

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT (TEMPORARY COVID-19 PROVISIONS) BILL 2022

559. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Deputy Premier:

I refer to the Emergency Management Amendment (Temporary COVID-19 Provisions) Bill 2022.

- (1) Why has the government chosen to temporarily amend the Emergency Management Act instead of the Public Health Act to provide fit-for-purpose legislation to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and any future pandemics?
- (2) Why has the government chosen to have no ministerial or parliamentary oversight of decisions of the State Emergency Coordinator as empowered by the proposed bill?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. For the sake of the record, I am, of course, answering the question as the Premier's representative because he is travelling to Canberra to attend the national service of mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I also add, I am not the Acting Premier, but am very happy to receive the question from the Leader of the Opposition.

- (1)–(2) The purpose of the legislation brings into stark reality that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. We are still facing a potential that some of the policies that were brought into being as a result of our dealing with the emergency that was the COVID-19 pandemic may need to be implemented in some form at some point in the future.

The WA government, like governments across Australia—although perhaps with the exception of Victoria—has decided to implement legislation that will provide the necessary powers to respond to any emerging issues in relation to a global pandemic when they arise from time to time. I think the reality is that as the world's population continues to grow and as we continue to encroach upon natural environments, there will come a time when there is another episode associated with some form of cross-species communicable disease. Therefore, from that perspective, it makes sense that we have in place the measures that we need to ensure that we can respond when the time arises.

The opposition, like many other people in the community, has been calling on us to move beyond the state of emergency and that is what this legislation will do. It will put in place appropriate powers for the emergency management controller to respond as the need arises and take us beyond the Emergency Management Act, which as everyone knows is not fit for purpose. The Emergency Management Act is primarily a piece of legislation around things such as floods, cyclones, fires and other disasters and not for a prolonged campaign that something like a global pandemic represents. The bill is an appropriate response to the need to move beyond the Emergency Management Act, but will ensure that we will have the necessary powers to respond as required.

The member's question also goes to the point of why are we not just enlivening the Public Health Act or other aspects, or doing some version of that legislation. As we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, a whole-of-government response, not simply a health response, is required. That goes to the issue, obviously, of the health factors that are associated with it, but also to the issue that we must be able if required to manage the population and population movements to ensure that people are kept safe.