




Speech By
Hon. Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL BILL

 **Hon. JP BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (4.32 pm), in reply: On behalf of the Premier, I thank all honourable members for their contributions to the second reading debate of the Queensland Independent Remuneration Tribunal Bill. As the Premier has outlined, the government is of the view that it is no longer tenable for the salaries of members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly to be legislatively linked to the salaries of members of the Commonwealth parliament and indeed that it is no longer tenable for members to set their own salaries, entitlements or allowances. That is why the government is acting to resolve this situation once and for all to place in the hands of an independent tribunal the unfettered ability in an independent, fair and transparent manner to determine the remuneration that will apply to members and former members of this House.

The bill implements the Premier's five-point plan to reform Queensland parliament's entitlements system. The bill breaks the nexus between the salaries of Queensland and Commonwealth members; formally establishes the Queensland Independent Remuneration Tribunal under legislation; provides that the determinations of the tribunal are independent, binding and are not subject to change by members; legislates to ensure that the back pay for current and former members is only applicable from 1 July 2013; and provides that the tribunal must ensure that any allowances are to reflect the amount of reasonable expenses incurred by a member in servicing their electorate and that the allowances are not a substitute for other remuneration. The passage of the bill is urgent so that these matters can be implemented as soon as possible. Apart from breaking the salary nexus with Canberra, the bill rescinds the salary increases which took effect for members on 1 July 2013 in accordance with the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 and returns the salary rates of members to those that applied on 30 June 2013, pending the tribunal's first determination. Once a determination is made with effect from 1 July 2013, the Clerk of the Parliament will assess if any overpayments have been made to members and, if so, will then begin to recover the money through their fortnightly salary.

While the tribunal and its members have already been administratively appointed and established by the Premier, urgent passage of the bill will enable the tribunal's members to be formally appointed under the legislation as soon as possible and the tribunal can be conferred with the necessary legislative powers. The tribunal has a lot of work ahead of it to resolve and determine all these matters by 15 October 2013 and it is necessary that it has these legislative powers as soon as possible. This whole issue for members' salaries goes back to 2009, as the Deputy Premier said, when the former government first chose to act without regard to the provisions of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001. To ensure that no member, current or retired, will get a salary or superannuation increase that they might claim they were entitled to, the bill retrospectively confirms and validates the salaries that any member received from 1 September 2009 to 30 June 2013.

The bill also allows the tribunal, should it wish, to vary its determinations from 1 July 2013 in such a way that takes into consideration the different superannuation arrangements that apply to members and former members. The salary increase received by members on 1 July 2013 also has an

effect on the salaries of local government councillors given the nexus between the salaries of members and councillors provided for in the Local Government Act 2009 and the Local Government Regulation 2012. Urgent passage of the bill will enable that nexus to be broken and for the remuneration of councillors to continue to remain at the same level as existed prior to 1 July 2013. The bill also goes one step further and reforms the way in which councillor salaries will be determined moving forward. Instead of councillor salaries being set once every four years, the Local Government Remuneration and Discipline Tribunal will meet every year to set salary levels for each category of local government. Local governments will either then accept those salary levels or set a new salary level which is lower than that fixed by the Local Government Remuneration and Discipline Tribunal. The bill is yet another way in which the government is delivering more empowered and autonomous local governments in Queensland.

Without going to the points raised by the Deputy Premier, because he covered the issues quite well in his contribution, I want to make two points. The first is with respect to why the Premier did not act on the advice of the Clerk some 12 months ago a few days after becoming Premier. The simple reality is that it was not a priority for government and it was not a priority for the Premier. When it became abundantly clear that the legislative scheme in Queensland was illegal and no-one, including the Premier, the Deputy Premier or the cabinet, had the executive power—the head of power—to do anything other than what the legislation says, we acted on it. But it was not a matter of priority for the government. That is why the Premier, rightfully so, did not act on it. The member for South Brisbane said that it was so obscene and so wrong, yet for three days they remained silent. For three days they remained silent. After the Deputy Premier did the first press conference, for three days the Labor Party in Queensland remained silent—until Alex Scott from the Together union opened his mouth and then the calls were made to the Labor Party, ‘This is what you’ve got to do.’ So it was so obscene and so wrong that the Labor Party did not speak about it for three days after such wrong. As the Deputy Premier said, we are righting the wrong, and this government will never stick up for any former Premier that acted outside his or her lawful entitlement in that role and functions of that office. I commend the bill to the House.