




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.34 pm): I rise to make a contribution to this very important debate. In doing so, I intend to speak as authentically as I can for the people of Southern Downs. I would like to be rightly understood that, from the very beginning, I have always agreed with the state government's use of powers to keep Queensland safe, and I am particularly talking about things like the border closures. Given that my electorate of Southern Downs has about 400 kilometres of border country with New South Wales, with many towns located close to the border or on the border, where their communities of interest, family connections, small businesses, primary production operations and so forth have spanned that border, I feel that the people of Southern Downs and I have made a very significant sacrifice in keeping Queensland safe. That is why I have not criticised the measures that have been imposed on Queensland in order to battle the COVID pandemic.

However—and this is something which came to us the last time the extension of these powers was debated, in about September last year—many of my colleagues and I do not agree with the continuation of powers which compel people to give up their freedoms without proper understanding of the motives and the information that the government has acted upon to impose those things. I am talking particularly here about what are known as vaccine mandates, where people who have elected not to be vaccinated are excluded from certain venues and from certain activities.

In my electorate of Southern Downs, we have had three of the eight shows in my electorate so far closed because of that particular mandate. We have also seen the Stanthorpe Rodeo cancelled. I want to inform the House that these are not small things. In my electorate, the local show is a very important part of the life of the community in which that show is located, and requirements that the shows have employed security to vet people on the basis of their vaccination status puts those shows out of the reach of the communities that control them. It costs too much.

What is particularly concerning here is that it seems that other events which have the same physical circumstances—perhaps a similar location, similar propinquity of revellers or people together to potentially pass COVID to one another—do not require such measures. I look, for instance, at the Stanthorpe Apple and Grape Harvest Festival, which we had recently. We had tens of thousands of people come to Stanthorpe, yet the rodeo, which ran concurrently with that event, was provided with a decision that it had to vet people going into the showgrounds based on their vaccination status. It is those kinds of arbitrary inconsistencies which hurt people, hurt communities and hurt excellent community organisations that breeds contempt for the system which encourages disobedience for the measures that have been necessary up until now.

I have just recently recovered from my own bout of COVID. When I undertook COVID quarantine at home, I gave it to my family in no time at all. I am triple vaccinated. My kids have had one of their shots; they are due for more shots soon. My wife is triple vaccinated. The lesson to me is that my vaccination status did not stop other people from getting COVID from me. There could be arguments over the likelihood of transmission and so forth but, at the end of the day, I cannot see, on the basis of

practicalities, that the case has been met to prevent people who have not been vaccinated from going to things like the Stanthorpe Rodeo. It has cost my community, just like the border closures cost farmers and families and small businesses in my community.

I feel that in my electorate people are well and truly over vaccine mandates. It has been a divisive issue. It has forced people who have made the valid and lawful decision not to be vaccinated to be divided from perhaps their own families and friends, from the music group they play with or the choir they are involved with. They can be prevented from engaging with the community in the ways they have always done. The bifurcation of realities that I talked about where people can actually be vaccinated and still pass it on to others who are also vaccinated really erodes public confidence in the need for vaccine mandates. I am deeply concerned about the erosion of very sacred and precious personal liberties that has occurred under the extensions of powers we have seen.

As I have said, I do not oppose realistic measures, some of which have been quite punitive on communities such as border communities in my area. We have done the hard lifting in Southern Downs, but I think it is time to draw the line on vaccine mandates. I say again that when I had COVID myself a week or two ago I went home and within days all of my family had it. They were vaccinated and so was I. On that basis I think it is difficult for the government to maintain with credibility the line that it is necessary to divide people on the basis of their vaccination status. I think it is time that the government stuck with the original agreement that the Premier struck with all the other Premiers in the country and the Prime Minister that these kinds of restrictions would stop when we reached 80 per cent vaccination status. We are almost at 90 per cent now.

When I say this, I am speaking for many people in the community who share that view. I have heard members on the other side of the House—not universally but there have been some—reflecting haughtily on the people outside who are protesting and trying to convince us to take their view in this debate. I think that is unfair. Those who choose not to be vaccinated and who are disenchanted with the way these powers have been used to exclude them from daily life are not necessarily a howling anarchy. Many of them are very good people; they are good, sensible people.

Mr Andrew: Doctors and nurses.

Mr LISTER: They are doctors and nurses. I take that interjection from the member for Mirani. In fact, a good friend of mine is a doctor; he is a very good fellow. He explained to me his objections and they sounded pretty reasonable to me.

I am vaccinated. I believe people should be vaccinated. However, I oppose the separation of people who exercise their lawful right to decline to be vaccinated. We do not need any further division in the community and we do not need further politicisation to the advantage of the government during this COVID emergency. I say to the people of Southern Downs: I hear you and I am going to stand up for your rights.