




Speech By
Brittany Lauga

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Record of Proceedings, 11 September 2024

MOTION

COVID 19, Response Review

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (4.35 pm): I move the following amendment—

That all words after 'pandemic' in paragraph (a) be omitted and the following inserted:

- (b) that the Queensland response to the COVID pandemic was nation leading, including being the first jurisdiction to declare a public health emergency;
- (c) the strong economic recovery of the Labor government which assisted Queensland families and businesses through the pandemic;
- (d) the Australian government is conducting a COVID-19 Inquiry, with its report due on 30 September 2024, which Queensland has had input into; and
- (e) that agencies across government will review the findings along with their own internal reviews to ensure continued improvement.'

Millions of people around the world lost their lives to COVID-19 and it is fair to say Queensland's response was one of the best in the world. We listened to the expert advice throughout the pandemic, including taking the tough decisions to close Queensland borders when the expert advice indicated that that was the best way to keep Queenslanders safe.

Queensland's border policy has always been formulated pursuant to the expert health advice. Those opposite attacked the expert health advice by attacking our border policy. They implicitly attacked the then chief health officer—but sometimes they were not implicit and instead directly attacked the then chief health officer. These attacks included the member for Surfers Paradise and the member for Callide re-posting a cartoon critical of the former chief health officer and comparing the deadly pandemic to a mild flu. It included the member for Kawana, who initially called COVID a scare campaign, posting a tweet this weekend attacking the former chief health officer and dismissing her health advice. The member for Broadwater claimed the former chief health officer was part of a collection of punch-drunk bureaucrats and was power hungry.

Our health response was swift and coordinated, considering the seriousness and unprecedented nature of COVID-19. We were the first Australian jurisdiction to declare a public health emergency. Our top priority during the pandemic was keeping Queenslanders safe. To do this, our response broadly occurred in two phases: keeping the virus out for as long as possible until high levels of vaccination coverage were achieved; and focusing efforts on protecting those at highest risk. Our effective COVID-19 response meant shorter and fewer lockdowns than other jurisdictions.

It was an unprecedented event and it is crucial that we learn from it to ensure we are prepared for any future pandemic. That is why the federal government announced an independent inquiry into Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inquiry will consider health and non-health responses to the pandemic including the responses of the Commonwealth and the states and territories. These include issues such as the provision of vaccinations, treatments and key medical supplies to

Australians; aged care; disability care; mental health support for those impacted by COVID-19 and lockdowns; assistance to maintain cross-border road and shipping supply chains; financial support for individuals and businesses; and assistance for Australians abroad.

The review is due to the Commonwealth at the end of the month and Queensland, which has participated in the review, will consider all of its findings. However, Queensland has also looked at some of the innovative models of care and incorporated some into ongoing care. For instance, to support continuity of care closer to home, we leveraged opportunities to increase the uptake of virtual care and telehealth—something that regional Queenslanders in particular are incredibly happy about. The uptake of telehealth services has been significant right across the state. Queenslanders were a little hesitant to use telehealth before COVID, but as soon as COVID happened we were ready and those in regional Queensland were very pleased to use it.

Telehealth services delivered in April 2020 tripled from those delivered in the nine months prior to the COVID-19 response. This increase was reflected in many clinical areas. COVID-19 provided the impetus for widespread and sustainable change towards a more empowered, collaborative, transparent and agile health system. Queensland's health system now retains capacity and capability to respond to future pandemics.

We are also implementing the national plan to transition Australia's COVID-19 response and establish stores of PPE and health consumables to protect against significant supply chain disruption and rapid, large-scale vaccination networks. In the meantime, post the COVID-19 pandemic, to maintain readiness for another pandemic we have also revised the pandemic influenza plan. We have commenced the development of a generic public health pandemic response plan to guide the response to a pandemic threat from any emerging disease. I commend the amended motion to the House.