand that the virus is mutating and changing—but they want to know that there is a plan, that there is a future, that there is a pathway forward. They need to be assured they will be able to come home to loved ones and to family. All question time today revealed was a Premier and a Treasurer who have a cheap fear campaign and no plan for lifting restrictions.

We will support this bill, as the shadow minister has indicated. We understand variations of COVID strains are still emerging and that the threat of the delta variant still remains. It is still important to be able to respond in accordance with health advice and best evidence. But importantly it is necessary to ensure that the response is consistent, is fair and is seen to be responding to the actual threat and not a political plaything used to entrench limits on our communities that would otherwise be unacceptable.

In April this year when we debated similar emergency extension powers I made the point that while the LNP considered the extension of five months reasonable, and we did, and acknowledged that further extensions would need to be brought back to this House for debate, and they are, the government should not anticipate ready agreement to any further extensions. This in fact repeated a statement that I made in the emergency legislation debate in December 2020—the first bill this parliament considered. I pointed out that while the coronavirus is still with us, and it will be for many years, we must adapt to this reality. I also pointed out that emergency legislation is no substitute for proper legislative reform and there is no good reason not to progress with changes that have broad support and that make life easier, particularly in the portfolio areas of Attorney-General and justice.

Decisions under this legislation have torn families and businesses apart. Here are a couple of examples. Constituents of mine serving in the Army Reserve have been training in New South Wales for five weeks. They were due to return home last week when on the day of departure they were told of the ban until 8 September. They have jobs waiting for them that they need to get to and they have families who have not seen them now for over six weeks.

An elderly couple are tragically separated. Mrs He, the wife, is stuck in Sydney and despite being fully vaccinated cannot get a return flight because of the Premier's arbitrary decision to close Queensland to Queenslanders. A husband is stuck in New South Wales after his employment contract came to an end and has no guarantee of being able to return home to his family because of the Premier's arbitrary decision to close Queensland to Queenslanders. Meanwhile, these people are forced to watch a Rugby League entourage of 100 people fly in on a chartered aircraft. The hypocrisy is galling to them. The inconsistency is appalling. The lack of compassion is astounding.

This legislation, as we are seeing and hearing every day in our electorate offices, has the effect of fracturing our civil society. The amendments proposed by the shadow minister are sensible and reasonable. They support the legislation. They support effective action being able to be taken by our authorities in accordance with advice. They are no substitute for having a plan, for telling Queenslanders what that plan is and in the event that further action is necessary and a further extension is necessary this House can do what its members were elected to do and that is come back and if necessary extend the legislation for a further period. To do any less is to abrogate our responsibilities, to not hold this government and executive government to account and to not ask the questions that our communities and many people rightly expect this government to answer that it has failed to do.