




Speech By
Linus Power

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (3.27 pm): We recognise that coronavirus has had a huge impact on our world; over six million people have already died. This is probably an undercount. We need to remember the incredible pain this caused for the families of those who died.

I want to say thank you to the healthcare workers and especially note, as did the member for Greenslopes, the thousands of healthcare workers who gave their lives in caring for others, including caring for those who chose not to take the basic preventive measure of getting vaccinated. We should remember the Queenslanders who died and express the condolences of this House to their families who miss them.

Recently I looked back on the speeches I have made on this subject. I note that we have debated the COVID-19 response a number of times. I counted five separate debates, but I note that the health minister nominated seven separate debates. I am really disappointed that those opposite, including the previous speaker, misled the House in saying that we have not examined the contents of this bill. The Economics and Governance Committee looked at the same extension of powers as did the health committee twice.

When I looked at my speeches the common theme in each was clear: the government led by Premier Palaszczuk was able to get the best advice and work with the Chief Health Officer to act quickly and firmly to protect Queenslanders. This has been vital in helping keep coronavirus out of Queensland, especially until all Queenslanders had the opportunity to be vaccinated. I want to speak briefly about vaccinations. We know that people who are unvaccinated are 10 times more likely to be hospitalised and die. That is an extraordinarily sobering thought.

We know that without so many Queenslanders getting vaccinated—in Logan, it is over 94 per cent—we would have seen many more Queenslanders and Logan residents sick and dying. We would have seen a far greater impact on businesses, schools and the services Queenslanders rely on. I, unlike many other members, continue to urge Queenslanders to follow their doctor's advice and get vaccinated. I have spoken to some good people in my electorate who continue to be uncertain about being vaccinated—they have seen unreliable information that feeds those doubts—however, I urge them to reconsider. With over 94 per cent of Logan residents being vaccinated, I can say with absolute confidence that the side effects of vaccination are minimal and, from the evidence presented, the benefits are clear. Over 4.5 billion people across the globe have been vaccinated. I ask people to please take this step to protect themselves and their family.

I note that some had doubts about mRNA vaccines which I think are misplaced. There simply is not the evidence to back it up. However, now we have the option of Novavax, which is more of a traditional vaccine. I say to those who remain unvaccinated: I respect that at the beginning of the process you may have had doubts, but it is clear now that those concerns and doubts have proved unfounded. Now is the time to look anew at vaccination and to speak with your doctor. I am sure that they will recommend vaccination to keep you and your family safe.

We hear from people who speak to us about rights, especially when it comes to mandates. I want to speak about a different right. We all have, as far as possible, a right to health—to go about our everyday life without unnecessarily being exposed to COVID-19; for example, to attend a hospital and know that the person who is giving us treatment has taken every precaution to try and keep us safe from a dangerous infectious disease. I want to say clearly when it comes to rights: there is no right to infect others with a dangerous disease. We care deeply on this side of the House—perhaps everyone does—about Queenslanders being able to go to work, to seek health care and to do what they wish.

We note that the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr McDougall, spoke about this issue in a hearing. As I said, we have heard this five times now. I asked him if was he making a health or epidemiological judgement and he said—

No, not by any means, Chair. I would not pretend for a moment to have any expertise to put to the commission—

I think he meant ‘committee’—

in a position where it was attempting to second-guess health decisions made by the Chief Health Officer. I think we have made that clear in our approach to the pandemic from the outset.

When we have this debate we must be very careful that the rights of one do not damage the rights of others. Whether it be accessing health care, being dealt with by the police or studying at school, people have the right to be as safe as possible from a dangerous disease.

I note that MPs have spoken previously about wanting to revisit this in three months. We dealt with this issue in the Economics and Governance Committee. I will read a question that one of the members of the committee asked someone who was asserting that it should be three months. The member said—

Mr Cope, this bill was introduced into the parliament in June. We are now halfway through July. It has to go to parliament in August. We have quite a period of legitimate questioning about the right to extend these powers.

At this point—which was the third or fourth time we had done it—the member was saying that we had deliberated on this extensively. He continued—

As we said, the sunset clause is going to take it through to April of next year. If we moved with your council’s suggestion of 31 December—

the three-month suggestion—

then proper parliamentary processes for extending these powers and extending the legislation would have to start in about late October or November to formally inquire as to the right and proper way to extend this legislation further.

The member went on to say—

... we have all agreed with what you said and we all understand those sorts of matters—to take it through to December may well require a further process in about two months time. Whilst we love seeing you here making presentations to us, it seems a very short-sighted answer as to where this pandemic is at.

In that case, the member asked a quite long-winded question. It could legitimately be said that I was not authoritative enough as the chair to pull this person up. Was it the member for Hervey Bay or the member for Macalister who was criticising this three-month period? No. It was the member for Mermaid Beach who made the perfectly sensible argument that we should not immediately turn around to start the process again as soon as this House had determined it. It is clear that it is quite sensible to have this extension for six months.

I want to make it clear that this legislation is an enabling power. The Chief Health Officer has this enabling power to do the things that keep people safe. All those who argue against it are arguing against the Chief Health Officer having an enabling power. They want to second-guess the Chief Health Officer. That is the only logical conclusion to draw about those who do not wish to vote for this legislation.

We have seen dangerous suggestions from those opposite. They said in the middle of the Delta wave that they wanted the borders to be opened.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr POWER: I hear the interjection that they were opened and that was the same. No, that is not true. How do we know this? Former premier Berejiklian made it absolutely clear when she said, ‘Deb would have opened it months ago’—not at a time when it was safe, with people vaccinated, but right in the middle of the Delta wave. We have it in black and white from the former premier of New South Wales.

Mr Hart interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Burleigh, order!

Mr POWER: This from a man who put up a billboard inviting sick people in.

Mr Hart: And that the government opened the border.

Mr POWER: And it would have been done months earlier if you had had your way. It is quite clear.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Burleigh, you are warned under the standing orders. I called you to order. Members, can we please let the member for Logan speak in peace for the last one minute and 27 seconds.

Mr POWER: I note that there is an amendment foreshadowed by the member for Traeger and that both the Greens and the LNP made a statement of reservation. Whenever I read them, I can hear a high-pitched noise. It is the dog whistle of those who do not have the strength to put what they want to say. It is a dog whistle to some of those protesters outside that secretly they are on their side. The member for Traeger has foreshadowed an amendment. If members intend to vote for this amendment, which says that unvaccinated people cannot be prevented from going into, in this case, healthcare or aged-care facilities—at least the Katter party is being honest.

Mr LANGBROEK: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I ask that you enforce standing order 244 about referring to members by their correct title and district.

Mr POWER: I apologise and withdraw. I did it inadvertently. I am happy to continue.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Logan, I ask you to refer to other members in the chamber by their correct title.

Mr POWER: Thank you. My apologies. If the Greens and LNP members are on a unity ticket on this issue, we will see them voting for the foreshadowed amendment. If they do not, they will be revealed as only dog whistling for those outside and not standing for them.

Put simply, the legislation we have before us has served us well. It has resulted in Queensland having one of the best responses in the world, both economically and with health. We should not throw away this legislation too early. We need to take a careful, considered approach whereby we have these options even if we do not use them in the future.