

Ordinary Meeting - 23 November 2021

Queensland Coronavirus (COVID-19) Roadmap Related Impacts

Councillors,

Last evening, I had indicated that I would not proceed with this Mayoral Minute. That deferral was to be in recognition of the efforts that the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) are undertaking on our behalf.

However, I have reconsidered the scope I had originally intended and believe it goes beyond what the LGAQ are able to address as it relates to our community not just Council. Today, I table this Mayoral Minute for your consideration regarding concerns and potential impacts of Queensland's COVID-19 Transition Roadmap including the *COVID-19 Vaccine Plan to Unite Families*. In its current form, this roadmap appears to present significant constraints and restrictions that will bring undesirable related impacts for our region, its residents and business communities. Many of these remain unresolved.

Background

The last two years have been challenging and have tested the resilience of our communities. I commend both the Queensland and Australian Governments for their efforts that have prioritised the safety and wellbeing of citizens, while also attempting to protect our business communities from the most severe effects. Locally, Scenic Rim Regional Council has also played its part with targeted support packages and management of facilities. A hallmark of these early stages has been the evidence of respectful alignment necessary to give confidence to the wider community.

Based on the options currently available, I have confidence in the medical evidence that widespread vaccination participation provides the best foundation for community wellbeing. I will continue to advocate for community members to seek proper medical advice for their circumstance and engage with the vaccination opportunities accordingly. There is reliable evidence that they provide protections from serious symptoms and mitigate transmission.

From personal dialogue and email communications with a number of our residents, I am acutely aware that we have a significant population who are unable to receive a vaccine for genuine medical reasons. They, and their families, understandably have unresolved concerns for what their future challenges may be as they will be reliant on the so-called herd immunity for a large part of their protection. I look forward to additional solutions becoming available to support them.

It is also appropriate to clarify at this time that Council has not identified the requirement for, nor been directed to implement, total vaccine mandates within Council operations and facilities.

Councillors, as I have stated in a number of settings: Within the context of respectful coexistence, maintaining civilised society and not impinging on the reasonable rights of others, I respect the rights of individuals within our democracy to make informed decisions. I also respect that, in doing so, they must also be accepting full accountability for the consequences of their decisions.

Current Challenge

The Australian and Queensland Governments have the designated responsibilities to develop and administer well informed policy and wise decisions to ensure the ongoing wellbeing of our communities. After all, they have access to the proper health, medical, scientific and risk management resources to inform such matters. We rely on such clarity to operate as a civilised modern society. It is, therefore, increasingly disappointing to me that, given such access to expert resources, we are witnessing increasingly diverse solutions being implemented. In our Queensland context these present onerous burdens for many in our Scenic Rim communities.

Councillors, I share significant concerns that the current dialogue and currently revealed pandemic transition pathway from here for Queensland, seemingly, have not been adequately considered and have not adequately balanced all risk considerations. From discussions and correspondence across our region, I have confirmed that current proposed restrictions and constraints pose a risk to our social fabric and participation, while also imposing unacceptable cost, physical and economic risk upon both individuals and business operators.

Our Queensland transition will be progressing from a platform of high vaccination coverage and with access to a wide range of lessons learned from other jurisdictions, not just about the pandemic but also about concurrent risks to social fabric, business confidence and economic recovery.

This situation is made more complex by the nature of how South East Queensland works with high levels of mobility between local government areas for work, shopping, medical, social and recreational purposes. For us this has the added complexity of being one of a number of "Border Councils".

Councillors, I believe there are a significant range of matters that should be re-examined by the Queensland Government, while there is still time ahead of the 17 December 2021 reference date. I note that the significance of this date is the expectation of reaching or exceeding 80% double vaccinated community status.

Motion

In that context, I propose a motion as follows.

That Scenic Rim Regional Council authorises the Mayor to make representations to the Premier of Queensland, as a matter of urgency, regarding the following matters:

1. Scenic Rim Regional Council affirms its recognition that the Premier and Parliament of Queensland have the designated authority and responsibility to develop, communicate and implement a suitable plan in the current circumstances that maintains not just community safety but also upholds our social fabric, respectful community existence and confidence for business operations;
2. Scenic Rim Regional Council requests that the Queensland Government take urgent steps to:
 - A. Reassess any proposed directives to ensure proper respect and balance concerning the extent of differentiation indicated between the vaccinated and unvaccinated, as the current approach does not appear to consider all available mitigation alternatives to limit risk and allow equitable participation.
 - B. Reassess and limit the extent of locations, business types and role dimensions that require full vaccination on a total risk basis, including consideration of alternate solutions that may reliably mitigate health risk, allow equitable participation and address perceived inconsistencies;
 - C. Reassess the practical impacts and burdens that any restrictions or directives will impose on individuals, families, small, medium and large businesses and consult more widely to ensure the foundations for a sustainable confident society and economic performance are strengthened again;
 - D. Reassess protections for business owners and employees with regard to contingent issues including insurances, managing mandates, health and safety of employees and legal liability to maintain confidence for these participants in the economies of our State and the Scenic Rim region;
 - E. Reassess and develop pragmatic protocols for managing potential positive COVID-19 cases in workplaces, where there is a foundation of high vaccination coverage, to mitigate COVID-19 risks without crippling businesses and communities with impractical management mandates; and
 - F. Provide more communication resources to both engage more widely and deliver a more complete evidence based justification and explanation based on the outcomes of 2(A) -2(E) above.
3. Council continue to encourage all residents of Scenic Rim to seek medical advice and be vaccinated against COVID-19, as advised.

Cr Greg Christensen
MAYOR