




Speech By
Joan Pease

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (12.28 pm): I would like to give a big shout-out to the Jimboomba State School kids who are in the gallery today. How fantastic is it that Queensland and the Palaszczuk government responded so well to the COVID pandemic, which was a global pandemic, that shut down most of the schools in other states in Australia, yet Queensland students were able to go to school most of the time. I bet you all had a really great time with the social interaction. You have now been vaccinated. I can see that you are allowed to be here because you have had your vaccination.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Through the chair, member, please.

Ms PEASE: I am sorry that you have had to listen to the rhetoric we have just heard which is not correct and completely frightening to a group of young students.

I am absolutely delighted to be speaking to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. This bill extends the provisions that are required to support the public health response, the fantastic public health response that the Queensland government has undertaken. The expiry day is defined as the day on which the COVID emergency is ended by the minister under the Public Health Act 2005 or 31 October 2022, whichever is earlier. That means the government can react really quickly as needed.

We can respond to changing variants that are coming through and provide the appropriate responses that our community expects from us. Our community knows that they can rely on us to take care of their health and their future.

We probably all hoped that by this point, two years down the track in 2022, this would not be our reality. As we can see globally, nationally and here in Queensland, it is certainly not over yet. That is why the measures to extend this bill include the public health COVID measures under the Public Health Act; measures to respond to the risks of COVID-19 in corrective services facilities under the Corrective Services Act; disaster arrangements under the Disaster Management Act; measures to allow patients subject to the Mental Health Act 2016 to be granted leave to comply with the public health directions; and a range of other measures. This bill provides for most of the remaining COVID-19 measures to expire on 30 April 2022, unless a different expiry date has already been set by earlier legislation.

The COVID pandemic has been complex and unpredictable, presenting significant challenges across the globe for the past two years. Since COVID-19 was first detected, there have been over 400 million COVID cases and around six million deaths reported globally. I pass on my heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost loved ones and been impacted by the pandemic.

Since the start of the pandemic, my community and I have put our trust in our Premier and the chief health officers, Dr Jeannette Young or Dr John Gerrard, to keep us safe from COVID-19. I remember very clearly when we first heard about COVID-19. In the days that followed, our government Chief Health Officer took early and decisive action. It was Queensland's swift and adaptive public health response which was so highly successful in containing community transmission, providing the opportunity to reach high vaccination coverage across Queensland and ultimately saving lives.

My darling niece Millie was just two months into her grand overseas adventure in January 2020. She was settling into life in the UK and had a new job working in a pub, waiting to try something new. She is a nurse. She was all set to have a couple of years tripping around Europe. I remember calling her mum, my sister Maureen, saying, 'Maureen, Millie should come home now.' After a couple of false starts—because, like many Australians, she was abandoned overseas by the federal government—we got her home. That in itself was not without controversy. She was on a plane where a COVID-positive passenger collapsed beside her in the aisle. She took care of him during the remainder of the flight. She came home and quarantined. Thankfully, she did not get COVID.

I thank my constituents who have responded to the Chief Health Officer's directions. You have taken up the call to stay at home, get tested, wear masks and get vaccinated. I know that at times it had been challenging and hard. I thank you for the support you have given to our government, the Chief Health Officer and most importantly our community—a wonderful civil society that we all live in. That is what this is all about: living in a civil society, following guidelines. In the bayside we now have over 94 per cent of the community fully vaccinated and 66 per cent with more than two doses.

I still have, on a regular basis, people in the community asking me to pass on their thanks to the Premier and the Chief Health Officer for their work to keep Queensland safe. What they also say—without prompting, might I add—is how disappointed and disgraceful the Prime Minister's response has been to COVID: the shocking vaccination rollout—'Not a race', he said; the international borders and quarantining—again, a disgrace; the Australians who were trapped overseas for so long; the supply of rapid antigen test kits; and, tragically, the shocking care of residents in residential aged-care facilities and the abysmal vaccination rollout for residents and workers. These are all failures of our Prime Minister. They fall at his feet.

Since late 2021, Queensland has been easing restrictions and moving away from an elimination approach to a suppression strategy and towards eventually living with COVID-19. Under Queensland's COVID-19 Vaccine Plan to Unite Families, over 90 per cent of Queenslanders are now fully vaccinated. I thank the over 94 per cent in my electorate. We have reopened Queensland's domestic and international borders with no quarantine requirements for vaccinated persons.

The member for Hill's contribution—and that of other members—to this debate is at worst dangerous and at best laughable. There have been comments and arguments that rely not on scientific data but on flawed and disproven facts that have been found on the internet. I remind everyone here that the search engines conspiracy theorists use to locate these false facts are owned by the very people they believe are trying to take over the world. It is a bit like a B-grade scary movie, quite frankly. I wonder what score it would get on Rotten Tomatoes. He alleges—others make similar comments—that all governments have been corrupted by the large pharmaceuticals and large multinational companies. He claims that no-one has died from COVID; it was always another underlying health issue that took these people's lives. My colleague the member for Greenslopes has mentioned that the number of COVID deaths of frontline workers is at 180,000 around the world.

I remind everyone that we currently have two mandates in place: masks in certain settings and mandated vaccination, also in certain settings. We also have a growing economy. Fellow Australians are moving to Queensland in droves. Our unemployment rate is sitting at 4.3 per cent. Retail trade is up—and I can tell you that I have contributed to that quite significantly!—and investment is up 3.8 per cent. This is not an accident; this is due to a measured, planned and sensible approach. It is due to good leadership and due to Queenslanders who are committed to looking after each other. Currently, 94 per cent of baysiders are fully vaccinated. This shows that just six per cent either have a medical exemption or have actively chosen not to get vaccinated. This is a really tiny number and small cohort of my community.

All those members opposite, including the LNP, who are siding with the misguided and ill-informed members are on the wrong side of this debate. I ask them: do you want to be on the side of the debate that bases decisions on expert medical scientific advice and not on false facts read on the internet? I know wholeheartedly that I want to live in a civil society—a society that cares about each other, that values the scientific data to make health decisions, that takes care of those who are vulnerable and that makes what are sometimes hard decisions but, through due diligence, knows they are the right decisions for the right time.

I again acknowledge the wonderful work of our frontline workers. I acknowledge the staff who support these workers—the people who do all of the rostering and all of the background administration work. I also acknowledge the people who look after those people—the families who have supported their loved ones during difficult times. I thank baysiders for their commitment and I commend the bill to the House.