




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.53 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill. It is extraordinary for this place to give up its sovereignty over Queensland in any set of circumstances, but we find ourselves in extraordinary times and in extraordinary circumstances. Whilst I would normally be very cautious, the health emergency has been good reason to ensure that the parts of the Queensland government bureaucracy that need these powers have these powers.

I place firmly on the record my thanks and the thanks of everybody in the Toowoomba North electorate and Toowoomba generally to the doctors, nurses, police, paramedics, pathologists and everybody else who has been working on the front line not knowing if the situation they are dealing with right in front of them involves someone who may be infected. In Toowoomba thousands of people have been tested. They have been lining up in their cars and going through the process. The people working at the testing sites do not know whether or not the person in front of them is contagious. Our heartfelt thanks go to all of those people.

Obviously the vaccine changes things. By the time these powers expire, we will have been able to start measuring the impact of the vaccine on our communities, which is a good thing. However, I do have some concerns. Yesterday the Premier said—

All through this pandemic the government has made informing Queenslanders a priority. I believe part of Queensland's success in this pandemic has been because of good communication.

I would absolutely dispute that for the people of Toowoomba. At the moment there is a great deal of stress and nervousness being experienced by businesses, among individuals and in retirement homes because of the proposed quarantine facility that has been spoken about in my community. Many people in my community are not supportive of that quarantine facility, although some are supportive of it. We know that lots of people around Australia have taken the position of 'not in my backyard'. At the end of the day we are going to need a facility but the question becomes: should it be in Toowoomba or should we maintain the hotel quarantine system that we have? Over the period we have had just one serious breach although we do not yet know all of the facts of that case. I ask for there to be transparency and communication around that kind of breach.

In late January I sent a letter to the Premier asking for details so that I could reassure my community about the sorts of things that people have spoken to me about. I will table several letters. On 5 February I again wrote to the Premier. I did not get a response to my first letter or my second letter. On 12 February I wrote a third letter and within 15 minutes I received a response from the Premier's chief of staff stating—

I note the concerns raised on behalf of your constituents and I can assure you that the analysis of any specific options will include consideration of the health, safety and economic wellbeing of all relevant local communities.

That is fantastic, although it was three weeks late and followed a lot of publicity in my local community.

*Tabled paper:* Bundle of correspondence regarding a regional quarantine facility in Toowoomba [187](#).

I can tell the House that the impact is already being felt. Motels are receiving cancellations because people are concerned. People who have to drop their kids off at boarding school—and there are a lot of boarding schools in my electorate—are deciding that they will not stay in Toowoomba to do their regular shopping and catch up with friends. Instead they will run in, grab their child and leave because they are concerned that there may be an outbreak. Those concerns need to be taken seriously because they are having a real impact. People need reassurance.

The Premier has said, 'All through this pandemic the government has made informing Queenslanders a priority.' However, she has been deathly silent on this issue in Toowoomba. The people of Toowoomba are concerned. It is affecting jobs; people are not employing people. It is affecting investment; people are not making investments. A petition has started in Toowoomba stating that the quarantine facility is not wanted in Toowoomba. People are worried about reputational damage. They are worried about many things that could all be cleared up if the Premier was true to her word, but she is not. She is not communicating with any of the people in Toowoomba save the Wagner family.

There is no doubt that the Wagners have built a fine airport and there is no doubt that they would be able to build a quarantine facility. The questions are: can it be run safely for the community of Toowoomba, or will Toowoomba, which has a gross domestic product of just over \$25 million a week, face being shut down? If it is shut down, what compensation exists for all of the people there?

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I hear someone barking away on the other side about—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): Member, I ask that you adjourn the debate, please.



**Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.06 pm), continuing: Just before the break we were talking about the quarantine facility in Toowoomba and the anxiety it was causing in my community in terms of concern for people's businesses and, in fact for some people, their lives. We were also talking about the Premier and how she said she had been communicating transparently and openly. I have some questions for the Premier from the people of my constituency, Toowoomba North. When will the community be consulted on this quarantine facility? Senior ministers have come to Toowoomba but have not spoken to the people of Toowoomba. They have not answered any questions or given them any information about this facility. If there is a positive case that needs medical treatment, will the person go to Brisbane or be dealt with locally?

The medical fraternity in Toowoomba, both public and private, is very concerned about this. If an ambulance is used, will it be one from Toowoomba? Will that ambulance be taken out of circulation while it is cleaned? Will its paramedics have to self-isolate afterwards? These are questions being asked in my community and not answered by the Premier, despite her statement this morning, which goes some way to misleading the House, that communication has been good, open and transparent. There has been no communication about this quarantine facility in Toowoomba. How quickly will a positive case be picked up? People are asking me this question. Will sewage from the facility be tested? I was told by the Wagners when I had a briefing about the facility that that is possible. The petition exists in Toowoomba because people are scared and anxious. That has been created by the inaction of this government. They need to come and answer some questions for the people of Toowoomba.

If there is a fire, how will the fire be managed? Who will put out the fire? What will happen to the personnel who put out that fire? Where will people congregate as the fire is put out? These are genuine questions that people have which are causing anxiety and concern in my community. If there is some civil unrest in the facility, who will deal with that? How will it be dealt with? Where will the police come from? What kind of quarantining will they have to go through afterward? Will there be a penalty for a private provider or otherwise if there is a biosecurity breach? Will there be compensation to the people of Toowoomba, their businesses and livelihoods, if they are shut down because there is a breach of this facility? These are genuine concerns.

Open and transparent communication should be answering these questions, not leaving a town of 160,000 people so anxious. I have businesses such as motels that are receiving cancellations right now for the September holidays. People who were going to pick up their boarders and spend some time shopping in town have decided they are not coming. It is causing an economic impact right now. What will happen to the boarders if Toowoomba is locked down? Will they be allowed to go home or will they have to stay through the holiday period? These are genuine questions.

Who will manage the waste facility? How will that waste be processed? Will it go into the creek? These are genuine questions being asked. How will passengers leave the facility? Will they be transferred through Toowoomba? Will they be cleared through Toowoomba? People are concerned. There was an outbreak in the Illawarra after 16 days of quarantine. People are concerned about what that means. We have been told that there could be hundreds of thousands of overseas students coming through. It may well be a good thing for the education community in Australia but it will be very bad for the education community in Toowoomba if there is a breach. All these concerns can be alleviated with some good communication, with the minister and the Premier coming up to Toowoomba, talking to people and discussing this. If they did that, we would not have people chasing a petition and saying, 'We do not want it in Toowoomba.'

*(Time expired)*