




Speech By  
**Jarrold Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.00 pm): In speaking to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill, which is essentially the extension of the Chief Health Officer's extraordinary powers in Queensland, I place on record my great thanks to our frontline health workers across the state who have not only dealt with COVID themselves but also dealt with their patients, their families and the long hours. I say thank you to all our health workers across Queensland, and particularly on the Sunshine Coast and in my electorate of Kawana which has the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. Over the last 2½ years health workers have done an extraordinary amount of work and done the best they can in extraordinary circumstances. For our health workers, ambulance officers and police on the front line it has been a long journey. It has been a long journey for Queenslanders.

The impacts are real. Over the last 2½ years we have raised issues in this parliament related to not only the health impacts of COVID but also the borders being closed and the sad and sorry stories of people in my electorate who could not get home because their own government denied them the opportunity to return to their families and friends under the guise that this Premier kept everyone safe. This keeping everyone safe had huge mental health impacts for many constituents in my electorate, particularly those who could not get home and see their families.

I recall many times I directly asked the Premier questions about many Sunshine Coast residents who were over the border visiting family for health reasons or whatever the case was when the borders were slammed shut and the state government did not let them return home. This included young people in Kawana who had surgery overseas and could not get home and home quarantine. The government kept saying to us at the time that it was about keeping everyone safe. Labor members were saying, 'The Premier has kept everyone safe,' but it is interesting that every matter I raised in this parliament on behalf of my constituents about them not being able to come home was by the afternoon somehow fixed. It was fixed. The rouse that the Premier was keeping everyone safe and that is why people were denied entry back into Queensland was all of a sudden fixed by the afternoon. If only the government had the political heart every time we raised these issues then we would not have had the anxiety and pressure faced by many Queenslanders. We have faced that issue of Queenslanders not even being allowed to come to their own homes in Queensland.

We have had lives turned upside. We have had livelihoods turned upside down. We have had businesses close down. We have had our communities divided more than I have ever seen before. I have mentioned the mental anguish of many people. At the start of the pandemic I spoke about the music industry and how the pandemic is impacting that industry particularly. As soon as they stopped live music and they put restrictions on venues like NightQuarter on the Sunshine Coast all those musicians lost their income. It was not until the federal government introduced JobKeeper that a lot of sole traders in the music industry could maintain their livelihoods.

To this day, Kawana Surf Club continues to struggle. Their income is down roughly 30 per cent. Labor members would have us believe that there are no restrictions, no-one is wearing masks in these venues and capacity is not an issue at these venues anymore. There are impacts because of the vaccine mandate. It is not just eight per cent of the population who have chosen not to get vaccinated, it is their friends saying, 'We are not going to book a table at the Kawana Surf Club and 10 of us are not going to a concert because our mate is not vaccinated.' That is having impacts today.

The restrictions may be over but they are still having an impact. They are having an impact on cafes that are still operating under takeaway provisions and are not allowed to have their regular clientele sit down at tables. For some reason, the government would have us believe that it is unsafe for someone in Kawana to go to, for instance, B'Fresh—which is a very popular cafe in my electorate—and sit down and have their coffee. It is okay for them to stand and wait 15 minutes for a coffee but they cannot sit down and have a coffee because of the vaccine mandate. Some of this does not make sense.

Businesses are still hurting because of these issues, including the mandate. The road maps the government released over the last 2½ years could be chopped and changed at the whim of the government. There was no certainty for business. There has not been enough support for our small business community. We have expressed those concerns.

At the end of last year I expressed the concerns I had with extending the Chief Health Officer's powers. I see no more reason, as I did back then, to be in the position now of having to extend the Chief Health Officer's powers. Even the new Chief Health Officer is saying we need to live with COVID. Labor does not want to start living with COVID because if they have a policy that people live with COVID then that means government is getting out of our lives. The control the current government has on people's lives will go. Labor does not want to let go of that control.

We on this side of the House believe in small government. That is what the Liberal National Party believes in—small government; personal responsibility. Let the people take responsibility for their own actions. Labor does not want that. We saw this with the floods a few weeks ago. The Bureau of Meteorology issued a severe weather warning so what did we do? We closed every school in South-East Queensland and sent every parent to pick up their kids. This was done under the guise of the Premier keeping us all safe. Principals and local communities used to be tasked with that job. If it is unsafe to have kids at school let the principals, the parents and the communities decide, not the government acting as Big Brother in everything in our lives.

We are at the juncture with this pandemic where people need to start, as the new Chief Health Officer and the Premier say, living with the virus. That means the state Labor government giving some of their powers away. Why have legislation on the books that is not required at this stage? Labor will say, 'What's around the corner? There might be a new variant.' I have had the new variant. There will be new variants. There will be new variants forever. There will be new variants of influenza forever.

We deal with it at the time. Parliament can easily come back and deal with urgent matters, including the extension of the Chief Health Officer's powers if the government so requires or, better still, give them to the health minister and then make the health minister responsible and accountable to parliament. That is why we will be moving the amendments as outlined by the shadow health minister, particularly those around parliamentary oversight. It is very important.

I turn to the issue of the small business community and the concerns with the vaccine mandates. Let the record show that I am pro vaccination but I am also pro choice. I have always been pro choice for vaccination. I do not support vaccine mandates. I never have but I am pro choice. I choose for me and for my family to get vaccinated. I have been triple dosed and I still got COVID. When the Premier was telling under-40-year-olds not to get the AstraZeneca, I went and got the AstraZeneca because I believe in the vaccine, but I do not agree with the vaccine mandates. I have been honest and up-front with everyone who has asked me in my constituency and I have told them that from the start. They appreciate honesty from their members. I have been up-front with people.

It is now the time when we either live with the virus or keep living with government control over our lives. I believe we must take personal responsibility for our actions. Over 90 per cent of the population are double vaccinated now. I encourage more people to get vaccinated if that is their desire. It is well beyond time now. We need to heal our communities. We need to bring our communities back together.

I say to the Labor government and to the people of Kawana that, if the Labor government do not in a spirit of cooperation support the amendments that will be moved by the LNP opposition in terms of parliamentary oversight, then I see no reason for supporting this legislation today. As the Chief Health Officer and the Premier say, if we are going to start living with this virus let us show the community how to live with the virus. We would do that by supporting the amendments. If not, then we are sorry but we will not be able to support this bill.

*(Time expired)*