



Speech by  
**Dr DAVID WATSON**  
**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

Hansard 4 June 2003

**PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—Lib) (12.22 p.m.): I rise to support the bill before the parliament. The Premier came into this parliament after the 1989 election, as did the member for Southern Downs and myself. When we came into this parliament the resources that went to the opposition were not only substantially less than they are today, but there was some controversy over the paucity of the resources that went to the opposition. Both the National Party and the Liberal Party were in opposition and it had been like that for some time.

It was great credit to Rob Borbidge, when he became the Premier of this state, that he gave to the then Leader of the Opposition the full resources that were given to both the Liberal and National Party. Rob Borbidge attempted to change the historical position of the Queensland parliament with respect to the resources. To give the current Premier credit, in the last parliament he did exactly the same thing, and with the recent re-formation of the Liberal-National Party coalition he has done the same thing.

What the previous Premier did and what the current Premier did was try to recorrect the historical imbalance on resources that went to the opposition. The Premier said, and we agreed with the same proposition when we were in government, that if a parliament was to function properly, if a parliament was to act in a democratic way, the official opposition needed to be properly resourced. The government obviously is resourced. The official opposition needs to be resourced otherwise you simply have an incorrect balance of resources.

**Mr Terry Sullivan:** It is actually a healthier parliament if you have a healthy opposition.

**Dr WATSON:** It is always a healthier parliament in that situation, and when we have had close parliaments one knows how rigorous the debates have been in that process.

I understand Independents coming in and having a slightly different view point, but the fact is that it is the government and the opposition that have the prime responsibility for making sure the parliament runs. It is as simple as that. The opposition is always the alternative government and plays a role particularly in that way.

When the Premier initiated this review committee in the last parliament, which I was a member of along with the member for Nicklin and the member for Gladstone, he did so to address a whole range of issues that had been out in the public to do with the handbook, about where resources went and whether they were well defined or not. The committee considered all of these things. It was during that process that the issue came up about whether or not it was fair that the Liberal Party by itself, again a historical situation, should be named as a party in the handbook and no other party. We had One Nation in the parliament at that particular time.

We addressed that situation quite up front and we addressed it in a couple of ways. One of the ways we suggested to make this whole thing transparent was to actually change the Parliament of Queensland Act to make sure that that was out there so every one could see it; that it was not just the Liberal Party that was named, but in fact it applied to any particular party. What we agreed to in the committee was a motion which was even broader than what the Premier has proposed in the current bill. The motion that we supported specified at least 10 per cent of the members of the Legislative Assembly or, if less than 10 per cent of the members of the Legislative Assembly, at least 10 per cent of the primary vote in a general election for the parliament.

The situation was very simple: there was no minimum number of members to form a political party. This bill essentially puts in a minimum number. It is exactly the same recommendation that the previous committee made, except a minimum number of people is put in there. Quite frankly there is some logic to that because it probably does help that there is a minimum.

The point about this is that the original proposal was not about favouring Bob Quinn, the current leader of the Liberal Party, or myself as the previous Liberal leader. It was about getting transparency in the process. The member for Nicklin and the member for Gladstone participated in those discussions.

As I said in the debate we had the other night, the chairman of that committee, Terry Mackenroth, at the time was extremely careful to make sure that every member had their say. I can remember him going around the table and making sure that every member was satisfied with every proposal that went forward. In fact I even said to him one day, 'Gee, you know, this is getting a little laborious', and he said to me, 'David, I want to make sure that when this is done that no-one is going to come back and say they were not listened to; that they did not have an opportunity to put forward any question; that everything that they wanted was considered; and that they agreed with every word that was in the report'. That is what Terry Mackenroth said at the time, and he did that, and I have to give him credit for that. The Premier would remember him being as precise at that.

**Mr Beattie** interjected.

**Dr WATSON:** I agree; he did an excellent job. There was absolutely no question that when the report came down every word of that report had been considered by each and every member, and every member had agreed with every word. That was in the last parliament. The member for Nicklin was there, the member for Gladstone was there and the One Nation leader at the time, Bill Feldman, was there. Every member of this parliament and the clerk had an opportunity to make submissions, and every submission that was made was considered by the committee and was addressed and dealt with.

I find a bit ironic the suggestion now that there has not been consultation. The member for Tablelands said it is 'an ALP bill' because it is a government bill and the Premier introduced it. The Premier is responsible for the Parliament of Queensland Act, so he has introduced the bill. But it is a bill that comes out of wide consultation with members of parliament—not of this parliament but of a previous parliament—people with a lot of experience of being Independents or being in political parties at the time.

I will not speak long because I know the Premier needs to leave, and I respect that. Let me say one other thing: with single member constituencies in a democracy there are wide swings in the number of seats, with very small swings—

**Mr Terry Sullivan:** In the overall vote.

**Dr WATSON:**—in the overall vote. That will always be a difficulty. The ALP suffered that kind of swing back in the seventies. The National Party and the Liberal Party have suffered; One Nation has suffered. We will never get around that without changing the electoral system from one of single member constituencies. This bill is an attempt to recognise that. That is why it provided the variation.

This legislation is not perfect. I do not think any legislation we pass in this place will ever be completely perfect. There might be change in the future, but this has come about because of wide consultation. It was carefully thought out by the committee that previously existed and it was done on an extremely fair and bipartisan basis. I congratulate the Premier on this legislation. He has done a good job in terms of supporting the opposition. I hope he will continue to do that in the foreseeable future. I commend this bill to the House.