



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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**COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY (QUEENSLAND CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW COMMISSION)
REGULATION**

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.12 p.m.): I rise to support the Attorney-General in opposing the motion to disallow the Commissions of Inquiry (Queensland Constitutional Review Commission) Regulation 1999 (Subordinate Legislation No. 85 of 1999) tabled in the House on 25 May 1999. The Opposition has moved this motion as a ruse. Everything that those opposite have said today has been a ruse. It is beyond the pale. Those opposite have used this device to come in here and raise a number of issues that have no standing whatsoever and are wasting the time of the Parliament. It is ironic that those opposite are also wasting my time because I should have been addressing a meeting which is dealing with matters pertaining to this particular commission.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr FENLON: It was very important that I come into the House and address these issues. I will be returning to the meeting shortly. I have responsibilities directed towards addressing that meeting. It is a gathering of senior officers from the curriculum section of the Department of Education in the presence of Professor Hughes. All those people were pleased that I was able to join this debate.

The matters that have been raised by the Opposition in relation to this particular regulation are absolutely absurd. Those opposite claim that it would make it impossible for the commission to meet if there was a regulation that stipulated there must be a quorum of three. What a farce! What a ruse! That was the substance of the note I took during the contribution made by the member for Warwick. Mr Springborg said that it would make it impossible for the commission to meet. The Opposition came in here in order to raise issues that have no foundation whatsoever.

The Attorney-General has raised the issue of the lack of bipartisanship. I will detail the incredible history of this matter. I will not go into the same detail, but the Attorney-General has gone back at least five years in dealing with LCARC and EARC itself. That history has shown an amazing level of bipartisanship and illustrates the good and constructive work that was carried out by a range of members of this Assembly. That bipartisanship has resulted in some very fine work.

The draft Constitution which the Attorney-General has today tabled largely reflects word for word the draft which has come from LCARC and its predecessors. It is a testament to the professionalism of the staff that we have had working for us and the many hours of debate and constructive work that the committee has put in.

To date there has been a very strong sense of bipartisanship. As the Attorney-General has indicated, that same committee will receive the outcome of the commission's deliberations. This matter will return to LCARC. A further report will be provided to the Parliament. It is absolute nonsense to suggest that any bipartisanship is lost in this process.

As the Attorney-General outlined, the commission has been properly set up. It has been provided with adequate powers to execute its purpose. There is no doubt in the community about the eminence, capacity and devotion to the task of each of the members who have been appointed to the commission.

The work of our parliamentary committee is limited. The Attorney-General alluded to the machinery whereby parliamentary committees work closely with the commission. It is the role of

Government to set up such a committee. The process is in place and there is much work to be done. The nature of the work goes far beyond that of a parliamentary committee.

I must remind honourable members that one of the fundamental issues is education. In a previous speech in the Parliament on this matter I outlined the paucity of understanding of members of the public in relation to our State Constitution. It is an appalling indictment of our society that people in the community have little idea that Queensland has a Constitution.

I suggest that if members go to a family barbecue on the weekend and ask the people present what they know about the Queensland Constitution, I can guarantee that even professional, educated people will look at them in wonderment and ask, "Is there such a thing? I did not know that there was a State Constitution." So this commission has a very, very important role to play not only in educating people about the fact that Queensland has a constitution but also in educating people about that dynamic that we have operating in Australia. At present we have a very strong foment coming from the community in relation to the reform of the Australian Constitution, the republic and the establishment of constitutions that are meaningful and accessible to the public.

That brings me to another point that was raised by the Opposition in that the regulation is somehow pre-empting the prospect of a successful pro-republic referendum outcome. What are the members opposite suggesting? Are they suggesting that we wait around with our arms folded until there is such an outcome and then jump up and say, "Oh dear, we have a little problem. We have to deal with our State Constitution"? Is that what they are really suggesting? If they are, it is an absolute absurdity. It shows again that the Opposition's disallowance motion is a complete ruse. The Opposition has no argument and no foundation upon which to move this disallowance motion.

The Opposition's argument in terms of lack of timing or problems with the timing is also fundamentally flawed. The process has run smoothly. The responses that have been provided via the Departments of the Attorney-General and the Premier have been incredibly well timed. They demonstrate that this Government is intent on ensuring that the people of Queensland play a role in this very important process. I hope and urge the participants in this process to ensure that it filters through to the entire community. The meeting that I mentioned earlier was one such action that I have taken to ensure that education about this issue permeates our schools and reaches our young Queenslanders, who need to know more about this process and be very much a part of it.

I also commend the Attorney-General and the Premier for pursuing these matters, because they are consistent with the commitments that were given prior to the 1995 election. In doing so, we are fulfilling those very important undertakings. There is no bias in this process. The suggestion that Labor is getting a head start is absolutely absurd.

Time expired.
