



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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PEOPLE'S HOUSE BILL AND REFERENDUM FOR AN UPPER HOUSE BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (7.57 pm): Tonight I rise to speak on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal opposition for the state of Queensland as we consider these two bills currently before the House. Tonight we debate these two bills that were introduced by the member for Beaudesert and the Queensland representative of Katter's Australian Party, formerly the leader of The Queensland Party, formerly an Independent, formerly a member of the LNP, formerly a member of the National Party and formerly a member of the Liberal Party. In fact, the only parties he has not represented are the Greens and the Labor Party, but I will not hold my breath. The Labor Party can have him!

The bills are part of the member's plan to restore Queensland as a bicameral system of government. The Constitution Act Amendment Act 1922 was proclaimed in March 1922, ending the 63-year history of the Legislative Council in Queensland. The history of the abolition of this chamber is quite an interesting tale of political manipulation and manoeuvring that spanned almost two decades. The Legislative Council had long been a frustration of Labor Party administrations of the earlier 20th century. It unsuccessfully tried to abolish it with legislation that was rejected in 1915 and in 1916 which then qualified for a referendum in 1917. The referendum was overwhelmingly lost by some 40 per cent for abolition, as opposed to 60 per cent of Queensland's population which wanted the Legislative Council to be retained.

The Labor government achieved what Lord Grey's administration was initially unable to do to the House of Lords in the 1830s. They swamped the Legislative Council with new members. Being a fully nominated body rather than an elected body, the then Labor Premier of Queensland convinced the Governor to appoint additional members to the council that would secure a Labor majority. These people have gone down in Queensland's history as the suicide squad. On 24 October 1921 the members of the council overwhelmingly voted to abolish the council, by 51 to 15. The leader of the government in the council remarked at the time—

... until we had a majority here—

the council—

was obstructive, and now that we have a majority here it is useless.

In fact, denigration of the council was quite common in publications such as the *Moreton Bay Courier*. The proposal was opposed at the time by the National Party opposition. It went to the March 1918 election with the following pledge—

Keep the council—Keep your homes—Keep your Savings Banks deposits.

If you vote for the Ryan Party in this election you will be voting for the abolition of the Legislative Council. Once the Legislative Council is abolished the Ryan party will be able to do exactly as it likes.

Not even the British Secretary of State for Colonies at the time, one Winston Churchill, could save the Legislative Council after being petitioned by those who opposed abolition. He remarked—

After careful consideration of all the circumstances, I cannot but regard the matter with which the Bill deals as essentially one for determination locally.

The council last sat on 27 October 1921. The bill before the House speaks volumes about how out of touch the member for Beaudesert is with the people of Queensland. When I and, I guess, those opposite speak to constituents we are continually told that the issues are cost-of-living pressures, skyrocketing water and electricity costs, the lack of health services on the Sunshine Coast—

Mr Rickuss: And more parliamentarians.

Mr BLEIJIE: No, they are not talking about more parliamentarians. Inadequate public transport services, education, crime, law and order, roads, policing, forced council amalgamations—I could go on. They are all the failures of the Labor government. I make the point: this issue is not high on the agenda. While government integrity and parliamentary accountability are crucial to a well-functioning democracy, a change to the status quo is not on the priority list of the taxpayers of Queensland.

The people have lost faith in this long-term Labor government that has been in power for 20 out of 22 years, rather than our political system. They have not lost faith in our political system; they have lost faith in a government, in the Labor Party. The People's House Bill 2011 seeks to reinstate an upper house in Queensland to be known as the 'people's house'. We are in the people's house tonight. Rather than electing more politicians, the membership of the house proposed in this bill will consist of 45 local government mayors. It will review any legislation that has been divided upon by not fewer than five members of parliament. I assume that statement means 'the Legislative Assembly', but that is how it reads in the explanatory notes. I note that the 45 members who will comprise the people's house will be the Lord Mayor of Brisbane as president, 43 mayors of the largest councils and one representative of the 29 smallest councils in Queensland.

I note that in the extremely detailed explanatory two-page document to the bill there was no mention of how this one representative would be determined. From what I can understand, it would be the local government area with the largest population, as stated in clause 11A(4) and (5). I am not sure what these 29 smallest councils have in common other than population size. I would submit to the House that a local government area in Far North Queensland would have vastly different issues from a council in far western Queensland. Since the forced amalgamations of local government areas in Queensland by this long-term Labor out-of-touch government in 2007, from 156 to 72 local government areas, our state has some of the largest local government areas in Australia.

The Brisbane City Council has the largest population of any government area in Australia. At one million people it is roughly equivalent to the size of Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT combined. Under the propositions of the member for Beaudesert, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane will not only have the responsibility of governing the largest local government area in Australia; he or she will also sit on the woolsack of the proposed upper house.

The Gold Coast City Council is the second largest local government area in Australia in population size and the Moreton Bay Regional Council is the third largest government area in Australia, yet the mayors of these and the other 41 largest local governments in Queensland will have to fulfil the dual roles of mayor and member of the people's house. Under the legislative amendment, they will also have a greater power than the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, who is the designated president of the house.

The days of part-time municipal leaders converging upon Macquarie, Spring or George Street to occasionally wear their upper house robes have come and gone. Modern upper houses are true houses of review and require people primarily dedicated to that function. This is a poor plan for an upper house in Queensland.

It has been debated tonight that we have this new committee system that was set up with a bipartisan committee. There will always be teething issues with new committee systems, but parliaments evolve over time and so will this committee system. Yes, there will be teething issues. I know that there have been teething issues, but parliaments evolve. The standing orders of this House two years ago are different from the standing orders that we have now. I believe, and the Liberal National Party believes, that we must give this new committee system time to see whether we can get true accountability out of this committee system.

Professor Scott Prasser, the Executive Director of the Public Policy Institute, has labelled the member for Beaudesert's model of an upper house as a shemuzzle. This is a rushed and poorly conceived attempt at amending parliamentary acts as important as the Constitution Act 1867 and the Constitution of Queensland 2001. It is typical of a member who cannot decide which political party he wants to represent, which political party he wants to join, let alone the serious policy implications for the people of Queensland.

The LNP will not be supporting these bills, if members have not worked that out by now. By this position it is not to be taken that we are against a bicameral system—quite the contrary—but, given the

time and deliberation that have been spent on the changes to the committee system, it would be irresponsible to not allow these changes to continue as a vital part of consideration and scrutiny of all legislation in the parliament. Those changes recommended by a bipartisan committee have an important role in improving legislation that is passed in this House, allowing for greater collaboration between committee members and providing a greater opportunity for consultation with the community and peak industry bodies in Queensland. This is nothing more than an opportunistic plot from the puppet of Katter in Queensland to get this into debate. I will be opposing it, members of the LNP will be opposing it, and I urge all honourable members to do the same.