




Speech by

Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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COMMITTEE SYSTEM REVIEW COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (5.13 pm): I want to make a few comments on the report by the committee. The chair's foreword states—

Our review of our committee system has been the most comprehensive assessment of our parliament's structure that has been undertaken.

In closing in that foreword the chair states—

The Committee System Review Committee members believe we can transform the way the Queensland Parliament operates by giving members greater responsibility for the scrutiny of the executive; by using the parliament to enliven the executive to their constituents concerns; by ensuring that every Queenslander has the opportunity to have a say on laws that may affect them; and by giving the parliament a committee system that is strong and dedicated to the purpose of scrutiny, review and deliberation.

The recommendations that we have proposed could potentially result in the most significant changes to the Queensland Parliament since the abolition of the Upper House ...

I applaud the committee for being forward thinking and recommending fundamental change, change that looks at what is best for Queensland and Queenslanders. The executive summary comments—

One of the key functions of a parliament is scrutiny of the executive. Proper scrutiny of the executive helps to ensure accountability and transparency and in turn better administration.

I must say that in the two years I have been in this place that certainly has not happened. I take the point that the member for Nanango made in relation to the disappointment in the way the place has worked in the past. I could go on about that but let us move forward.

If one was going to create a new parliament today, how would one do it? Interestingly enough, it is probably very similar to the one that we are in the midst of creating here today. I have visited several parliaments, including the Scottish parliament. As members would know, the Scottish parliament has been in existence for about 11 years and it has a very strong parliamentary committee system. In fact, I must admit that when I did the tour—a very special tour of the parliament laid on thanks to the Clerk of the Parliament here arranging it for me—I was most impressed with the committee rooms and the way those committee rooms are set up. I was thinking then, 'Am I missing something here? There is something very wrong here.' A unicameral parliament with the committee system that the Scottish parliament has and the facilities that the Scottish parliament has is certainly very, very impressive. The executive summary in the report states further—

It is now time for committees to take on a greater role in examination of executive action across all the policy areas of government and in considering proposed legislation, building on the moves made in this direction in early 2009.

How true that is when we consider that we are coming forward in leaps and bounds. The suggestion in the report is that there be nine committees—I have heard that there may be some variation on that and that, of course, will be fleshed out over time—with a subject based jurisdiction, which is absolutely wonderful, mirroring the various portfolio areas of government. It goes on to say that the following functions are part of that nine-committee system—

- Monitor and review of all issues and executive action, including operational matters and events

- Consideration of proposed legislation, both from a policy point of view and to ensure compliance with fundamental legislative principles

I think we are all going to learn something as part of this process—something that we probably have not been learning a great deal about certainly in the time that I have been here. I have to confess that I have not studied each and every bill that has come through this place. Continuing with those functions—

- Scrutiny of the estimates
- The ability to consider petitions.

Once again, the petitions come in, they are sent off to a minister, the minister responds to the petition and that is where it dies. Now we are going to have this opportunity to flesh things out far more than ever before.

Turning to the recommendations that are made in this report, recommendation 1 states—

The Committee recommends that in place of the current committees there be the following committees:

- nine statutory portfolio based committees to cover the array of government activities
- the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee
- a Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

Once again, it is a strong structure that is going to be of great benefit to this place as we move forward. It will deliver what the people of Queensland deserve, which is appropriate legislation properly researched and properly fleshed out in that committee system. Recommendation 21 states—

The Committee recommends that all bills, with the exception of those deemed 'urgent', be referred to portfolio committees for inquiry and report, using a model that achieves the following:

- there shall be a presumption that the Legislature will refer legislation to a committee, and any exceptions must be transparent, narrowly-defined, and extraordinary in nature

That is a very powerful sentence: 'narrowly-defined, and extraordinary in nature'. The people of Queensland will not bear this committee system being used on an ad hoc basis when, in reality, it should be used for the majority of legislation that comes through this place. The recommendation goes on to state—

- committees shall scrutinise legislation referred to them and have the power to recommend amendments
- opportunities shall be given for public input into the legislative process.

That is all very well and fine, but I do have one question. I note that in the committee system in Scotland, which I was referring to earlier, the committees have the opportunity to initiate legislation. I wonder whether or not that possibility will exist in this place for our committees. They will end up with a wealth of knowledge and experience from the various testaments that come to them and the various people who talk about their needs. I wonder whether it will be possible for the committees to initiate legislation in their own right. Of course, all individual members have the capacity to do that, but a well-resourced and staffed committee would be perfectly positioned to see any holes in legislation. I believe consideration should be given to that proposition. Recommendation 31 states—

The Committee recommends that the maximum timeframe for committees to inquire and report on bills be six months.

Is it anticipated that that be the exception or the rule? Six months is a long time. We expect most legislation to be dealt with fairly quickly. I note that recommendation 32 states—

The Committee recommends that Standing Orders be amended to provide that committees must report on a bill within six months of the bill being referred to it or by such other time as fixed by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

Does that mean that it could be longer? Does that mean that, in most cases, we will see them turning things around in a four-week or six-week period? I am curious about that recommendation.

Mr Schwarten: You have to manage your own workload.

Mr CRANDON: That is absolutely right. I take the interjection. They will be managing their own workload, but how will that recommendation be fleshed out? That sort of consideration should be taken in hand. It seems to me that there might a conflict in the terminology used in recommendations 33 and 34. Recommendation 33 states—

The Committee recommends that bills be set down for the second reading a minimum of three sitting days after a committee reports. In effect, that would probably mean the next sitting week. Recommendation 34 states—

The Committee recommends that Standing Orders be amended to provide that following the presentation of a committee report on a bill, the bill is set down for second reading on the third sitting day following.

Recommendation 33 refers to a minimum of three sitting days and recommendation 34 states that it will be set down for second reading on the third sitting day. Is there a conflict there in the terminology? Having asked those few questions, and hopefully they will be answered, I finish simply by saying that I look forward to working in this place in this new paradigm and to making a difference for all Queenslanders.