




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (12.08 pm): I rise to make my contribution and speak in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. I understand from what I have looked at that 10,626 Queenslanders have been diagnosed with COVID in the last 24 hours, 395 Queenslanders are in hospital, 15 are in ICU and nine have died in the last 48 hours. Over 730 Queenslanders have died since this pandemic began, and over 5,900 Australians have died across our nation since this pandemic began.

The COVID-19 pandemic remains unpredictable in Australia and around the world. The public health measures that we have are necessary to respond if new variants emerge that are more transmissible, more severe or both, and that has been recognised by people on both sides of this chamber. The measures will also allow the Queensland government to continue to manage health system capacity coming into the winter months. The bill sets up the enabling framework for the Queensland government's COVID-19 response. It enables a range of things to be done, but it does not require the powers to be used.

The powers proposed to be extended by the bill do not need to be exercised if the risk remains low. However, it enables the Chief Health Officer to respond rapidly if new threats emerge. It also ensures that the Chief Health Officer can quickly wind back restrictions as soon as they are no longer required. It is important to note that, I will say that again: it gives the Chief Health Officer the ability to wind restrictions back as soon as they are no longer needed.

Since late 2021, restrictions have been steadily easing, particularly as we have seen the compliance rate in relation to vaccinations. Our borders are open to domestic and overseas arrivals. Quarantine is no longer required for vaccinated persons. Masks are no longer required except in limited places, and obviously we are encouraging people who still feel at risk should they want to use them to do so. However, the Chief Health Officer has made clear that he considers withdrawing all public health controls in one go would be reckless.

I want to state from the outset that in Queensland, in comparison to other jurisdictions in the Commonwealth and also when we look overseas, our performance and our management of this has been impressive, to say the least. We have done an outstanding job even when we look at other states in our Commonwealth and, as I said, when we look overseas. The reason is we have taken the scientific and measured and calculated advice from the health experts. We do not bring politics into this. We do not bring the unmeasurable emotion into it. We need to be relied on to be doing what the science tells us. This is what we have done and what we will continue to do.

It reminds me a little bit of that movie where you get the bad bloke at the end and you think you have knocked him out; you get up and you are about to walk away and the bad bloke jumps up again. We need to kill this thing dead.

Mr O'Connor: Which movie is that?

Mr HEALY: Sam, I will explain it to you; it is an old movie.

Mr O'Connor: What movie?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair, please, member for Cairns.

Mr HEALY: Mr Deputy Speaker, there are some great old movies where they just do not knock the bad bloke on the head and as a result this is what happens. We will not let that happen. Without the measures in the bill, people who have COVID-19, or are suspected of having COVID-19, would only be required to quarantine for a maximum of four days under a direction given by a doctor; the Chief Health Officer would not be able to give a public health direction, such as a direction to manage access to vulnerable facilities like residential aged care or disability accommodation services; and the public health emergency could only be extended by regulation for seven days at a time. These are the facts; they remain undisputed.

The bill only extends provisions that are directly related to the public health response. This includes: powers in the Public Health Act 2005 that increase powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit, or respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland; authorise the sharing of confidential information of contact tracing; encourage compliance with public health directions and directions by emergency officers by providing penalties for contraventions; increase the period for which a regulation may extend a declared public health emergency from seven to 90 days; provide for quarantine fee arrangements; and public health measures in the Corrective Services Act 2006, Disaster Management Act 2003 and the Mental Health Act 2016.

The bill also continues provisions to support the operation of the Retail Shop Leases and Other Commercial Leases (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020 which have been continued until 30 April 2024. Nobody has made any mention of these. The transition expiring COVID-19 laws put in place back-to-normal operations.

The bill does not extend a range of other amendments made to other portfolio legislation in response to COVID-19. These measures were put in place to provide regulatory relief and continue the operation of institutions and businesses early in the pandemic.

As Queensland transitions to more normal conditions, temporary measures are no longer necessary unless they are part of the public health response. This bill does not repeal these measures. Rather, they will expire in accordance with the sunset provisions made by the parliament in September 2021 as part of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Act 2021. Some beneficial temporary measures have been made permanent.

From the beginning of this pandemic, the government's goal was to protect Queenslanders and to protect the health system until viable vaccinations and treatments were available. We successfully reached that point late last year, with only 2,318 cases and seven deaths when the Queensland border reopened on 13 December.

As I say, when we look at other jurisdictions, they are solid figures. In line with the national plan to transition Australia's national response to COVID-19, Queensland has moved from an elimination approach to a suppression approach, and we will gradually move to living with COVID. That has been well and truly covered by this government in a range of areas.

I want to finish by saying that I, like many, have been impacted. I talk to people in my community who, for whatever reason, do not want to get vaccinated. I understand the challenges they face. When people are talking about freedoms, I question the authenticity of some of those statements. At the end of the day, our goal is to protect the people of this state. We have made a commitment and we do so. In doing so, I also want to acknowledge the work of not only the current health minister but also the previous health minister. I want to acknowledge the work of Dr Young who was under an enormous amount of pressure and was attacked enormously unfairly for doing what was absolutely right: listening to the science and doing the right thing by the people of this state. I also acknowledge Dr Gerrard who continues in that role.

I pass on my condolences to people who have lost loved ones during this pandemic. I know it is tough; I lost my father. Four of us buried him. There were hundreds of people who would have loved to have farewelled him.

I understand the pressure that police are under. I understand the pressure that doctors and nurses are under every single day. I find it absolutely remarkable the politicisation that some people make of this topic. It is a pandemic; it is going to be enormously inconvenient. We are doing our best and I think we have done an outstanding job. I will continue my support. I am very proud of a government that listens to the science and does the right thing. I will support this bill to the hilt.