




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.00 pm): I rise to contribute to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. It is just over two years since governments at all levels in Australia responded to the threat of COVID-19. The initial predictions sent a chill up the spine of many, and governments reacted based on the information they had. Queenslanders, like all other Australians, responded accordingly. Like a number of other members in this House, my family has not been immune from COVID—with my son contracting COVID last week. It is touching many of us across this state. The impact of government action at the state, federal and even local government level was huge. Restrictions meant long planned events were cancelled at a moment's notice. Celebrating a marriage or farewelling a loved one was thrown into chaos, but Queenslanders overwhelmingly did the right thing.

We are now in a very different position. More than 90 per cent of adults have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. We have moved past a multitude of contact types—where a casual contact of a close contact was treated similarly to a person who had actually contracted COVID-19. Today I am calling for this state government to repay the enormous efforts and the commitment made by Queenslanders. I am not calling for anything more than openness and honesty, and surely Queenslanders deserve that.

I will be supporting the amendments moved by my colleague the member for Mudgeeraba because they are practical, commonsense amendments that reflect the changing face of COVID-19 in Queensland. Firstly, the member for Mudgeeraba is a health professional. Regardless of the petty attacks by those opposite, Queenslanders support all of our health professionals, and that has been proven during this pandemic. Like all members on this side of the House, I believe that Queenslanders deserve to see the health advice. It is a very different time today than it was just over two years ago. Back then, many of us had never heard the phrase 'health advice' uttered so many times. We complied—in fact we did more than comply—and in my opinion Queenslanders went above and beyond day after day.

More than two years later, the health advice is still not available to the people who have sacrificed so much. It is easy for the minister to refer to an abundance of information when it comes to COVID-19, but surely it is not the responsibility of people who have done the right thing to track down that information. The Premier and the relevant ministers have relied on that health advice provided to them. That health advice was the basis of restrictions and mandates: restrictions that meant people could not say goodbye to a loved one, restrictions that meant people missed the birth of a family member, restrictions that led to heartbreak—heartbreak that Queenslanders faced in good faith based on health advice they had never seen.

At this time I would like to pass on my thanks to the many people who were dragged into that heartbreak—our health professionals, our emergency services and even the staff in our own offices who were confronted by people who felt lost but complied. I know that, like members in this House and

their staff, my staff were affected by the sadness, fear and frustration faced by constituents. I also place on the record my thanks to the staff in the Minister for Health's and the police minister's offices who provided assistance and guidance to both my staff and constituents, many times outside of work hours. While I may not agree politically with those ministers, I acknowledge the work of their staff and I thank them for their efforts.

No-one can deny that COVID-19 and the restrictions put in place by government have had a massive impact on people across the state. Like many members on this side of the House, I have spoken with small business owners, cafe owners and hoteliers who were struggling to keep their businesses afloat and their staff employed, and that has continued to this day. In their voices, I could hear the frustration and the fear that their life's work was all for nothing, but they complied. They made the massive changes to their operations and, in addition to suffering financially, they suffered personally.

At the core of all of this was the inconsistency in how those mandates were imposed and how they were enforced. Members on this side of the House are well aware of the challenges that communities in regional Queensland face when it comes to service delivery. In my electorate of the Burdekin, I have towns with under-resourced or even non-existent medical services. In my electorate we have schools with 10—yes, 10—outstanding staff vacancies, with many of these vacancies linked to vaccination mandates. Despite the huge challenges the staff at those hospitals and schools face while being disregarded by this government, they have done again what they always do—they have stood up for and stood by their communities during the COVID response.

The Burdekin electorate is home to a substantial part of the Bowen Basin. Like others throughout the electorate, the miners who live and work in that electorate have sacrificed based on the health advice. FIFO and DIDO workers have been unable to return home to see families due to travel restrictions, and the workers who live locally have had to contend with some of their co-workers simply being unavailable. Despite that, they have continued to keep the economy ticking over. Despite that, without the amendments moved by the member for Mudgeeraba, those people will not have access to the health advice that they have complied with despite the drastic effects it has had on their lives.

The second reason I am supporting the member for Mudgeeraba's amendments is oversight. As I mentioned, Queenslanders have not been given access to the health advice; instead, the Premier and senior members deflect to the current or the past Chief Health Officer whenever the questions get tough. There is no denying that the position of Chief Health Officer is crucial and deserving of respect, but in a democracy that does not mean that the position is immune from oversight. In recent months we have seen the importance of oversight when it comes to fighting corruption and to ensuring integrity in government. Sadly, it has taken that oversight and brave individuals to force this government to act on integrity, but oversight is not just about holding a government to account. Oversight is part of our democracy because oversight results in better legislation.

I will be supporting the amendments moved by the member for Mudgeeraba. Queenslanders have done the right thing and they deserve to be respected. They have sacrificed and they deserve good, solid health advice that is transparent. I call on all members to support the member for Mudgeeraba's amendments. To do otherwise is failing to acknowledge the sacrifice that Queenslanders have made. We need to see a clear plan going forward to provide that confidence and clarity that our community needs in these times of uncertainty. Is that too much to ask?