




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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.45 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021. The important part of that title is ‘further extension’. I am concerned that the bill that is before us extends this too far. We have proposed an amendment, which I think is sensible. It does not stop us coming back into this House and carrying on these provisions. However, it does keep the government accountable and ensures we have a good hold on what is going on in our community. Let’s have a look at a couple of things that have been going on.

We have consistently been asking for the public health advice to be published. This is public health advice put together by people who are paid by the taxpayer. There is no reason for this to be secret. If the health advice is based on science and it is solid and it is what we should be doing, then publish it. There is absolutely no problem in publishing that sort of thing. There is no need for a veil of secrecy around this. If that were published, it would relieve some of the fear and anxiety out in the community. I think people out in the community at the moment are finding a great deal of mental health issues are starting to become apparent because of this COVID virus. I think it would be a good thing if people could understand why the health advice is in place because they are told where it has come from and what has happened.

I am concerned about the lack of a plan for the way out of here and I think our communities should be rightly concerned. I am also very concerned about the fact that we are creating more than one class of citizen here in Queensland. There are those people who have to abide by the rules and then there are those people who play sport, who are given exemptions, who are allowed to do other things.

Mr Harper: Tell us about following all the rules.

Mr WATTS: I will tell the member about following rules. I broke the rule. I took responsibility. I apologised to my community and I was appropriately fined, and that is exactly what should happen. What should not happen is we should not be chartering planes when there are family members stuck elsewhere who live in Queensland, who pay rates in Queensland, who have registration in Queensland but who cannot come home. It is not that there is a process that they must follow; they cannot come home. They are forbidden from entering the state. That I think is a serious problem and an overreach from this government and it should not be allowed. It just feeds the anxiety and the fear that people in my community have.

I think there are a couple of things that we need to look at. People’s lives are on hold. There are people who have missed their 21st or have missed engagements, weddings and funerals. All of these things are very important. That is one of the reasons I have been double-vaxed with the AstraZeneca. I would encourage other people to look at the science, talk to their doctor and follow their doctor’s advice in terms of vaccination because we need to find a way out of here. We cannot stay in this situation forever where our own citizens are banned from coming back to Queensland.

I just want to say a couple of other things. I want to know what the plan looks like. One of the key things is that it should be transparent. If it is going to be transparent, we should be publishing the health advice. It needs to be accountable, which means it needs to be brought back into this House so that it can be reviewed and talked about. That is the reason for not wanting to extend these powers too far into the future.

People should have confidence in it. That would require good communication and consultation. Coming up to Toowoomba and announcing what you are going to do without talking to anybody in Toowoomba, apart from the proponent who will make a profit from it, is not good enough consultation. I am really interested to find out from the government and would really love to see published the preparations we are making in terms of our medical supplies, our training of people and our building of facilities. In Toowoomba we do not have enough negative pressure rooms to deal with an outbreak. We do not have enough ICU facilities to deal with an outbreak. I should imagine that this is not dissimilar around the state.

A plan would make sure that we have some transparency and accountability and that we are prepared for a medical emergency. That would then give some confidence to the people of Queensland, removing some of their anxieties and fears—rather than simple two- and three-word slogans that are feeding those fears and causing anxiety, mental stress and suicides in our community.