



Speech by

Ted Sorensen

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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CRIMINAL CODE (HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (8.57 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Criminal Code (Honesty and Integrity in Parliament) Amendment Bill 2009, which was introduced by my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, John-Paul Langbroek. I appeal to this House to bring back honesty and integrity to this place and to support the need for accountability from its members.

Back in 2006, the Attorney-General introduced a bill to repeal section 57 of the Criminal Code and to remove the ability to hold accountable those members who would knowingly mislead the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Legislative Assembly. The decision to repeal sections 56, 57 and 58 of the Criminal Code can only be viewed as a self-serving one—self-serving to the Labor government of the day.

The repeal of section 57 of the Criminal Code in particular was to put a teflon coat on a former member, however brief it was. It was not long enough. The Premier at the time who made that decision has definitely left this place, although at the time he had the absolute support of the current Premier. Irrespective of the reasons this section was repealed, the horse has bolted. We need to prove that we are not scared to be accountable when undergoing examination in this assembly or its committees.

For those parliamentary members on both sides who look at Queensland governance and politics as it is today, just briefly, with a bipartisan view, and for those members who pride themselves on their honesty and integrity without fear, they will support this amendment.

The amendment is important and is derived from common sense to bring back into line other acts, such as the Parliament of Queensland Act sections 36(b) and (c) and section 37, to ensure that contempt of parliament equates to providing false evidence and can only be dealt with under the Criminal Code. Under the Criminal Code, members who knowingly present false and misleading information to parliament and its committees can face seven years imprisonment. What is wrong with that? Why is the government scared of telling the truth? Why would members prefer to give ministers the ability to mislead? When we teflon ourselves from the laws that apply to the people who we represent we create a divide in democracy and in the very institution that we took an honourable oath to serve. This parliament cannot become a dictatorship and say 'Do as we say, not do as we do.'

The Queensland government is all about accountability. Without accountability we lose the fundamental process of governance and democracy in Queensland. We are elected by our constituents because we are upfront, straight and honest. We never go on the campaign trail saying, 'I have a licence to mislead,' do we? The popularity of politicians in the public eye has diminished gravely. This amendment will claw back some of the trust lost. We need to bring back the fundamental promise to Queenslanders that we will not knowingly mislead the Legislative Assembly or its committees when it comes to matters that affect the running of this state.

While I support the rights, immunities and parliamentary privilege that are extended to us as members of parliament because it allows us to have robust debate, I completely oppose the current status quo—that is, the orchestrated ability to blur the lines in terms of what is represented as false evidence

during parliamentary process and be considered allowable. Of course it is not allowable. Do members think for one minute that our constituents who elevated us to this position and ministerial positions in parliament give us the green light to present false and misleading evidence and stretch the truth when presenting evidence and facts to parliament that affect this state?

We all know about the integrity and accountability booklet with the Queensland government badge on it that was produced in August 2009. It was sent out to all of us. It has 'discussion paper only' plastered across the top of the page. Okay, let us discuss it. When we get to part 2 of the Queensland Integrity and Accountability Framework, the section in respect of the Criminal Code Act 1899, it clearly outlines that if a person corruptly receives, asks to receive or attempts to receive any property or benefit of any kind for himself or herself they will face seven years jail. That is corruption. Corruption, when one looks it up, is plain and simple. Corruption is dishonesty. I quote from the *Encarta Dictionary* where corruption is defined as 'immoral or dishonest, especially as shown by the exploitation of a position of power or trust for personal gain.' Are we not in a position of power? How can we say that it is okay to knowingly present false evidence and mislead parliament and get away with it? Yet, in the same breath, if we make money and gain property from dishonesty means then we are corrupt and face jail. Does not being corrupt mean that one is dishonest in manner, action and speech? The two go hand in hand. We need to stamp out the ability to mislead. This amendment will help us do that. If one gets away with lying for long enough the dishonest amongst us will push the envelope. They will think they are bullet proof. When is this government going to set the bar to 'honesty only'?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! You have used that word again. I will ask you to withdraw that word.

Mr SORENSEN: I withdraw.