




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Coronavirus, Noosa Electorate

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.36 pm): After the devastating floods that impacted my community and South-East Queensland it seems totally inappropriate that during recovery efforts I stand here to speak again on COVID instead of applauding our incredible frontline workers, agencies and local heroes as the member for Bundamba was able to; however, I have no choice.

While masks come off and vaccine mandates drop for some front liners, there are unanswered questions. Remaining mandates without relevant medical or scientific rationale still impact our financially vulnerable, including our agricultural shows, and there is silence regarding the strategy moving forward. Human rights can only be limited when reasonable and justifiable, and clarification is required immediately on this. If we do not speak now on what has occurred, how do we prevent it from happening again?

The trauma inflicted on Noosa over the holidays as a result of ineffectual planning, modelling and foresight by levels of government meant there was no joy from borders opening nor the needed reprieve for businesses and residents. Regardless of pleas leading into this period, including the use of RATs as options for risk management to access much needed staff and services, we experienced the worst. Testing sites and businesses were closed because of service shortages due to a lack of staff or close contact directives. Superspreading occurred in vaccinated-only facilities, which led to our aged-care homes going back into lockdown, again relegating our loved ones to their rooms for weeks on end. Communications during this time were appalling. Dropping the reporting of exposure sites without a clear explanation created enormous outrage and confusion. That the Queensland app was reduced weeks after Queenslanders stopped using it makes one wonder whether the government waits until no-one abides by it or that a mandate is unmanageable before announcing it has been relaxed.

That is not how we need to manage a pandemic. It led to further trauma, noncompliance and anger. The ongoing divisions in our families, workplaces and communities over that time included the pitting of business against business. In desperation to survive many did not abide by venue mandates, leaving those that did targeted by extremists and empty of customers. Inconsistent policing of mandates further enabled this. We do not need any more hardship: we need to recover. This includes allowing residents back into their cafes and jobs, tackling unacceptable waitlists for mental health professionals, elective surgery and the horrific increases in my community of domestic violence as well as our ongoing housing emergency.

What about our small businesses and their workers? They have abided by directives, subscribed to the belief assistance was coming, borrowed money and endured as best they could. Many have gone broke, lost their homes and mental health as well as their dreams as a result of decisions made by those on high salaries who can work from home—unlike Queenslanders who have to be physically there on the job. It was insulting to them that the government has just released small business support in the form of another loan.

As part of our recovery, we need to rebuild trust and surety into the future by doing three things. Firstly, we need to provide the requested data and information on which decisions are being made, as well as rationale as to why the two remaining contentious vaccine mandates have not been relaxed. Clarity, accountability and transparency will restore confidence, improve mental health, decrease the extremist views out there and reconnect our communities before future waves and potential variants arrive.

Secondly, we need to allow our businesses to return to managing their resources, including their unvaccinated staff and patrons. The speed at which Omicron swept across South-East Queensland—regardless that border crossers, staff and patrons were double vaccinated—clearly demonstrated that it is the contagious status, not the vaccination status, which is vital to know in preventing spread to our vulnerable. Thirdly, if we are to face another two years of waves as well as potential variants, the government needs to communicate clearly to Queenslanders how this will be managed, including guaranteed compensation to small businesses and workers for loss of income as a result of determinations by government.

Enough is enough. It is time to learn from our successes as well as our errors, analyse the modelling and objectively critique mandates that divided our communities unnecessarily. We need proper oversight and external reviews. We need to repair our broken families, repair our faith in decision-makers and, most importantly, ensure our logistics and operations specialists are part of determinations. All people matter—they really matter—and we cannot move forward and believe that we are in this together unless they and their MPs have a voice.