

## SUBMISSION ON THE QUEENSLAND VETERANS COUNCIL BILL 2021

### Background

The Bill [[https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/whole/html/bill.first/bill\\_2021\\_003](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/whole/html/bill.first/bill_2021_003)] and was introduced to Queensland Parliament on the 22nd April, 2021, along with the Explanatory Notes [<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Documents/TableOffice/TabledPapers/2021/5721T549.pdf>].

The stated purpose of the Bill is to create a so called Queensland Veterans Council to administer ANZAC Square, and also to administer the Trust Fund of the ANZAC Day Trust, which is currently governed by the ANZAC Day Act.

The Bill also provides for the Council to “advise the Minister about veterans’ matters.”

In actuality, the latter function is specified in clause 11 to be as follows:

- (a) to monitor matters affecting the veterans’ community;
- (b) to investigate and report on any aspect of veterans’ matters referred to it by the Minister;
- (c) to consult with the veterans’ community when developing advice for the Minister;
- (d) to advise the Minister about veterans’ matters and any other matter relevant to the performance of the council’s functions.

The Bill creates a Council of eight members, but only a maximum of two of these are nominated by veterans’ organisations. The other six members are:

- the Chief Executive of the Department of Premier and Cabinet or their nominee;
- a nominee of the CEO of the Brisbane City Council or their nominee; and,
- up to four other people appointed by the Minister

In addition, the Minister (the Premier) can appoint the Chair of the Council.

A discussion of the issues arising from the Bill is set out below.

### The title is a misnomer

The name Queensland Veterans Council is a misnomer, as veterans will account for only one quarter its members. As five of the members of the council (and potentially six if an additional Chair is appointed by the Minister), veterans will essentially be nothing more than spectators with no real power to direct or control the decisions of the Council.

This should be seen in contrast to the ANZAC Day Trust, which has four members, all of whom are veterans.

### What is the need?

The Explanatory Notes fail to explain why the Council is needed, other than that it is a “policy objective.” To add insult to injury, the Explanatory Notes canvass the question “Alternative ways of achieving policy objectives” in a self serving way by stating:

*Legislation is the only way to establish the QVC as a statutory body. In addition, legislative amendment to the AD Act is the only way to abolish the Anzac Day Trust as a statutory body and transfer the governance of the Trust Fund to the QVC.*

What the notes don’t canvas is whether the Bill offers anything for veterans. The answer would appear not. No need is stated for the change. Nor is there any stated support from ESOs in the two years the Government had the Bill but didn’t introduce it to Parliament. That had to wait until after the recent election lest it become an issue. The Bill serves to give effect to the Government’s policy, but nothing else.

## Financial implications

The Explanatory Notes state that:

*As part of the 2019 20 State Budget, the Queensland Government committed \$2.7 million over five years and \$2.4 million per annum ongoing to establish the Office for Veterans and provide for the ongoing curation and oversight of Anzac Square.*

*The cost of maintaining the Anzac Square parklands is currently met by BCC. With the establishment of the QVC, these costs will be met by the State Government through the existing funding allocation noted above.*

However, the Hansard of the hearing of the Parliamentary Committee heard on the 30th April, 2021 contains the following exchange when Ms Filly Morgan, the Deputy Director General, Corporate and Government Services, Department of the Premier and Cabinet appeared before the Committee:

Mr BENNETT: I am sorry if my questions about funding were confusing. I want to ask another question around similar issues. I note that there is \$2.7 million over five years from the state government and \$2.4 million per annum for the establishment of the new Office for Veterans and the ongoing oversight of Anzac Square. The day to day operational costs, I believe, were borne by the Brisbane City Council and now will be borne by the state government or this Office for Veterans. As an outsider looking in, I would have thought that the ongoing costs would have been significantly more than that with maintenance, setting up for special events et cetera. Is there a more in depth budget available for the overall expected running costs and financial statements of Anzac Square?

Ms Morgan: That is the current budget for the running of the council and Anzac Square, and that takes into consideration the costs that were borne by the Brisbane City Council in maintaining the square. That is included in that budget at the present time.

Mr BENNETT: \$2.4 million per annum is what we expect it might have cost. I am not asking you to be definitive because I know that we cannot nut down to the last dollar. It seems to me that it is about \$2.4 million as an annual maintenance cost or running cost of the square, plus the new Office for Veterans.

Ms Morgan: Yes, that is correct.

However, there will be insufficient funding to maintain the functions of the ANZAC Day Trust, as well as maintaining ANZAC Square, and doing all manner of inquiries directed by the Minister.

The ANZAC Day Trust currently administers approximately \$1.2m per annum in appropriated funds, which in turn are distributed to ESOs across Queensland for commemorative and veteran welfare purposes. The State pays the cost of a 0.5 FTE Secretary to assist the Trustees administer the Trust.

If the annual appropriation of \$2.4m will go in maintaining ANZAC Square and the running costs of the Council, then it means there will be only \$2.7m over five years to replace what would otherwise be \$6m in funding which flows to veterans.

In short, it would appear that veterans will be approximately \$3.3m worse off in funding over the next five years. That assumes, that the cost of running the Council does not blow out and eat into the funds that would otherwise flow through the ADT to ESOs.

## Better ways to spend the money

The new Council will be loaded with costs that currently don't exist. For example, all eight members of the Council will be entitled to be paid for their time, whereas the current Trustees of the ADT perform largely the same role without payment.

There are very clearly better ways to spend \$2.4m a year supporting veterans. The money could be directly channelled into delivering services. The Council will in fact deliver no services at all, and at best be a talking shop.

Even then, the effectiveness of the Council as a talking shop is highly doubtful. With only two veterans out of eight members, the government will effectively be talking to itself.

It would have been far better to appropriate the money in additional funding to the ADT, without having a bureaucracy built up around the Council.

#### It will weaken ESOs

The creation of the Council will weaken the voice of ESOs. Currently, the Government has to deal with ESOs directly, but with the passage of the Bill they will be able to avoid talking to them, and instead consult the Council.

#### It will politicise ANZAC Day and veterans issues

At all levels of Australian government, ANZAC Day and veterans affairs have hitherto been non-partisan. There are clear signs in the Bill that this will not be so after the creation of the Council.

The structure of the Bill is to create a Council which is directed by the Premier. In clause 11 of the Bill it is clear it has very little freedom unless directed by the Minister.

Moreover, the Explanatory Notes clearly state that:

*Establishing a statutory body for Anzac Square will support the future strategic direction and operation of the State's war memorial, particularly to the extent that the memorial galleries educate and inform visitors about the service and sacrifice of Queenslanders and Australians in war, peacemaking and peacekeeping.*

This is very worrying, as the State Government will be able to control the education and messaging around ANZAC Day through control of the Council.

The proposed Bill needs amendment by ensuring that the majority of the Council membership is comprised of veterans and an assurance that the funding allocated will not be consumed by the costs of looking after ANZAC Square and the employment of those associated with the Council.

Stewart Cameron, CSC  
Air Commodore (Rtd)