




Speech by  
**Ian Berry**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

Hansard Thursday, 29 November 2012

---

## **RIGHT TO INFORMATION & INTEGRITY (OPENNESS & TRANSPARENCY) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BERRY** (Ipswich—LNP) (5.45 pm): I almost waited for this moment to be able to speak because I remember events that occurred in 2009. I remember being—and I think I was president of the Law Society at the time—at the Moynihan inquiry. At about 5 pm that day, after the adjournment, the members of the Law Society received a copy of the Jury Act. We got 12 hours notice. But do not be alarmed, the Bar Association got 24 hours notice! So they were able to recommend a few amendments. They actually recommended two that were incorporated. In fact, this was probably one of the catalysts in my life which said that I really ought to get involved in politics in a more formative and positive way. I could not believe that the government of the day had treated its key stakeholders with such arrogance.

The year 2009 was eventful for me also in relation to the Integrity Act. As I remember, there were events happening at that time. The Labor Party were having problems with some of their lobbyists, some ex-ministers. As I remember, I caused a newspaper article to be written and I wrote to the Premier, and the next thing we knew we had the Integrity Act. If, in fact, the opposition, the Labor Party, are taking the high moral ground on integrity, I would, with respect, indicate that they ought not to because it was the thrust of other organisations in the community—not only the Law Society but other organisations—which were very concerned as to the goings-on of the government of the day.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that this bill devotes six pages out of 16 to the opposition. That is not quite so; it is seven pages. It is important to acknowledge this because I am sure the Attorney must have been thinking, 'One page per member? Yes, I think they should be able to cope with that,' and they did. That is good.

The best part about being in a robust democracy is that we do have openness. I think it is obvious what the openness of this legislation is. Here we have an opposition actually complaining about a newspaper having to disclose that it wants a right to information and documents. How is that a difficulty or a fetter on democracy? The logic defies me. Firstly, as I understand the argument, if the media have to disclose that they want documents, they may not want them; they might not put their names forward to actually have the documents. What a feeble bunch of journalists and newspapers we have in this country!

I am really sorry that the Leader of the Opposition takes that view. I personally think the *Courier-Mail* and the *Australian* are quite robust. I think they will disclose their names and I think they will get their documents. I see no difficulty, but that is the openness of the legislation for which I commend the Attorney-General.

Integrity and the right to information are an evolving process. To see this one needs look no further than at a sophisticated economy such as America. They are way ahead in terms of information. We are evolving, and this is just a piece of evolving legislation to cover the circumstances in which we now find our democracy. It is quite tempered, valid and measured. It is a balance. It is a balance in terms of what our constituencies require of us and in terms of the right to free speech and for parliamentarians to be able to

talk openly. At the same time, our democracy must evolve as well. We must protect citizens' rights, and those provisions are well and truly included. It seems to me that it is balanced.

Absorbing the contents of 16 pages of legislation in the time provided is not difficult. The now opposition when in government well and truly indicated its desire to rush through legislation. The bill to amend the Jury Act was four or five pages in length. Doing the mathematics and comparing the bill to amend the Jury Act with this bill—four or five pages in 12 hours as opposed to a few days for 16 pages in this bill—it seems to me to be pretty well in line. And they have to read only seven pages, because that is all that is devoted to the opposition.

The end result is that this bill is measured and balanced. It further extends integrity and it is transparent, including the fact that the Integrity Commissioner is involved in the process. Journalists and newspapers will be well and truly able to obtain what they want and all they need to do is disclose who they are.

I take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the House—and the Attorney-General for any input that he may have had—for my appointment as chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. Certainly it is a job I am looking forward to. I also take this opportunity to wish all my colleagues the compliments of the season—even the opposition.

**Ms Palaszczuk:** Thank you.

**Mr BERRY:** Indeed.