




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE
NOTE**

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.15 am): I rise to speak on report No. 26 of the Finance and Administration Committee which covers the work of the Integrity Commissioner, the Lobbyists Code of Conduct and the government's recent changes to the Integrity Act. On behalf of the opposition, I would like to thank the chair of the committee, the member for Coomera, and all the other members of the committee for their genuine bipartisan approach that they adopted when considering these integrity issues.

As we are all aware, issues involving integrity and lobbying have been prominent in the first 12 months of the Newman government. Even a cursory glance of ministerial diaries reveals that lobbyists such as LNP powerbroker Santo Santoro have been quite active among government ranks since the election in March 2012. I genuinely believe that the committee has risen above the politics of these issues to make three recommendations to the government in relation to lobbying and integrity.

The first recommendation relates to the government's new system whereby lobbyists will record interactions with government and opposition representatives through the Integrity Commissioner. This recommendation is, I believe, a practical compromise between the need for openness and transparency when it comes to lobbying activities and existing legislation relating to privacy and information. Certainly, given that ministers are responsible for public moneys, there is a need for a high level of scrutiny regarding who is influencing their decision making.

My view, which is not foreign to some people in this chamber, is that there should be no real need for lobbyists. A government should be open and accessible to the people it is elected to serve. However, the reality is that a market exists for people and companies with expertise in lobbying activities, and we must have a framework to ensure the public interest is protected, along with an organisation's interests.

This leads me to the second recommendation to include in-house lobbyists in Queensland's regulatory regime. I must say that, if the government ever did adopt this recommendation, it must ensure that the Integrity Commissioner is appropriately resourced. The extra demands placed on the Office of the Integrity Commissioner by including in-house lobbyists would require a significant injection of funding and staffing. There is no point adopting this measure if the Newman government is not prepared to properly resource the Integrity Commissioner for both monitoring and compliance.

The issue of monitoring and compliance is also an element of the third recommendation of the committee, which involves a broader review of the Integrity Act. Through this review process, the committee has identified a number of areas where the regulatory regime regarding lobbying could possibly be improved or strengthened. This includes such things as sanctions for certain types of breaches of the legislation, the investigative powers of the Integrity Commissioner, the definitions of a 'lobbyist' and 'lobbying activity', and post-separation employment restrictions. Obviously, possible changes to the elements in this recommendation would depend on the government's view on the two

other recommendations. But I would particularly like to see the government move to clarify the definition of a 'lobbying activity'. The committee has expressed its willingness to assist the executive with this review, and I urge the government to adopt this recommendation.

I would also like to add that, in my view, the Integrity Commissioner should continue to attend estimates committee hearings each year. While it may, at times, seem like a waste of time for senior government officials to attend these hearings each year, particularly if they are not asked any questions, I can reassure them that it is not. The people of Queensland are happy for senior officials to give up a little bit of their time each year to ensure expenditure and performance of government agencies can be scrutinised. Our estimates committee process may not be perfect, but exempting senior officials from scrutiny would be a backward step.

To conclude, as deputy chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, I want to again thank members of the committee, as well as the committee secretariat, for their efforts in compiling this report. I also want to thank the Integrity Commissioner, Dr David Solomon, for meeting with the committee and providing his candid views on the integrity regime in Queensland. I commend the report to the House.