



Speech by

Steve Wettenhall

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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

Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (8.08 pm): I rise to support the Integrity Bill. This bill marks yet another significant milestone for successive Labor governments in this state since 1989. Ever since the revelations of the Fitzgerald inquiry that exposed systemic corruption in police and government at the highest level, Labor governments have developed the strongest and most effective system of integrity and accountability measures in the country. This bill ensures that in Queensland our systems that ensure integrity and accountability keep pace with the ever widening scope of government activity and heightened public expectations of the standards to be observed not only by elected representatives but also by those with whom elected representatives interact.

Central to public confidence in our system of integrity and accountability is the notion of transparency—that is, not only will there be stringent protections and safeguards; the business of government can be seen to operate according to the rules and according to the highest standards. This bill will achieve those objectives by providing that the independence of the Integrity Commissioner is enhanced by making the position an officer of the parliament and giving a new Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee oversight of the performance and functions of the Integrity Commissioner. In line with these reforms, the bill will provide that any member of parliament may seek the advice of the Integrity Commissioner with respect to their statements of interest on the Register of Members' Interests, which is an important new source of advice and will aid members avoiding conflicts of interest and perceived conflicts of interest.

The bill also creates a legislative basis for the Register of Lobbyists and bans the payment of success fees to lobbyists. The Crime and Misconduct Commission will also be given new powers to investigate misconduct allegations in government owned corporations. These reforms follow the Integrity and Accountability in Queensland discussion paper that facilitated widespread community consultation and input about how the integrity framework in this state can be improved. Further reforms will be introduced in 2010 as this government maintains its commitment to provide the strongest and most effective integrity and accountability measures that are available, in contrast to the proud record of success of Labor governments in creating a framework of integrity and accountability in this state—a framework that I remind the member for Clayfield did not exist prior to 1989 and which allowed systemic corruption and cronyism to flourish under successive National and Liberal-National governments under the leadership of Bjelke-Petersen.

In debating this bill we are also considering the private member's bill, Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill 2009, which I oppose. This private member's bill is just a rank political stunt and demonstrates yet again the contempt with which the LNP treats the parliament and the people of Queensland. All of the circumstances of substance and importance which that bill identifies as worthy of inquiry are matters which can be adequately investigated now by the Crime and Misconduct Commission under the powers it has been granted by this parliament as, in effect, a standing royal commission on crime and misconduct.

The bill also seeks to require a new commission of inquiry to inquire into the adequacy of a raft of legislation and integrity codes. The LNP is nothing if not famous for its laziness, but this bill takes the cake. It wants a commission of inquiry to do its work for it as an opposition. It wants a taxpayer funded inquiry to do the work it cannot or will not do. Why have we not heard from the LNP about the specific concerns it has about these acts or codes? Not only does it want the role of this parliament usurped by such a commission of inquiry; it wants the inquiry to inquire into the adequacy of government policies. The private member's bill is a breathtaking statement of no confidence in itself as an opposition—a view shared by most Queenslanders.

Another amazing provision in the bill is that which seeks to have a new commission of inquiry inquire into the relationship between members of the Queensland government and persons who have been appointed to the judiciary or magistracy by Labor Attorneys-General between 1998 and 2009. I wonder how each of those magistrates and judges will be feeling tonight when their independence, skill and experience have been put under a cloud by this ridiculous and scandalous bill. I will hazard a guess that they will feel insulted. The provisions of this bill are nothing more than a witch-hunt.

This opposition has a track record of besmirching the reputation of this state's judiciary. They are prepared—indeed, they actively seek—to undermine public confidence in our system of justice and our judiciary, and they do so for purely political purposes. They have raised not one concern about the conduct of any one member of the bench appointed by Labor Attorneys-General—not one. I challenge them now: put up or shut up. Have you the courage to identify what are the characteristics of the members of the judiciary you say render them unsuitable to carry out their judicial functions? I am ashamed that the parliament is demeaned by the Liberal National Party's ill-conceived and disingenuous private member's bill. I am proud that this government, through its bill, is continuing two decades of genuine reform in integrity and accountability measures in this state.