




Speech By  
**James Martin**

**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

---

Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

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

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (4.25 pm): I do not know about other members in this place, but I certainly do not have the urge to ‘Shout, shout, let it all out’. I rise to support this bill to extend the provisions required to support the public health response unit until the COVID-19 public health legislation expiry date, defined as the day on which the COVID-19 emergency is ended by the minister under the Public Health Act or 31 October 2022, whichever is earlier.

The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating: on families and individuals who have lost loved ones, and in my community this is pronounced as many residents of Stretton have relatives overseas and have shared with me that they have lost loved ones overseas due to COVID and it has been made all the more difficult because they have been unable to travel back to visit them; on small businesses and students who face lockdowns and restrictions; on families who have been unable to see each other; and on nurses and doctors in the ICUs putting people on ventilators. No-one has been untouched.

If we could go back 2½ years, no-one could have imagined the challenges our community would face as a result of this global pandemic. It certainly has been a difficult time. Many of us are over it. I know from speaking to members of my community that we had all hoped that at this point in 2022 COVID would be over. We all want life to get back to normal. We want this to be over, but the reality is, as we can see globally, nationally and here in Queensland, it certainly is not over.

That means we need to stay the course. We need to carry on sensible and proportionate restrictions. We must take a cautious and prudent approach that continues to keep Queenslanders safe and, importantly, protects our health system from being overrun. After all, the emergence of COVID has not stopped the ongoing health needs of Queenslanders—be it emergency services or elective surgery. We must continue to provide these services to Queensland in the midst of this pandemic.

The Australian Department of Health has reported over 5,000 deaths in Australia from COVID, and in Queensland we have had over 700 deaths. The truth is that the Queensland government has done exceptionally well in its response, always putting the safety of Queenslanders first. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to supporting Queenslanders and business. The last few years have obviously been very challenging times for small business in Queensland, but they have been resilient and survived thanks in large part to the strong health response of the Palaszczuk government allowing our businesses to stay open whilst businesses in other states and countries faced extended lockdowns.

Of course, restrictions and the vaccination program have only been possible and so successful thanks to the overwhelming support they have received from the community. Our community have done the right thing. They have rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated, they have worn masks, they have checked in and stayed home when asked. They have done this because the vast majority of Queenslanders understand that responding to a global pandemic is about the community working together. It is about recognising the needs of others, recognising the needs of people in high-risk

categories—people with disabilities and our seniors in aged-care facilities. In contrast to your own individual health, public health is about the community. It is about your responsibility to your neighbours, to others and to being a good citizen.

On this, I want to thank my community for getting vaccinated and following the rules to protect themselves, their families and others. We have risen to the challenge. Our effective public health response has enabled high vaccination rates to be reached across the Queensland population. However, whilst this high coverage provides protections, the risks of adverse impacts to the health system, the economy and the community remain. We are seeing that play out now at the moment in schools with disruptions to semester 1 and in businesses which are feeling the hurt thanks to the brunt of absenteeism. Whilst most people do the right thing, others do feel passionately that their individual beliefs outweigh the needs of the community. They believe that they know better than scientific experts and, sadly, some have fallen victim to crackpot conspiracy theories peddled by science deniers in deep dark places on the Internet.

As I have said in many email responses, COVID is real and COVID kills. I believe that vaccines work and that they are safe and effective. I have had many conversations with locals, and I recognise that many have passionately held beliefs against restrictions and vaccinations. I understand your position. I accept that you will not get vaccinated. However, except for those with genuine exemptions, I totally disagree with your reasoning. I agree with the Chief Health Officer's directives that in some cases, to protect the public and our health system, your decision will have consequences as to places you cannot go and things you cannot do. Sometimes civic duty outweighs individual wants. In addition, I will always take my medical advice from scientific experts and our Chief Health Officer, especially when it comes to decisions relating to public health.

I have been perplexed with anti-vaxxers on the one hand arguing that the vaccine is experimental, that there is not enough efficacy and questioning the evidence behind the vaccine, while on the other hand when it comes to therapeutic medicine like Ivermectin or hydroxychloroquine apparently no efficacy is required, no evidence is needed and their belief is that there is some absurd conspiracy to stop people taking it. As I have said to the many anti-vaxxers I have emailed or met, I support medicine that works. I believe in vaccines, I believe in science and the scientific method, and I rely on advice from the medical experts and the approval process of the TGA.

Many locals who have spoken to me about this issue have been polite and respectful, passionately putting forward their opinions in a calm and reasonable way. Unfortunately, this cannot be said for everyone. I have to share with the House a recent experience with anti-vax protesters in my community. Just this weekend, I was outraged and angered by racist attacks from anti-vax protesters which were directed toward members of my community who had come out to talk to their federal MP, Graham Perrett, last weekend in Sunnybank Hills.

Stretton is a multicultural and harmonious community. On the weekend, anti-vaxxers descended on a community sausage sizzle hosted by Graham Perrett. I can confirm that one of the residents of Malaysian descent was yelled at to 'go back to China!' by a member of the anti-vax crowd. I will not reveal the name of the person targeted as they have asked me not to, but I can confirm that they are a well-known community volunteer who has also been recognised with an OAM. In fact, many members on both sides of this House will probably know who I am talking about and I am sure they have been to functions with this great Australian. I will be very clear: these attacks are racist and unhinged. They have absolutely no place in our community or Queensland, and I condemn them without hesitation. Members of our community have the right to talk to their local representative and raise concerns in peace. By attacking members of our community who are trying to exercise this right, the anti-vax crowd is attacking a fundamental tenet of our democracy. Every member of Stretton benefits from our fantastic multicultural community and, like Duncan Pegg before me and Graham Perrett, I am unequivocal in standing on the side of all members of my community.

In addition, I have to say that I question the decision of these protesters to target a sausage sizzle. I understand protesting outside parliament and I support people's right to do so—after all, this is where laws are made; however, with their decision to descend on a community sausage sizzle in a park with placards and chants, in my view they lost a lot more support than they won, interrupting and accosting ordinary members of the community. I am happy to advise the House that, despite the bad behaviour of the protesters, their protest was a fizzle; they could not stop the sizzle!

It is also important to note that we have been reducing and easing restrictions since late 2021. We are moving away from an elimination approach towards a strategy based on suppression. We know that we will have to live with COVID, but this transition needs to be done sensibly. With winter on the way, it is prudent to keep a close eye on how COVID is spreading through the community, and we need powers to respond if something unpredictable happens.

This bill simply extends most temporary public health measures by six months, to 31 October 2022, or until the Minister for Health declares the end of the public health emergency. I have to say that I hope it can be before October, but, as I said before, these decisions need to be based on health advice from health experts, not TikTokers or YouTubers.