



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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AUDITOR-GENERAL BILL; FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BILL

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Financial Accountability Bill. As a former public servant, I can see the merits of this bill, as it seeks to contemporise the Queensland Public Service and statutory bodies in terms of their financial management. The bill supports this government's commitment to ensuring that processes of government agencies are transparent and that they are effective and economical in their operations.

I would like to briefly cover three aspects of this bill, if I may: departmental budgets, delegations by accountable officers and statements by chief financial officers. The current government policy—but not legislation—requires departmental budgets to be tabled in parliament each year as part of the state budget papers. These budgets are currently included in the Service Delivery Statements. Budgets represent an important process in any business cycle, including that of individual departments. By being made publicly available, budgets allow members of the public to assess how well a department is managing its resources by comparing actual results with planned performance.

In recognition of the importance of budgets, this government wants to provide legislative support for this practice to ensure continuity into the future. As such, the bill requires departmental annual budgets to be tabled in parliament with the state budget each year. The bill does not, however, mandate the form of the departmental budgets or the time frames for tabling in parliament. That provides flexibility to the government of the day to respond to ever-changing needs.

The existing Financial Administration and Audit Act, which this bill will repeal, already allows accountable officers or directors-general to delegate powers and responsibilities to an officer within their department. Recent machinery-of-government changes and the creation of superagencies is a major step forward in reducing the silos that can exist between departments. In recognition of the increased collaboration between agencies, this bill provides for an extension of this power, allowing an accountable officer to delegate functions to public servants or other employees of the state outside of their department.

This provision operates, for example, where a department is working on an initiative in partnership with a statutory body and the accountable officer needs to delegate his or her powers to officers in that body. To provide safeguards, a delegated function cannot be subdelegated and any action by a delegate will be taken by law to have been performed or exercised by the accountable officer. That means that the accountable officer will remain ultimately accountable for any decisions or actions of an employee under a delegation.

Part of the responsibilities delegated by accountable officers to chief finance officers is the implementation and review of financial internal controls. These internal controls do a number of things for a department: they assist in protecting an agency's assets, they generally support the achievement of its strategic objectives and they go some way to ensuring the truth and fairness of an agency's financial statements.

As one of the certifying officers to the annual financial statements, the accountable officer needs assurance over the quality of the financial statements. The Financial Accountability Bill requires the chief

finance officer, when presenting the annual financial statements each year, to also provide a statement about whether the financial internal controls are operating efficiently, effectively and economically.

Queensland is a decentralised state, which often provides major headaches to government agencies regarding service delivery models and resourcing, particularly for regional areas such as my electorate of Mulgrave. This bill allows accountable officers to meet their legal obligations but affords them the freedom to use their experience, expertise and good judgement to manage their departmental resources to the maximum benefit of staff and the public at large and to prioritise the areas and locations of greatest need.

I support this bill, because it has broad-reaching impacts and will allow accountable officers to customise their systems and processes to meet emerging needs, modernising and positioning Queensland as a leader in public sector management in Australia.