




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 MANAGEMENT)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (7.23 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Public Health and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Management) Amendment Bill and rise to offer my objection to the bill. There are a number of points that I would make reference to as to why I would form that view. The first is probably one of the more minor points, and that is the one-size-fits-all approach that often gets delivered. I am looking at trying to critique the way things were handled through COVID-19, notwithstanding that it was an enormously challenging event to be presented with at the federal and state level.

It was very challenging and very testing with a lot of pressure—I accept all of that—but embedded in so much decision-making that is made down here is this one-size-fits-all approach and it is not appropriate. For example, if there are bar spacings that are appropriate for Brisbane, that does not mean that they are appropriate in Bedourie or Boulia where no-one is going in or out. Particularly when representing regional areas, there is enormous inconsistency and lack of efficacy in the way that these laws are applied. People say that this is the best thing for us, but is it the best here or is it the best way to operate there? That is one area where we object to a lot of these public health directives and how they can be offered.

There is a lack of trust in some of that advice. Everyone wants to ostracise you and say, 'If you don't agree with this view you must be an ignoramus and you're just not considering this.' No, some people are more discerning. How many doctors have we had through this process challenging some of the views? Some of them might be wrong and some of them might be right, but the government is saying that these are absolute truths and this must happen this way, and if you do not believe it you have to be vilified. What an unhealthy situation when debating something that is really important and a serious infringement on people's lives. In an earlier contribution from another member they said, 'What are you worried about? What's restricted?' I will reverse that argument: if we are not worried about anything, why are we putting this legislation up then? Why do we need emergency powers if there is nothing to be concerned about?

I do not trust some officials because I know that there is influence from government on people operating in these areas. I will argue that until the cows come home. To me, honestly you would be a fool if you believed otherwise—that is, that there is not influence to say, 'Mate, this is the way the government's going in its direction on this.' With regard to those people who stick their head up and say, 'I don't agree with this,' guess what? They are not getting the promotion next week or next year. They might not be sacked, but they are slowly pushed sideways and moved out. Honestly, I think you are a fool if you believe otherwise because I have seen too much in this House.

Let me provide another piece of evidence to rely on. Going sideways a little bit, we debated the reef regulations for years and everyone was saying that the reef was dying as all the science was telling us and members were standing in the House laughing at us saying, 'The science is saying the reef is dying.' Guess what? AIMS reports that for the last two years there has been record coral cover. How

do I reconcile that with all of the science and everything that I have been told? Am I stupid? Is it wrong when the data is telling me another thing? I am trying to be discerning and rise above some of this commentary and say, 'There could be something going wrong here.' Yes, I do distrust some of the advice and I am entitled to do that, and I should not be vilified or ostracised for maintaining an alternate view.

Hospitals are blocked up as a very real, inadvertent effect from all of these activities. Members pat themselves on the back for all of the shutdowns and everything, but there were inadvertent effects and we have to count the cost of that when we are debating this issue because the government wants to maintain the opportunity to come and do this straightaway again. At hospitals people were not checking in. They were saying, 'Crikey, if this is so bad I'm not going to go into town to get my check-ups.' Everyone in the hospital system knows this. It created this ballooning effect of diseases or afflictions not being treated and building up and getting worse, and now we are counting the cost of that. This is another inadvertent effect of this hard approach the government took to this issue.

There is an inherent distrust from a lot of people out there. Governments have to earn people's trust. Like I said, people like us who live in regional areas are trying to make sense of everything the government is saying such as the reef is dying and we say, 'Hang on. That doesn't ground truth.' That builds that sense of distrust and we saw that. It hit a peak on the issue of vaccinations where people said, 'The more you're forcing this, the more I'm going to stand up.' We have said that before. So many people said, 'Do you know what? I had no problem with it before, but now the government's trying to force me to do this stuff I'm backing away,' and that was a well-documented effect that was happening.

Another issue was the borders. There was a lot of rationale behind that and I get that, but I had interface with another doctor who worked in Africa for some six or 12 months during the Ebola virus. He was insistent with me when he said, 'Keep the messaging about clean hands, keeping your distance, maintain your distance and if you're sick stay home. That's the messaging. You've got to focus on that stuff. You're battling a virus. You've got to work effectively.' He said, 'Don't get caught on the border stuff.' He said that that created more problems than they started out trying to fix in Africa and Monrovia when there was an outbreak of the Ebola virus. He said that people started doing silly stuff and it created all of this chaos in the economy, and they are very real impacts that the government cannot deny happens from this decision-making.

There may have been a lot of good intent from the government, but I am sure there was an appreciation that it was working well politically and that it was a winning formula, so let's keep it going. That is part of the impetus for this bill. We strongly reject this bill. It sends bad signals to the people of Queensland. It is very dangerous that the government continues to condition people to need to be ordered about and told what to do.