



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (3.16 pm): We have had a very long debate on the Integrity Bill and the Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill, with many speakers from the LNP as well as the Independents. It indicates the strong feeling that exists in the state about the culture that has crept into our single tier of government here in Queensland. Whilst the system of government in Queensland is part of the Westminster system, it varies from almost every other Westminster system of government in that we do not have an upper house. To put it colloquially, an upper house acts like a handbrake. It provides a house of review, a house of checks and balances. Very often, the decisions by the lower house have to be modified, adjusted or amended in some way.

But in Queensland, with a single house, if you win the election, basically what you decide to do in parliament or outside of parliament in terms of appointments and so forth is what happens—that is what goes. What we have seen in Queensland is almost 20 years of Labor government, with the exception of 2¼ years in the period from 1996 to 1998. When Tony Fitzgerald spoke about good governance and systems of good governance, he spoke about the need for change, the need for balance, the need for review, the need for refreshment. That applies no more than here in the Queensland parliament with our unicameral system of parliament.

This government has been in power under Premier Beattie and Premier Bligh since 1998, just over 11 years. In that time, the public of Queensland has got used to a continual litany and diet of ministers being jailed, Labor members of parliament having to resign from parliament, referrals to the CMC, investigations, whistleblowers, appointments of concern to do with the number of ex-Labor members and ministers of parliament on boards, lobbying, success fees and so on. It has been building up and building up all the time. No doubt, much of it has been emanating from the massive majority that the government had after the 2001 election, when it had a huge majority in the parliament. That is the sort of thing that concerned Tony Fitzgerald about complacency coming into government.

As a result, we have seen things build up. If you were drawing the situation on a whiteboard, you would have 'complacency' in the middle, an arrow leading out to the left to 'culture' and an arrow leading out to the right to 'debt'. The complacency has led to the mismanagement of the finances of this state, and on the other side it has led to corruption, allegations of cronyism, favours and all the rest of it that has built up over a long period in government, starting with the biggest majorities this parliament has ever seen three years after the government was last elected.

That is why the LNP has put forward, through the Leader of the Opposition, a bill to allow for a royal commission of inquiry because only that can deal with this culture. You can deal with some specific things through the CMC or through some form of inquiry, but you cannot deal with everything. You cannot deal with a culture. It was a previous royal commission by Tony Fitzgerald that dealt with the culture that had developed in Queensland over a long period of time of government by one party. That is what we are seeing now, in the same type of vein. We are seeing this culture that has developed. We have seen the entrenched practice of looking after mates and favours.

Despite the gloss and spin that the government has attempted to put forward, the public of Queensland knows that exists. Finally, everybody came to that conclusion after the deceit of the last election earlier this year in which the government did not reveal the true extent of the debt and the financial mismanagement. The government in its campaigning did not reveal its plans to introduce a fuel tax. It did not speak honestly about its plans to deal with the massive debt and the burgeoning mountain of interest through a system of asset sales—selling off assets which earned this state an income. Some 18 or so months earlier the government sold off the income-earning assets of the Cairns Airport, the Mackay Airport and I think a 16 per cent share of the Brisbane Airport. The income from those assets is lost and gone forever.

Only a royal commission as proposed in the opposition's bill can get to the bottom of the culture that has developed in Queensland under the Labor government for 11 years and a unicameral system of government, where the checks and balances of the parliament are limited to what can happen here. In here, on this floor, the numbers have always been against—and always will be—the opposition of the day. As I said, the people of Queensland have seen the deceit and they have come to a conclusion that the deceit is endemic and that it is part of Labor's DNA. That can be seen in the polls, particularly the polls for the Premier. Only a royal commission will clean that up.

Good, decent people get deeply hurt and deeply offended by deceit. People approached the election seriously. They thought about it. They took the time to digest the various messages, media releases, ads and comment. They took the time on Saturday to vote and did so after thinking carefully about what they are doing and understanding the importance of their vote. They do not like being deceived, and they will not forget it. The example set by the Labor government in the conduct of the last election should never be followed by any other party in contesting an election. The people of Queensland certainly will never forgive this Labor government for the deceit that was heaped upon them during the election.

I have gone through some of the litany of things that have occurred. We have seen at times members of parliament who were under investigation and court processes stay here because the government of the day had a margin of one and needed that person. We have seen all sorts of referrals. To sum it up, there is a spider web throughout this state that has developed over 11 years of favours, of cronyism, of corruption, of 'scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'—all sorts of decisions being made about who gets grants and who does not get grants. It always occurs with a bit of spin on it. 'We are giving one to an electorate of the opposition, but there are seven or eight going to government electorates.'

People are starting to see through all of that. They have seen through the process that has led to this particular bill. They saw the process of the green paper, which was only a response to the massive criticism that was occurring throughout the media and public commentary about the spider web of corruption, cronyism and favours that had developed in this state. In response to that, the spin doctors put out the green paper and then a bill following on from that green paper. Much of the submissions, particularly from very important organisations and institutions, has been completely disregarded. We are supporting this bill in the parliament today because the small number of things that it will do will make a difference, and we agree with them, but it does next to nothing.

Other speakers have spoken about all the things that it does not do. It has four major pillars to it, three of which are either fully or partly in place at the moment, and it introduces only one new area into the legislation. On that basis we are supporting it, but, as other speakers before me have said, it is notable not for what it does but for what it does not do. Once again, it is a part of this whole spin process that the Labor government has become accustomed to doing, thinking that people will fall for it. They have woken up to them and people will no longer fall for it.

Not only have we ended up with this culture that has become endemic in this government and which people are sick of; complacency has led to financial mismanagement. Once you get complacent and you start to treat people as fools, all of these other problems come cascading down. As a result, we have seen the government deliver some massive budget overruns—a lack of financial oversight that would never be tolerated in private organisations. We have seen debt and an accompanying interest bill that our children and our grandchildren will never be able to pay off. It is a massive debt, far bigger than the basket case of New South Wales—in fact, probably 40 per cent bigger than the debt of New South Wales. It is a massive debt compared to the debt of Australia, which has ballooned from zero to somewhere around \$150 billion already under Prime Minister Rudd, who inherited a \$21 billion surplus that he spent very quickly.

This mountain of debt will mean that important day-to-day operational services will not be able to be provided because the government of the day will have to find billions and billions of dollars necessary just to pay the interest, let alone make a commitment towards reducing that mountain of capital debt which is so important to get our AAA rating back so that we are paying a lesser amount of interest and so those local governments who are tied to that would also pay a lesser amount of interest.

It means less money for the important services that we need to provide during the year. That might be services to people with a disability. It could be health, education, police, roads—the whole gamut. The

spending that has occurred and the waste that has come from the complacency is a great lesson to the people of Queensland and future governments about how you need to be not only tight in your systems of ethics but also tight and careful in dealing with people's money. We are really dealing with people's trust and with people's money. The people's trust has been shattered by this government. This government will always be remembered and known as a government of deceit and a government that has been there too long. People cannot wait for just over two years time when they can throw them out.