



Speech by

**Jarrold Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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## **INTEGRITY BILL AND COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY (CORRUPTION, CRONYISM AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (7.30 pm): I rise this evening to add my contribution to the cognate debate of the Integrity Bill introduced by the Premier and the Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill introduced by the Leader of the Opposition. I will preface my contribution by stating that, while the two bills being jointly debated are common in subject, that is where the similarities end. One bill seeks to tinker around the edges of the public sector ethics of an old, worn out government trying to cover its tracks for past, well-publicised indiscretions of corruption and cronyism, while the other seeks to introduce provisions for the Attorney-General to instigate a commission of inquiry into corruption, cronyism and unethical behaviour during the past 11 years of the Labor government in this state.

The issue of public sector ethics was brought to the attention of the Queensland public after the former member for Sandgate was tried and convicted of corruption earlier this year while serving as a minister of the Crown in the previous Beattie government. Labor mates looking after Labor mates could not be better illustrated by the political rise and fall of the former member for Sandgate. Earlier this year, reports emerged that two former staffers of the former member for Sandgate were sacked in 2002 after they had raised concerns about Mr Nuttall's conduct with the office of former Premier Peter Beattie.

Because of sub judice rules I will not delve deeply into the more colourful aspects of the former member for Sandgate's history, but I am more than happy to discuss the issues surrounding his time as health minister and the crisis of the Bundaberg Hospital. Mr Nuttall was health minister from February 2004 to July 2005. In 2005 a staffer at the Bundaberg Hospital came forward alleging gross misconduct by one of the senior surgeons of the hospital resulting in the death of at least 13 and up to 17 patients. While Mr Nuttall blamed the hospital staff, it was later revealed that he deliberately misled a parliamentary estimates committee about his knowledge of the scandal and was then subsequently exonerated when this parliament was recalled by the government in December 2006.

While the Premier touts the introduction of the green paper into integrity and accountability in Queensland as the government's process of reform, of strengthening Queensland's integrity and accountability framework, I am afraid it is a case of 'too late'. While I acknowledge that a series of reforms in public sector ethics needs to be initiated in this state, a royal commission needs to be established to determine the level of corruption, cronyism and unethical behaviour that has permeated consecutive Labor governments in this state over the past 11 years.

The Integrity Bill introduced to the House by the honourable the Premier is a desperate attempt to spin the issue of the government's own lack of accountability and integrity into an effort to reform the public sector. While the Premier trumpets her ability to make the tough decisions, as is consistently the case with the Labor Party, this bill is all spin and little substance.

Of the four key objectives in this bill, all but one are currently in existence and have just been tinkered with around the edges to make it look like a wholesale reform is occurring when really the Premier does not want to front up to the people of Queensland and admit that the Labor Party government in this

state over the past 11 years has fostered and harboured a culture that looks after its own rather than the interests of the people of Queensland.

The issue of the lack of ministerial accountability highlighted by the former member for Sandgate has not been addressed. There are no provisions in this bill to amend the Criminal Code which would once again see it a criminal offence to deliberately mislead parliament or one of its committees. In terms of electoral reform, this bill is definitely silent. There is nothing on electoral reform, nothing on election campaigning—nothing of any substance. Rather than providing actual results in terms of cleaning up the public sector ethics and a culture of government corruption and cronyism in this state, all this bill does is add another layer of bureaucracy to the Integrity Commissioner. But I guess that is what we have come to expect. After all, the red-tape bureaucracy runs at the heart of what is in the Labor Party's DNA.

In terms of the Premier's claim that she encourages all members of this chamber to meet annually with the Integrity Commissioner, I would like to know whether the Premier herself visited the Integrity Commissioner after she went to the March state election with not a whisper of the introduction of a fuel tax or the fire sale of some of Queensland's assets and then in the subsequent months had continually broken her election promises, in particular—and one close to my heart—the delaying of the construction of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital only two months after the state election when there was a rock-solid commitment to have it built by 2014. The government continues to struggle to make any headway on the 100,000 jobs target that will never eventuate under a government that illustrates the lack of fiscal responsibility and control that this one has over the past 11 years.

The green paper into accountability and integrity of government in this state was just an opportunity for discussion. The people of Queensland have had enough of this government that says much but delivers little. While there are over 200 submissions to the integrity green paper, we see a bill that has just four amendments, three of which are already to some extent in existence and are just tinkered with around the edges. One damning submission that added some stark observations to the debate was that of the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie. As the principal adviser to parliament, Mr Laurie attacked the level of public sector accountability demonstrated by the Beattie and Bligh governments. In his submission to the integrity green paper Mr Laurie said—

The political culture that has grown in Queensland is, in many respects, worse than the weaknesses in institutions discussed above.

He was referring there to the Fitzgerald report. He further stated—

This in turn leads inevitably to lack of transparency, an absence of fear of detection or enforcement, poor leadership in ethics and integrity and, most importantly, the growth of a culture that either accepts, ignores or is fearful of reporting unethical conduct.

After initiating a debate which instigated many different reform ideas to achieve more accountable governance of Queensland, we have seen a bill introduced that reeks of the same arrogance that had led to the continued public disapproval of this government. This desperate attempt to cloak itself as a party of reform of public sector ethics smacks of the very arrogance that has dogged the Premier since her re-election in March this year.

The commissions of inquiry amendment bill introduced by the Leader of the Opposition ensures that a symbiotic relationship that has existed between at least one government member and big business in this state in the past 11 years has not developed into a systemic culture of unethical behaviour and cronyism in the public sector. The Crime and Misconduct Commission is a commission of inquiry that is already established. However, the limited powers and resources of the body are inadequate in any attempt to investigate the public sector ethics and dealings of consecutive Labor governments over the past 11 years. Included in this is the suspected misconduct of parliamentarians, which the CMC does not have the power to investigate. The terms of reference for the CMC with respect to the issue of investigating parliamentarians only relate to the instance where criminal behaviour has been alleged. If there have been no specific allegations of a criminal nature then the CMC's investigative powers are restricted. Due to the number of allegations that have been made with regard to various unethical behaviours demonstrated by Labor governments in this state since 1998, anything short of the establishment of a royal commission to investigate these matters illustrates the very lack of transparency, accountability and integrity Labor has shown over the past 11 years.

We need a commission of inquiry to specifically look at issues such as the matters and circumstances that led to and permitted to continue the breakdown in integrity and incidences of misconduct in the public sector in relation to the payments received or sought by Mr Gordon Nuttall whilst a minister despite the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001 and the bodies and powers created under it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Wendt): Order! Member for Kawana, you heard the Speaker's ruling today in relation to sub judice. I think you are coming very, very close to the line. I will continue to listen but I would ask you to take that on notice.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. These next two items that I will discuss are quoted from the legislation that we are debating tonight. It also looks at the circumstances and procedures relating to all contracts of Queensland government departments or Queensland government owned or controlled

entities or appointments to Queensland government boards or boards of Queensland government owned or controlled entities in relation to which Mr Nuttall had ministerial responsibility; and the dealings between ministers, former ministers, ministerial staff, former ministerial staff or persons exercising delegated authority on behalf of the Queensland government.

We need this commission of inquiry so that it can delve into these issues and many other issues. It is getting very hard to speak or ask questions in this House in relation to previous ministers, staffers or lobbyists as the Premier and ministers have on many occasions advised that the matter is before the courts or the CMC and so they will not speak on it. How convenient, but it goes to the heart of the lack of integrity of this government. It should hang its head in shame that the Premier and ministers of the government have to refuse to speak on so many occasions regarding certain issues that we raise in this parliament because the issue in question is before some court or tribunal. I submit that a government holding itself out as having a sense of integrity would not want so many investigations carrying on in so many different jurisdictions across Queensland. If the government has nothing to hide it should stop wasting everyone's time and establish this commission of inquiry so that the Queensland public can rebuild confidence in this system of state government.

Whilst the government champions the Fitzgerald inquiry and services of Mr Tony Fitzgerald to the state ad nauseam, it only chooses to do so when it suits its political interest. In fact, the Deputy Premier comes into this place each morning and waves the Fitzgerald report around like he has just won a teddy bear at the Ekka sideshow ally. I suggest that when the Deputy Premier next comes into this place waving the 20-year-old Fitzgerald report around he includes an addendum to it, because surely those opposite want to be a modern Labor Party, one that reforms and progresses Queensland. When he waves the Fitzgerald report around each morning he could attach to it a copy of Mr Fitzgerald's recent speech made on 28 July this year in which he cast aspersions that this government has fostered a culture of unethical behaviour during the past 11 years. His scathing indictment of Labor governments followed on from the case of the former member for Sandgate. Mr Fitzgerald was quoted in his speech as saying—

Ethics are always tested by incumbency. Secrecy was re-established by sham claims that voluminous documents were 'Cabinet-in-confidence'. Access can now be purchased, patronage is dispensed, mates and supporters are appointed and retired politicians exploit their political connections to obtain 'success fees' for deals between business and government.

The terms of reference for this inquiry have been forged in consultation with external legal advice. With an inquiry of this nature and extent, the terms of reference for the investigative purposes of the inquiry need to be watertight. Considering the relevant allegations that have been made with regard to unethical behaviour exhibited by Labor governments in this state, the terms of reference outlined in this bill are appropriate and ideal to ensure that these allegations are investigated suitably.

Recently I had the privilege of hosting the Leader of the Opposition at a public community forum in my electorate. The community forum was held at a local community church. While there was an hour set aside for the forum, we went for nearly an hour and a half until we had to vacate the premises. The Leader of the Opposition has visited my electorate twice in the past three months. Along with the residents, I certainly appreciate his interest in issues of concern to the residents of the Sunshine Coast. The opportunity for residents to have open, unrestricted and unscripted access to the Leader of the Opposition was appreciated by all of those in attendance. Rather than a culture of payment for access to politicians perpetuated by Labor governments over the past 11 years, members of the Queensland public in general want to know that they can access their politicians. Over 80 residents attended the community forum with the Leader of the Opposition. I asked him various questions regarding the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, Traveston Dam, desalination plants and water security for the south-east region, amongst other things. This is the difference between the Labor government and the LNP on accountability and integrity.

On 26 August the Attorney-General hosted a forum at the Innovation Centre in my electorate on the issue of public sector accountability and integrity, and I have spoken about this in the House before. I do not wish to be accused of having a repetitive nature, but I must point out something to those opposite. Whilst I received the invitation to represent my constituents at the forum at the last minute, out of all of the invitations that went out to the relevant industry stakeholders and interest groups to meet the Attorney-General, the Integrity Commissioner and the CMC commissioner to discuss issues raised in the accountability green paper there were some four people in attendance plus six high school students. Four businesspeople from a region of some 300,000 people turned up. I do not want to blame the people for not showing; it is because it was a closed shop even to the extent of local politicians. Thank goodness that the *Sunshine Coast Daily* phoned me and the member for Buderim to see if we were going. I have already advised the House that when I showed up to this apparent open and accountable integrity community forum I was warned by the Attorney-General that he would let me in on the condition and the proviso that I held back from speaking at a public community forum. I now understand why this is the case and I understand why the government did not open it up to the public: it was afraid of what it was going to hear. It angers me when I hear the Attorney-General bragging in this place about how successful these open community forums were, because what I saw was nothing more than a government controlling the agenda and the debate and attempting to silence the local MPs.

While we on this side of the chamber take public sector ethics seriously and offer a government to Queenslanders that will be transparent and accountable, those in the Labor Party vested with this responsibility have failed miserably. I even heard the member for Everton tonight talking about the LNP including this provision because the LNP had something to hide. It is a sad day in politics in Queensland when a government that has been in power for almost 20 consecutive years says that the opposition has something to hide or is fearful of the holding of a royal commission despite the fact that we are the ones calling for a royal commission. It must be because of the unlimited opposition resources at a time when people pay for access and all these sorts of things! The comments of the member for Everton that the LNP would have something to fear from a royal commission just do not make sense. Last time I checked, calling for a commission of inquiry is a provision of our bill. It did not come from the government side. I can tell honourable members that we have nothing to fear from a commission of inquiry or any terms of reference that it may have.

We heard the Attorney today criticise the opposition for making a spelling mistake and then try to connect that spelling mistake to question the integrity of the opposition. That would be the second most absurd thing, behind the submission of the member for Everton, that I have heard in this place—that one lacks integrity, openness and accountability because of a clerical error. If that is the standard of proof set by the Attorney, then it would be to his detriment, particularly considering his upcoming rolling of Premier Bligh. By that standard of proof, I would be quite interested to hear what category on the Attorney's own scale of integrity the following would fall into: one, calling an election some six months early; two, getting re-elected only to introduce a fuel tax on every Queenslanders without any word of it prior to the election; three, selling Queensland assets in a fire sale—again, there was no mention prior to the election; and of course, four, promising the good people of the Sunshine Coast a 450-bed tertiary hospital to be built by 2014 and then some two months after the election cutting at the heart and soul of thousands of Sunshine Coast residents desperately seeking new health infrastructure by delaying the hospital by three years.

I say to the Attorney that that is not a clerical error and it shows complete contempt for the government's so-called reform process—that shows no sign of openness, that shows no sign of honesty and that shows no sign of any form of integrity whatsoever. How could this government be so blind as to think that the Queensland public does not see through this distraction? It sees through it and it will have its chance when Premier Dick drives to Government House to seek an election. That day cannot come soon enough for the Queensland public. I commend the Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill to the House.