



Speech By  
**Hon. Yvette D'Ath**


**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

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

**Second Reading**

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (5.00 pm), in reply: In rising to speak in reply to this bill I would like to thank members for their contribution to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. This bill has been developed in a period of ongoing uncertainty not experienced in a century. For the foreseeable future there will continue to be unknowns. Government must have the tools to respond to preserve the health and safety of our people, to protect the community and mitigate disruption to society. The government cannot do this without relying on the public health emergency powers included in this bill. This is the bill that allows the Chief Health Officer to require mandatory vaccinations in our hospitals, aged-care facilities and other high-risk settings. It is what allows him to quickly bring in requirements for mask wearing should the public health environment require that to be done. The unpredictable nature of this virus means that we need a framework that allows for our Chief Health Officer to react quickly.

While this virus remains unpredictable, one thing remains constant: the opposition's unrelenting willingness to criticise and undermine the public health framework that has served Queensland so well since the outset of the pandemic. The opposition claims they recognise the importance of following expert public health advice and the need for restrictions, but also want to cherry-pick which restrictions they like with hindsight in their favour. Having said that, many have said they will vote the entire bill down if they do not get what they want today, which includes the restrictions that they do say they support. We do not have the luxury of hindsight or hesitation here. Those opposite are now trying to rewrite history to pretend that they have asked responsible, measured questions, as the Leader of the Opposition liked to put it.

Let us look at the record of some of those who spoke on this bill. We had the member for Mudgeeraba who tried to attack the Premier on vaccinations—we just heard it again from the member for Buderim—despite the member for Mudgeeraba's membership of a fake union that promotes antivaccination sentiment.

We had the member for Kawana, who in a dog whistle to the protesters outside, loudly proclaimed that he was pro-choice when it came to vaccination. In early 2020 the same member for Kawana described COVID-19 as a scare campaign.

The member for Toowoomba North launched into a bizarre rant, making allegations of the Palaszczuk government having visions of a dystopian future and sharing his musings on propaganda. He said it was time to cast out the legislation entirely, but the member for Toowoomba North would do well to remember he is not particularly well placed to criticise COVID restrictions given it was revealed that he was breaching COVID rules at the beginning of the pandemic.

Despite all of the words from the member for Broadwater, he is still yet to apologise for his comment that Dr Jeannette Young was a punch-drunk bureaucrat. I am not even going to mention the member for Mermaid Beach, other than to say I hope he gets an invite to the next karaoke night held by the member for Nanango and the member for Kawana. I did miss some of the singing and dancing in the chamber relating to this bill, which I do not regret.

The record of those opposite is relevant to this bill and the amendments that they seek to move. Their record is relevant because it undermines their contentions that the amendments that they propose have been formulated in good faith. They are not. They are an attempt to play to both sides of the fence. Not to achieve balance, but to play politics. They are yet another example of an opposition's willingness to blindly oppose anything proposed by the Palaszczuk government. I want to go into a bit more detail in relation to some of the speeches that we have heard in this debate. I want to go to the member for Currumbin first.

**Mrs Gerber:** Yes!

**Mrs D'ATH:** She is very excited—I would not be. The member for Currumbin said, 'I want to acknowledge those who have suffered the most from COVID', except the member for Currumbin did not mention the families of the 737 people who have died from COVID. She did not mention all those with disability, in aged care, those who are immunocompromised or First Nations people who are most at risk. There has been heartache from this virus throughout the world, but let us not forget the lives lost and their loved ones.

**Mrs Gerber:** You missed the start of my contribution, Minister. It was before the break. That's when I thanked all those people and talked about all those people.

**Mrs D'ATH:** I acknowledge the interjection. The member did thank all those who work in health care. That does not change the fact very few people talked about those who died from COVID. One can talk about those who did not make it to funerals or weddings or heartbreaking situations, but also the families of those who have died from COVID should be remembered.

I encourage everyone on that side to meet with disability advocates. I can tell members opposite that they are not calling on us to lift the remaining restrictions. They are calling on us to reintroduce mask wearing and other restrictions because they feel like they have been forgotten. They feel that they are the minority and that no-one cares that they are being put at risk by this virus as we get on with the rest of our lives. We have to remember the most vulnerable in our community. Even with the booster those in aged-care settings are at risk and the onus is on us to do what we can to protect them.

**Mrs Gerber:** Politics of fear, Minister. It is disgraceful.

**Mrs D'ATH:** I will take that interjection: politics of fear. What an absolute joke from the member opposite. 'Open the borders! Open the borders!', those opposite said. 'Let the virus in. We do not care how many people die. Just let it rip'. I will forever be proud of what this government did in holding firm despite the calls of those opposite to let the virus in before people were vaccinated.

**Mrs Gerber:** That is rubbish, Minister.

**Mrs D'ATH:** I will take that interjection: rubbish. Sixty-four times they asked for the borders to be opened!

**Mrs Gerber:** Then you opened the border, Minister. You are rewriting history.

**Mrs D'ATH:** The member for Mudgeeraba, the member for Buderim and a number of others talked about the public being told that at 90 per cent we would review and lift restrictions and that we sat on our hands. I do not know where those opposite have been. Talk about rewriting history. Let me talk about the changes we have made as we have lifted our vaccination rates. At 70 per cent people could come from declared hotspots by air if they were fully vaccinated and home quarantine instead of hotel quarantine. At 80 per cent, if they were fully vaccinated they were able to come back by road as well as air and not need to quarantine at all. At 80 per cent international arrivals could home quarantine if fully vaccinated. At 90 per cent there were no longer any restrictions or quarantine for vaccinated arrivals from interstate or overseas—unless you were an unvaccinated interstate traveller. We have continued to ease restrictions, including lifting mandatory mask wearing. Those on the opposite side just like to say, 'We have hit over 90 per cent, nothing to see here. It is all over. It is all done.'

Let us talk about the rate of COVID in our young children in our schools who are only 43 per cent vaccinated—our five- to 11-year-olds. Let us talk about the fact that only 61 per cent of eligible people are boosted. Thirty-nine per cent of people who are eligible for boosters have not had one. It is not all over because we hit 90 per cent, I say to the member for Mudgeeraba and those on the other side, and they should recognise that. The last time I checked, National Cabinet was still proposing to expand the requirements for the booster, not reduce it. They agreed that we should now mandate the third booster

for aged care and disability. They are not winding it back, they are increasing the mandates for the booster. We now have ATAGI advice that there should be a fourth booster and that fourth booster should apply to people who are over 65, who are vulnerable, our residents in aged-care and disability sectors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders over the age of 50. There are more requirements being put around vaccinations and boosters in the community.

**Mr Mickelberg:** They are planned. Do we have to wait until the next government?

**Mrs D'ATH:** I take that interjection. If they are saying they have to wait for the next government at a federal level to see a change, they need to talk to Morrison. We are hoping for a change. A couple of members on the opposite side have said that they are willing to have some restrictions embedded in legislation. They should come and tell me which ones they want permanently entrenched in law. They do not want a stand-alone bill that will cease at a point in time when we lift the emergency declaration, but they want things permanently embedded.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mrs D'ATH:** I heard someone on the other side say, 'We're happy for the mandatory vaccinations in aged care to continue.' What other measures are they happy to have permanently embedded in legislation? It is not just about mandatory vaccinations. I do not know if those on the other side are clued in to the fact that isolation and quarantine are still a national requirement in this country.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): Order! I am sorry to interrupt you, Minister. The House will come to order. The member for Pumicestone and the member for Currumbin will stop quarrelling.

**Mrs D'ATH:** It is this head of power that underpins our ability to require people to isolate and quarantine. That is a national decision. It is the AHPPC's advice that allows that. There is no plan at this stage. They have not announced when that is going to end. Those opposite say that we can just come back at the next sitting and outline the plan to lift isolation and quarantine, but AHPPC have not announced that yet. National Cabinet have not said when they will do that. I was just looking at my messaging from health ministers, including the Commonwealth minister. They were talking about mandatory mask wearing in airports and clarifying that it is still required. I do not think I am divulging anything confidential when I say that the Commonwealth health minister, literally in the last hour, texted everyone to say that it is a National Cabinet agreement that has to be administered at a state level through our public health directives.

**Mr Stewart:** So we need to have one?

**Mrs D'ATH:** We need to have the head of power to have the public health directives otherwise we could not comply with a National Cabinet decision.

**A government member:** So do we want to go with the Morrison government or not?

**Mrs D'ATH:** That is questionable. Those on the other side have had two bob each way in this debate. Many have said, 'We support the health advice.' The member for Glass House said, 'I support AHPPC.' However, as I have just explained, it is the AHPPC that recommend to us the requirements around isolation and quarantine, and that requires a head of power. We are not here debating individual public health directives. We are here debating the head of power that allows the Chief Health Officer to create those directives. There are so many who have decided to turn this into a debate about different mandates that they do or do not like as opposed to whether we should maintain a head of power for the Chief Health Officer.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mrs D'ATH:** The AHPPC issues advice online, as does ATAGI and TGA, if members would like to look there. There are those who have said in this place that they support the health advice and mandatory vaccinations in aged care, but then have said, 'If you do not give us what we want today we will vote against the bill.' They need to explain the inconsistent position that they have put in this debate over the past couple of days. They are willing to put the National Cabinet agreements at risk because we cannot comply with National Cabinet decisions without the head of power. They want us to end these powers at the next sitting in May.

A number of members opposite have said that their communities are fed up with mandatory vaccination and that their communities have done the hard yards. Every Queenslander has done the hard yards. Every single Queenslander has done the hard yards. Our health workers, our vaccinators, those doing the testing, our paramedics, our police, our emergency workers, our aged-care workers and our border control officers have done the hard yards. We remember the heartache as many Australians tried to get back to Australia and Queensland. It was a national decision to close the international borders. Let us be honest about what this is about: it is about politics for those on the other side. It always has been.

The member for Mudgeeraba has advised that she plans to move amendments to bring forward the expiry of the public health emergency powers in just two months time, in May at our next sitting or the one after—they are two weeks apart—because they want this bill to end on 31 May. They say that the parliament can come back and debate a further extension in May if required.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mrs D'ATH:** 31 May. You would have to introduce another bill, which could not go to committee if it were to be introduced and passed by 31 May.

**Mr Hinchliffe:** Then they'd have a whole bunch of speaking points about how it didn't go to committee.

**Mrs D'ATH:** They complain that the committee process was not long enough and then they say, 'Can you support our amendments?'

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister, please resume your seat for a moment. The level of interjection has risen to an intolerable level. I want to be able to hear what the minister has to say. If I have to pull up any more members, I will be warning them.

**Mrs D'ATH:** Those opposite argue that there has not been enough transparency and there has not been enough time spent in the committee process, but then they ask to change the expiry date so that we can come back at the next sitting week to quickly pass a bill that would not have time to go to a committee. That shows the game playing of those on the other side. Honestly! Members opposite complain about the committee process being five weeks instead of six but then they ask to introduce and pass another bill in May to meet the 31 May date. That is so hypocritical that it is extraordinary. And they do it with a straight face, which is what I am always surprised about.

The federal government has indicated that the COVID-19 national partnership agreement will run until 30 September, at this point. They have put money into more vaccinations and the national partnership for COVID goes until the end of September so at least the federal government realises that COVID will continue—at least until the end of September. However, those on the other side say, 'No, time's done. We're over it. We're just over COVID. Can we just end it now?' Come on! There are countries that are going back into restrictions because of new outbreaks. Their irresponsible call for us to end this before winter shows that they continue to deny that COVID is a serious threat to life.

Across the world every government has faced difficult decisions about minimising harm to public health, social institutions and the economy while also upholding the rights of people. I want to briefly touch on the Human Rights Commission. Yes, they did say that they believe we should lift mandatory vaccinations. I understand the point that they are making, but the health commissioner also wanted us to allow people to come out of their hotel quarantine rooms to get fresh air and we had to cease that because there was a significant risk of transmission. You have to weigh up the risk to the greater population against the rights of the individual. Those are not easy decisions to make. We introduced the Human Rights Act. We know it is hard to weigh up those rights and get the balance correct, but we have to do it.

No government has the luxury of making a choice without costs. It is not as simple as choosing between the impact of restrictions and the harm of COVID. Rather, we must seek to minimise the impact of both and we must make the decision that balances the respective harms most effectively. The bill provides the enabling framework to strike this balance.

I take the last minute to thank Dr Gerrard for his amazing work; of course Dr Jeannette Young, now our Governor; all of our healthcare professionals; police and emergency services workers; frontline employees; our hotel quarantine staff and hotel staff; and aged-care workers. I acknowledge the 737 people who lost their lives in Queensland as a consequence of COVID-19. A loss of life from COVID is something that weighs heavily on me as I know it does on our health staff and our communities. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of those we have lost. Finally, I express my gratitude to each and every Queenslanders who has made personal sacrifices during this unprecedented time. As a government we will continue to keep you safe and ensure we have the powers to do so.