



Speech by

**Hon. R. WELFORD**

**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Hansard 13 December 2001

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Electoral Reforms**

**Hon. R. J. WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.54 a.m.), by leave: I am taking the opportunity today to set out our government's comprehensive plan for reform of our electoral laws. On 21 January this year, the Premier made the historic Barcardine Statement, so named after the birthplace of Australia's oldest democratic political party, the Australian Labor Party. That statement committed the Beattie government to a range of reforms to deal with electoral fraud, with the aim of restoring public faith in the electoral process. Work on this package of reform measures is well advanced and the reforms will make Queensland's electoral laws the toughest and most democratic in Australia.

The plan outlined by the Premier in his Barcardine Statement includes measures to require registered political parties to have a community based membership with the right to control their parties through proper democratic processes overseen by the Electoral Commission; prohibit electoral officers running for political office and being members of political parties; deter abuse of the pre-selection process by introducing oversight of pre-selection ballots by the Electoral Commission; restrict voting in pre-selections to eligible electors; introduce new public disclosure requirements for parties and candidates in relation to preference arrangements and loans and gifts; prohibit registered political parties that do not comply with these new requirements from receiving public funding; introduce measures to improve voter participation; give the Electoral Commission responsibility to oversee the integrity of the electoral roll; clean up the special postal voter system; and make penalties for electoral offences under the Electoral Act and the Criminal Code the toughest in Australia.

Since these commitments were made, two inquiries into electoral fraud have finalised their reports. *The Shepherdson Inquiry: an investigation into electoral fraud* was tabled in this parliament on 1 May 2001. The Commonwealth Joint Standing Committee report on electoral matters, entitled *Report into the integrity of the electoral roll*, was tabled in the federal parliament on 18 June 2001. Those reports further highlighted the need for reforms to strengthen the integrity of our electoral system in the way foreshadowed by our government.

In October this year, the honourable member for Southern Downs introduced into this House a private member's bill titled Electoral (Fraudulent Actions) Amendment Bill 2001. On 28 November 2001, on my motion, that bill was referred to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee for its consideration and report. The committee is required to report back to the House before 31 March next year. The findings and recommendations of those reports are being taken into account in finalising a package of reforms to keep Queensland in the forefront of democratic government.

I am pleased to advise the House that the drafting of the legislation is well under way. I am aiming to introduce the bill as soon as possible after the parliamentary committee reports on the private member's bill. This will ensure the new arrangements are put in place and given full effect by the Electoral Commission of Queensland well before the next state election. Members, political parties and prospective candidates will be well aware of the new rules before nominating for future state elections.

The key outcomes of our government's electoral reform package will be raising public awareness about the electoral process; encouraging groups with traditionally low participation rates, such as young people, to enrol; cleansing the electoral roll of inaccurate enrolments; strengthening its

integrity by updating electoral information with data held by Queensland government agencies; and putting an end to electoral fraud.

The people of Queensland expect honesty and integrity from our electoral system and their politicians. Our government has been single-minded in its determination to restore public confidence in our elected government and the electoral system. The electoral reform package I have outlined today will deliver on our commitment made to the people of Queensland in Barcaldine. It will ensure Queensland's electoral laws underpin the strongest democracy in Australia.

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