



Hon Yvette D'Ath MP
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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliament
George Street
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Neil
Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter regarding petition number 3576-21, tabled in Parliament on 1 September 2021, in relation to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill, tabled 16 June 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in over 219 million infections and over 4.5 million deaths worldwide. It is an enduring emergency.

The temporary emergency powers provided under the Public Health Act authorise the making of public health directions that have proven critical to the Government's efforts to limit, and respond to, the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland. These powers provide the Chief Health Officer with the ability to quickly implement the recommendations of National Cabinet and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee without the need to remake or amend Acts or Regulations, which would have delayed and limited the effectiveness of measures to protect the public and limit the adverse health and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Queensland. The emergency powers and associated public health measures also underpin Queensland's quarantine system and contact tracing efforts, which are critical to effective efforts at prevention and containment.

The power of the Chief Health Officer to issue public health directions has made it possible to take prompt preventative measures to minimise adverse impacts on individuals, businesses and the Queensland economy. This framework also makes it possible to revoke or ease public health restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so, ensuring that restrictions are only applied for the shortest period of time necessary to address the public health risk.

While it is acknowledged that the decisions to impose restrictions are typically made in a time-critical manner and are not subject to usual legislative processes, parliament has broad oversight of the framework in which these decisions are made, namely:

- In 2020, the former Health, Communities, Disability Services and Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence Committee conducted several public hearings, sought public submissions and issued an interim report as part of its inquiry into the Queensland Government's health response to COVID-19.
- Both this Bill and the previous extension bill, along with other COVID-19-related legislation have been subject to detailed scrutiny by Parliamentary Committees. These committee processes have involved numerous public submissions, departmental briefings and public hearings.
- In addition to these inquiries, the relevant Parliamentary Committees have provided ongoing oversight by scrutinising and reporting on extraordinary regulations and other secondary instruments made under the temporary COVID-19 legislative framework.

I note that the petitioners requested an end to 'sign in' mandates for businesses. As noted in the *National Contact Tracing Review: A report for Australia's National Cabinet* (the Finkel Review), contact tracing and outbreak management must perform extremely well to prevent outbreaks and enable an active economy until a vaccine or an effective therapeutic arrives, and perhaps longer.

The use of the Check In Qld app creates greater certainty for the public health response and support increased flexibility in the level of restrictions imposed in the event of a transmission event. It also creates greater consistency in data collection, where records can be made quickly available for contact tracing. High quality contact information where a case is detected in the community is crucial to minimise the risk of widespread COVID-19 transmission.

Simply put, the quicker we can find contacts, the quicker we can require them to quarantine and the less likely we are to lockdown or put in place density restrictions that impact on the very business using the app.

The worsening outbreaks in New South Wales and other Australian jurisdictions and continued large-scale transmission around the world serve as a clear reminder of how rapidly COVID-19 can spread and overwhelm health systems. Risks for community transmission in Queensland, such as interstate cross-border travel, will remain while the virus continues to circulate in Australia. Queensland also continues to receive significant numbers of overseas arrivals and cases of COVID-19 continue to be detected in hotel quarantine, including highly contagious variants.

For these reasons, the public health emergency for COVID-19 continues to require a significant response from the health system and support from other government departments. It is expected the need for emergency powers will remain until a large number of the Queensland population has been vaccinated and the risk of widespread outbreaks has subsided.

Extending the temporary COVID-19 legislative framework until 30 April 2022 will ensure the Government can continue to respond quickly and effectively to protect the health and safety of the community, facilitate the continued functioning of businesses and institutions and support Queensland's economic recovery. I wish to emphasise that, despite the proposed extension until 30 April 2022, the emergency powers would cease earlier if the public health emergency ends before the expiry date.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



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