



Hon Yvette D'Ath MP
Minister for Health and Ambulance Services
Leader of the House

16 DEC 2021

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliament
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter regarding petition number 3610-21, tabled in Parliament on 16 November 2021, requesting re-opening of the Goondiwindi border bubble.

I wish to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the people in and around Goondiwindi in complying with Queensland's health and safety measures and for getting vaccinated, keeping themselves and the broader Queensland community protected from COVID-19. Goondiwindi has one of Queensland's highest levels of COVID-19 vaccination coverage, with 96 per cent of the population having received at least one dose and 90 per cent having received two doses.

Under *Queensland's COVID-19 Vaccine Plan To Unite Families* released on 18 October 2021, Queensland's border restrictions and quarantine requirements will be progressively eased as the Queensland population aged 16 and over nears or meets vaccine coverage milestones of 70 per cent (achieved on 19 November), 80 per cent (commencing 13 December) and 90 per cent (currently no set date).

Goondiwindi is an excellent example of how high vaccination rates can not only protect the community against widespread outbreaks and high numbers of hospitalisations, but also contribute to Queensland being able to ease border restrictions.

I note that the petitioners raised concerns about the closing of the border bubble leading to restricting access to schools, work, essential services and social activities in remote locations.

When all local government areas (LGAs) of New South Wales (NSW) are declared COVID-19 hotspots, as is the case currently, a border zone with NSW is also defined to allow for the continuance of day-to-day cross-border activities for communities that span the border but are also in a declared hot spot. Border zone areas are defined as restricted or non-restricted.

In November 2021, a total of eight COVID-19 cases were reported as part of the Goondiwindi cluster in Queensland. Some of these cases had contracted COVID-19 through cross-border movement into Moree, a border zone community in Northern NSW. Due to the increasing numbers of cases in Moree Plains and the amount of regular movement between the two LGAs, Queensland declared Moree Plains LGA as a restricted border zone area.

From 13 December 2021, some localities in the Moree Plains LGAs, including Tulloona, Garah, Boomi, Mungindi, Toomelah and Boggabilla were moved to the non-restricted border zone. However, all other parts of Moree Plains continue to be considered a restricted border zone.

While there are more significant restrictions on entry to Queensland for people who have been in a restricted border zone area, the border zone remains operational.

It is acknowledged that these restrictions may result in social and wellbeing concerns, but they have been necessary to mitigate the incursion of COVID-19 from NSW into Queensland and to protect Queensland's unvaccinated and vulnerable populations.

There has been a need to ensure that Queensland's border protections and public health measures remain robust as Queensland increased its state-wide vaccination coverage to levels where endemic COVID-19 can be managed without significant impacts to daily life and Queensland's health system capacity.

Queensland reached 80 percent fully vaccinated threshold on 9 December 2021.

In line with the *Vaccine Plan to Unite Families*, from 1am on 13 December 2021 fully vaccinated people from hotspots have been permitted to arrive in Queensland without having to quarantine, provided they have a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within the 72 hours prior to arrival into Queensland and agree to get a further COVID-19 PCR test on day five of their stay in Queensland.

Fully vaccinated residents can travel freely between Queensland and the non-restricted NSW border zone. To allow for day-to-day activities to continue for fully vaccinated residents from a restricted border zone, entry to Queensland is permitted without the need to undertake a PCR test for essential purposes, including for essential work, to get medical care, to attend school or buy essential supplies not available in NSW.

Unvaccinated residents from a restricted border zone can enter Queensland for limited essential purposes including for essential work (unless attendance at the workplace requires vaccination), to get medical care, or to attend school if a child of an essential worker or buy essential supplies not available in NSW. If they wish to enter for recreation purposes, they will have to comply with quarantine requirements.

From 17 December, Queensland will move to vaccine-related public health and safety measures under the *Public Health and Social Measures linked to vaccination status Direction*. The aim of this Direction is to continue to increase Queensland's vaccination coverage and reduce the need for non-vaccine public health and safety measures such as lockdowns and border restrictions into the future.

Vaccination is the way out of restrictions. Vaccination against COVID-19 is the best protection for individuals, the Queensland community and the Queensland economy.

I continue to encourage all people, including those moving into and around remote communities, to consider the risks to themselves and to the communities they will enter and act accordingly – this includes getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



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