




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE**

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (2.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. The purpose of this bill is to extend the special powers that were granted to the Palaszczuk government due to the onset of COVID-19. These powers have been extended once before, in August 2021. No-one can doubt the impact that COVID has had on every one of us and in fact everyone on this planet. It has been the cause of many deaths around the world and here in our own country. I take this opportunity to express my condolences to the families and friends who have lost loved ones.

The impact on businesses, large and small, has been very difficult and in some cases catastrophic, with livelihoods lost. The cost to governments around the world has been enormous and we have not been immune from that cost, with the federal government providing stimulus and support payments to keep the economy afloat. Australia is one of the stand-outs in the world, with the strength of our economy being one of the strongest and the current unemployment rate sitting at four per cent—the lowest unemployment rate for a generation. The federal government has contributed approximately \$28 billion to the Queensland COVID response compared with around \$9 billion by the Palaszczuk government. As we are all too aware, the Palaszczuk government has mismanaged the finances of this state to the extent that we already had a debt of \$102 billion prior to COVID—a debt that is now forecast to reach \$130 billion. This government cannot blame COVID for the dire situation of this state's finances; we were in trouble long before the onset of COVID.

The opposition recognises that the government needed to implement urgent legislation and amendments to deal with the rapid speed in which COVID was spreading throughout the community. There was a very real danger in the early days before the rollout of vaccinations that our hospital system would be completely overwhelmed. After all, our hospital system was already under pressure due to the mismanagement of this Labor government, and we have only seen this situation decline further ever since. We as an opposition did recognise that certain measures needed to be put in place. However, this support is not limitless.

The member for Mudgeeraba and shadow minister for health and ambulance services, Ros Bates, will be moving some amendments which will improve the openness and accountability surrounding this legislation. I would hope that all members in this House will support these amendments as we have reached the stage where the public has become worn out complying with some of the conflicting advice which is coming from this government.

The general public is to be congratulated on the way it has complied with the directives which have been imposed on its day-to-day lives. Our vaccine rate now stands at 93.4 per cent of the Queensland population aged 16 years and over being double vaccinated. We were told the restrictions would be reviewed after we reached 80 per cent and then this was increased to 90 per cent, and here we are now having reached that milestone debating these restrictions remaining.

Like all members, my office has been inundated with emails and phone calls regarding this bill. While many of these emails have come from all over the state, there has still been a significant number from within the electorate. It is the feedback from the electorate of Condamine that I largely base my position on. I do not think any member can say all feedback received is solely for or against this bill, and this is the case in Condamine. However, I have noted that the mood of the electorate has changed over time. It is fair to say that the general public in my view is looking for a relaxing of restrictions and life to return to something like normal.

Let me say that my position has not been influenced by some of the more extreme correspondence that I have received. For example, I do not believe that COVID is a hoax. It is real. I do not believe that we are not a properly constituted government and I very strongly believe in vaccines. Vaccinations have saved many millions of lives across the world for many decades. Putting the extreme views aside, it is everyday Queenslanders who have told me that it is time to move forward. We know things will not be as they were before COVID for some time yet. However, the overwhelming view being relayed to me is that with the vaccination rate now above 90 per cent it is time to begin to wind back these regulations.

It is the inconsistency that is frustrating many in the community, and there was no better example of this than last week at the Toowoomba Show. The show had to run under strict COVID regulations. Only vaccinated patrons and volunteers were allowed admittance. Security guards had to be hired by the show society at considerable expense to monitor those passing through the gates. Can members believe that we had to hire security guards at a country show? The Toowoomba Showgrounds hosts a multitude of events—home shows, book fests, gymkhanas, car shows and many others—without these COVID restrictions applying. These events have hosted many hundreds of attendees and volunteers. However, these events are fine apparently and do not require patrons to be fully vaccinated.

The show committee raised its concerns with this government, but to no avail. Its pleas fell on deaf ears. The agriculture minister, Mark Furner, offered no assistance to the show society and was left in no doubt as to its frustration by the committee when he attended the official opening of the show. As the Minister for Rural Communities, this minister is responsible for the cancellation of many country shows. He has not lifted a finger to help these struggling show communities. He forgets where the local show proceeds go to—mostly funding local charities and community organisations. He is no friend of our country towns and his abandonment of show societies will not be forgotten.

We have seen time and time again it depends upon the impact of particular unions that can be the deciding factor in which decisions are made. The Minister for Education was a perfect example in imposing restrictions, only to back down once the union gave her a call to tell her that she had chosen the wrong option and then there was a sudden change of mind. We have the situation where if you are involved in an accident the police and ambulance officers will arrive fully vaccinated, but then the firefighters arrive and they are not. Then we have the quarantine debacle.

There remain many unanswered questions regarding the quarantine facility at Wellcamp. The building contract for this facility was awarded to the Wagners on whose land it was built. There was no tender process. In fact, there was only one bidder. The terms of the contract have been withheld from the public, who are footing the bill. Under pressure from the opposition, the government has since revealed that the government contributed \$48.8 million towards the capital cost. We still do not know what the taxpayer is paying for the ongoing costs for this facility, and I think that is a question to which we should be entitled to an answer. The total capacity of the facility is currently at 500 beds, soon to be 1,000. Since this facility opened almost three months ago, it has housed 250 guests. That is approximately 25 a week. What great value for money that is!

As I stated earlier in my contribution, it is a lack of openness and transparency that has undermined confidence in the decision-making processes of this government. It is for that reason that one of the amendments proposed by the shadow minister is to release the health advice that these decisions have been based upon. We have been asking for this on behalf of the public for a considerable time.

The shadow minister is also calling for the establishment of a parliamentary committee chaired by a non-government member, such as is already in place in New South Wales and New Zealand. We have shown that we are prepared to work with the government and with these amendments we continue to show that. It is time that this government showed that it is willing to work with both the opposition and the people of Queensland.

I cannot conclude without acknowledging the tremendous work of those on the front line during this pandemic: our doctors, nurses, health providers, police officers, teachers and emergency services officers to name but a few. They have had to endure the frustrations of the public because of mixed messaging and at times heartless regulations. It is for them and the public at large that we need to transition to the next stage as outlined in the shadow minister's amendments.