




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.38 pm): I start my contribution on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill by thanking the health workers across Queensland and, indeed, in my own electorate of Broadwater. They have been the brave heroes of recent times. They have worked under a system that was already under stress. COVID added pressure to that. They have done a mighty job and they must be thanked. For the sacrifices of Queenslanders; for those who have lost loved ones; for those who have lost businesses; for those who have had disconnections with family in Queensland, in Australia and across the globe, we thank you for your sacrifice.

The opposition has consistently asked responsible and measured questions throughout the pandemic. We asked the questions when the government with two hours notice locked Queenslanders out of their own state. We asked the questions when sporting entourages were allowed in but Queenslanders were locked out. We asked the questions about hotel quarantine when a little boy called Lenny was not given the dignity that he deserved. So it is today that we ask questions about hotel quarantine of a different variety. That question is about a commitment being made by the government that hotel quarantine ended in February when the truth is that it continued. Queenslanders were taken for a ride.

We are talking about \$500,000 a day to pay for empty hotel rooms at a time when the Wellcamp facility is being underused. There is nothing Queenslanders hate more than their money being wasted, and this is a \$26 million dodgy debacle—that is what this is—and it took this parliament to ask questions for the government to admit it. The government was refusing to be honest with Queenslanders that it was paying for rooms that were not used and meals that were never being delivered—hundreds of thousands of dollars, \$500,000 a day in fact for empty hotel rooms. That is two brand new ambulances per day being wasted by a government that is more consumed with how things look than how they are, that is so embroiled in an integrity scandal that it has forgotten how to govern with openness and decency and transparency.

Before I continue, I also thank all of those small business owners who have struggled during difficult times. We have been vocal in our support for them and for their staff—their brave staff who have not had the certainty that they need. Throughout it we have been adamant: get vaccinated. It is important; it matters. I wrote to the Premier early to ask her to get vaccinated with me to send a message across the political divide of how important it is. Make no mistake: the opposition has backed the AHPPC guidelines throughout the pandemic and we will continue to do so. Where restrictions are not covered by these, we support clarity and consistency and a plan to transition back to the freedoms people deserve. As an example, the government has been unable to explain how a show society can host a market without restrictions on a Thursday before its signature event and on a Tuesday after its signature event but not on the Saturday of the show. That makes no sense at all, and transparency matters to me

and it matters to Queenslanders. It has long been the opposition's position that the key to public confidence during a pandemic is clear and transparent decision-making. That is not new. That is fair and reasonable.

We have encouraged the government to trust Queenslanders with the information, just as other jurisdictions have done here in Australia and overseas. We have previously moved amendments to this effect and the government has voted them down. However, the opposition will be moving them again. These are targeted transparency amendments. We believe as an opposition these amendments are fair and reasonable. As we did when these powers were voted on last year, we will move amendments to this bill to increase transparency of decision-making and to provide proper parliamentary scrutiny to the decisions of the bureaucracy. They are simple. We want the time frame shortened to 31 May. Let the parliament decide what is required beyond this date after seeing the government's plan.

We want the advice received by the government from the Chief Health Officer released for all Queenslanders to see. We want proper parliamentary oversight of these powers because, as we have all acknowledged in this chamber, the powers are extraordinary. I am calling on the government to listen. I am calling on the government to be fair. I am calling on the government to be reasonable on this. In the same spirit of bipartisanship which gave rise to these powers two years ago, the government must accept that these transparency amendments which the opposition health spokesperson will be moving are valid.

Bipartisanship is not a one-way street. Bipartisanship is to observe. It is to listen. It is to acknowledge and act on something beyond the daily cut and thrust of this place. I say to the government: the opposition, the parliament, the Queensland people entrusted it with these laws. We all understood we needed them. It is now time for the government to return that trust. If we are to have laws like this in this place, we cannot accept that transparency, accountability and scrutiny are sidelined. That is not fair. Every non-government member in this place wants to see more transparency, accountability and scrutiny when it comes to these laws—members from all corners of the state, from all political spectrums. That does not happen often. It should send a powerful message to the government. That message is to be open, to be transparent, to be accountable and to be prepared to accept scrutiny.

It is no secret that I have been critical of the government's clear integrity failings in recent months. Those very principles of openness, transparency and accountability have been missing in the way this state has been run in recent times, so the criticism is justified. Again here in this bill those things are not present. We could only support this bill with these transparency amendments. This bill needs fair and reasonable checks and balances. It needs the addition of proper transparency measures because in its current state they are just not there. Any fair-minded Queenslander would agree. In my view, leadership is about listening to advice and being prepared to accept transparency and scrutiny when a decision is made. That is what each of us are here in this privileged position to do and we have been put here by our communities to do that, and that is what I believe our amendments provide.

We cannot just wave through a bill which will face no form of parliamentary scrutiny for six months. As it was, Queensland Health officials were only required to appear before the parliamentary committee for a solitary hour. That is why we are moving amendments to establish a parliamentary oversight committee and for health advice to be released publicly. The parliament can query and consider the advice given to the government. That way there can be proper parliamentary rigour and process around our public health response. That is fair. It is also why we are calling for 31 May to be the date these powers end. That gives the government two months to release a plan. The new plan can then be subjected to the scrutiny of a bipartisan committee—fair and reasonable. Should a new variant emerge and should the case numbers rise, we can implement powers in a bipartisan fashion just like we did back in 2020.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Member for Logan, cease your interjections.

Mr CRISAFULLI: The parliament can do its job. That is reasonable. What is not reasonable is for a government to expect a blank cheque without scrutiny. That is unreasonable. The pandemic has impacted the lives of Queenslanders to an extent we have never seen before. We have lost opportunities, precious family moments and livelihoods. Tragically, we have lost Queenslanders. The opposition believes the time has come to restore parliamentary scrutiny of these decisions and these powers. It is time to provide the public and the parliament all the information with the plan for how we can truly live with COVID. To continually accept these laws without the proper oversight, without the proper transparency, would be for this parliament to not be doing its job.