



Speech by

Murray Watt

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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

Mr WATT (Everton—ALP) (5.53 pm): I also rise to speak in support of the Integrity Bill. This bill is the latest in a long line of reforms introduced by Queensland Labor governments over the last 20 years to ensure that the Queensland system of government is the most open and transparent in Australia. We saw the Goss government, elected in 1989, introduce estimate committees. It introduced fair electoral boundaries and freedom of information laws, and established the Criminal Justice Commission—all things that the previous 32-year National Party government refused to do in its culture of concealment and deceit.

The Beattie government, beginning in 1998, then established the Crime and Misconduct Commission. It established the position of Integrity Commissioner and Information Commissioner. In more recent times, the Bligh government has introduced the country's most progressive and far-reaching right to information laws. We have introduced a lobbyists register, a Contact with Lobbyists Code and restrictions on political donations. As I say, Queensland Labor governments have a very proud record in introducing accountability reforms, and the Integrity Bill is merely the latest in that tradition. This legislation will make the practice of politics even more transparent.

The Integrity Bill will give legislative force to the register of lobbyists, which was introduced earlier this year by the Bligh government. In an Australian first, the bill puts the requirements of the Contact with Lobbyists Code into legislation. As someone who has worked in government over quite a period of time, I do think there is a place for lobbyists in our system of democracy. There is no doubt that, whether we are talking about people in the private sector or in community organisations, sometimes these people—while they might be very good at running their own corporation or they might be very good at delivering community services—do not have as much experience in dealing with government and putting their point across to government in the most effective manner. That is something that lobbyists can assist them to perform. However, I think we all share a concern if there are situations where lobbyists abuse any personal connection they might have to obtain a gain for their client improperly. I am very pleased that, by registering lobbyists and by introducing a Contact with Lobbyists Code, which will now have legislative force, the Bligh government again is leading the country in making the practice of lobbyists much fairer, much more transparent and much more in the public interest.

The bill also bans the payment of success fees to lobbyists when they achieve a positive outcome for their client, whether that positive outcome be a government contract, a meeting with a government official or any other benefit. The bill also enshrines the role of the Integrity Commissioner and expands that person's role to provide advice to MPs on conflicts of interests and to maintain the register of lobbyists. The bill also expands the powers of the Crime and Misconduct Commission so that it may investigate allegations of misconduct involving government owned corporations.

I have been in the chamber for quite a period throughout this debate. From the beginning until the moment the member for Currumbin sat down, the opposition has sought to distort the events of the last few years to claim that there is systemic corruption in the Queensland government. Those opposite have relied on repeated smears and half-truths. But the one thing that has been missing from every speaker from the

opposition has been a shred of evidence that there is any corruption within the Queensland government or the Queensland practice of politics in general that has not already been dealt with by the CMC.

It is this bizarre view that there is a world of corruption out there which has not been dealt with that seems to be the basis of their desire for a royal commission. We have had opposition member after opposition member refer to the behaviour of the former member for Sandgate, Gordon Nuttall, as an example of why a royal commission is needed. Opposition members did not hear it, but I have news for them. Gordon Nuttall is in jail. He was investigated by the CMC, he was charged with offences, he went before a court and he was convicted—end of story. To say that insufficient action has been taken against Gordon Nuttall and that this is the reason to stage a royal commission just shows that the opposition is stuck in the past fighting old battles that have been dealt with comprehensively by our criminal justice system.

I can only assume that the opposition wants a royal commission because it has a guilty conscience. This of course is the party of the Fitzgerald inquiry. It is the party that attempted to shut down the Connolly-Ryan inquiry. Speaking of bizarre, I could not believe that the member for Gaven actually defended the actions of the then government in trying to shut down the Connolly-Ryan inquiry. At least most members of the opposition have the decency to slide under their table every time that combination of names—Connolly-Ryan—is raised. The member for Gaven usually puts a fair bit of work into his speeches but that one slipped through. I can only assume that the opposition wants a royal commission because it has a guilty conscience. The most recent example of that is the opposition's refusal to declare who attended the infamous \$20,000-per-plate dinner.

Numerous government speakers have made the point that the CMC has all the powers of a standing royal commission. As we are aware, there is currently an inquiry into the behaviour of a ministerial adviser which yet again is evidence that—

Mr Seeney: Who wrote this? They sent you down a speech to read, did they? Good little foot soldier.

Mr WATT: The member for Callide is asking who wrote my speech. Unfortunately the member for Callide clearly is one of the members who does not have the ability to write his speech. I am very proud to say that I have been spending the afternoon typing out my speech. Even though I am a newcomer to this place and he is one of the veterans, I am happy to teach him how to write a speech any day of the week.

Mr Seeney: Stand up like a good little soldier and read the speech the department wrote for you.

Mr WATT: The poor old member for Callide is obviously displeased that he does not have anyone to write his speech. I do not require someone to write my speech. Perhaps we would have more sensible contributions from the member for Callide if he did have someone to write his speech. As I mentioned, I am more than happy to give him lessons any time he wants them.

Numerous government speakers have made the point that the CMC has all the powers of a standing royal commission. We currently have an inquiry going on, which of course I will not say anything about, which demonstrates that point.

I do think there is a reason the opposition is not satisfied with taking complaints to the CMC. It is not satisfied with that standing royal commission as a means of dealing with its complaints, and that is because it does not have any complaints. It does not ever have any evidence for the smears that it makes. If it had any complaints, it would refer them to the CMC. In nearly every contribution the member for Burnett makes, he has his wild conspiracy theories and his wild allegations of corruption going down the coast of Queensland, but how many times does he take any of these complaints to the CMC? It is there any day of the week to receive those complaints and to deal with them effectively. We do not need a new royal commission specifically to deal with any allegations, because there are not any allegations.

The only other reason I can think of for why the LNP wants a royal commission is that it is bereft of ideas for reform and it needs the fishing expedition that a royal commission would constitute to come up with some reform ideas. Its meek attempt at reform ideas was the alleged blueprint for integrity and accountability in Queensland.

Mr Dick: That was a good one!

Mr WATT: It was a corker, as the Attorney-General has already referred to. The foreword from the Leader of the Opposition states—

The Bligh Labor government releases as a distraction a simple green paper limited to a sprinkling of issues that only Ms Bligh and her Labor Party want the public to discuss. It is a green paper engineered for public relations and designed to give an appearance, and just an appearance, of a tired and corrupt government trying to clean itself up.

I wonder how the eminent non-government members of the integrity round table feel about having been duped by the government to participate in this process. Who are those non-government members? The chair of the CMC, the Integrity Commissioner and various esteemed academics with long histories of

efforts on reform ideas. They believe this was a process worth participating in. I am sure they would not appreciate the smears on their names, but what more can we expect from the LNP other than smears? It seems they are capable of nothing else.

The other point in the opposition's alleged blueprint is a point that the Leader of the Opposition repeated again today, and that was about electoral boundaries. We know that the topic of electoral boundaries is something the LNP knows an awful lot about. I again quote from the blueprint, which states—

At the 2009 election less than one per cent separated the primary vote between the Labor Party and the LNP, yet Labor won 51 seats to the LNP's 34 seats.

This is not the first time we have heard conservative forces in Queensland want to draw up electoral boundaries on the basis of how people voted. Fortunately, the Queensland government over most of the last 20 years has been populated and held by people who actually believe in fair electoral boundaries and who do not pay attention to how people vote in deciding how to set them. In fact, we have a fair, independent Electoral Commission which determines those boundaries. If the LNP wants to go around convincing Queenslanders that we should be drawing up electoral boundaries on the basis of how people voted, I would be very happy to assist it in distributing that idea that it so dearly loves.

The one thing that is missing from the LNP's blueprint for electoral reform is any statement of who came to dinner. We know that the member for Clayfield is itching to tell us all who came to dinner, and I encourage him in that regard.

Mr Nicholls: Tell us all the dinners you have been to.

Mr WATT: I have certainly never been to a \$20,000-a-plate dinner, I can tell you that. Yet again we have the LNP speaking with a forked tongue. It wants to hold itself up as the paragon of virtue on this issue but it has an awful lot to hide.

This bill is just the beginning of a new era of transparency in Queensland politics. There are a number of issues which remain outstanding and which will be dealt with in the next 12 months. They include introducing legislation to govern the behaviour of ministerial staff, creating a statutory obligation on MPs and statutory office holders to declare their pecuniary interests, and many more far-reaching reforms to our electoral and government system.

There is a table at the very back of the response to Integrity and Accountability in Queensland which demonstrates the scale and the scope of the measures that this government has taken to improve accountability in Queensland. It shows that across probably about a dozen measures Queensland is the only state in Australia that has taken action, whether that be establishing an independent public sector anticorruption body such as the CMC, establishing an Integrity Commissioner, a Register of Lobbyists or many other things. Some states have picked up some of those things; others have not picked up any of them. The Queensland government is the only state in Australia which has taken action on each of these measures.

To hear the LNP bleat on about the need for a royal commission belies the fact that the Queensland government, under the leadership of Premier Anna Bligh, has taken far more action than any other state to clean up our electoral system, and well may it continue. I commend the bill to the House.