




Speech By  
**Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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## **CONSTITUTION (FIXED TERM PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL; CONSTITUTION (FIXED TERM PARLIAMENT) REFERENDUM BILL**

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (11.29 am): Today I rise to support the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill 2015 and the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Referendum Bill 2015, subject to amendments to be moved by my colleague the Hon. Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills. The duration of the Legislative Assembly in Queensland has long been a subject of debate. In 1991 a referendum was held to allow Queenslanders to vote on whether the parliamentary term should be extended to four years. The proposition put was: do you approve of a bill to extend the maximum term of future parliaments from three to four years? The question was defeated by 808,112 votes or 51.1 per cent to 771,103 or 48.9 per cent. The question posed in 1991 did not ask people to decide whether terms should be for a maximum of four years or for a four-year fixed term but simply sought approval for an extension from three- to four-year terms.

In 1999 the Queensland Constitutional Review Commission was established to look at the much wider question of reform of the Queensland Constitution. One of the issues that was looked at in the committee's inquiry, however, was the question of parliamentary terms. The committee recommended that terms be extended to four years and the government resolved that a bill to give effect to this change should be introduced in the next term of the parliament and that the bill should be submitted to a referendum. However, this did not occur. At various times since different political leaders have raised the question of four-year terms, but there has never been the level of bipartisan support for four-year terms that is considered necessary for its success.

In September this year the parliament resolved that the Finance and Administration Committee inquire into the possible introduction of four-year terms for the Queensland parliament. The committee, in its unanimous report tabled on 9 November 2015, recommended that a referendum for fixed four-year terms should be put to the voters of Queensland. The committee considered this should only occur where there is bipartisan support. I am pleased that today we have consensus, with both major parties supporting a proposal to change the term of the Legislative Assembly from a maximum three-year term to a fixed four-year term. If these bills are passed today, it will pave the way for a referendum to be held on the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill 2015 to provide for fixed four-year terms for the Legislative Assembly. It will also indicate bipartisan support for the yes argument at that referendum. I commend members in this House for their bipartisan support.

The constitutional legislation of this state requires a referendum to be held to extend the duration of the term of the Legislative Assembly. We are elected by and accountable to the people of Queensland and the people of Queensland rightly must have a say in the change proposed for this parliament. In undertaking its inquiry, the Finance and Administration Committee was asked to compare three-year and four-year parliamentary terms, including the advantages and disadvantages of each. The committee also looked into whether the terms should be fixed. The committee's report notes that a

majority of submitters to the committee's inquiry support the concept of a fixed term and a fixed date for an election. The committee came to the unanimous conclusion that fixed four-year terms should be introduced for the Legislative Assembly. The introduction of fixed four-year terms will mean Queenslanders are no longer caught by surprise with snap elections held at what may be opportune times for the Premier and the government of the day but what may be inconvenient times for the voters and the businesses of Queensland. The committee concluded that a longer term will enable those elected—the members of the Legislative Assembly—to become more familiar with and hence more effective in their roles.

Integrity and accountability in Queensland's parliamentary system is of the utmost importance, and I think we all agree on that. In 2011 significant reforms were made to Queensland's parliamentary committee system to enhance the parliament's oversight and examination of legislation and to strengthen the committee system and accountability of the executive government. The review of the parliamentary committee system that was yesterday referred to the Committee of the Legislative Assembly will check whether we are doing enough—that is, whether the committee system introduced in 2011 is working effectively or whether there are any needs for improvement. My government is committed to jobs and the long-term economic prosperity of this state and the introduction of fixed four-year terms will provide the certainty that the Queensland people and the Queensland economy need—that is, more certainty for government, business and community planning and for all Queenslanders. Business and community will know when an election is due.

As noted in the committee's report, there are views that a longer term may enhance business confidence and support economic activity and employment in this state. The business sector and the economy in general stand to benefit from the improved stability and greater certainty brought about by a longer parliamentary term. The Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill 2015 and the amendments to be moved by the honourable Attorney-General today include safeguards that provide for the calling of an early election in extraordinary circumstances despite the fixing of ordinary elections at four-year intervals. There is rightly an explicit role for the Governor in such extraordinary circumstances—for example, if a future Premier loses the confidence of the Legislative Assembly before the four-year term expires. In this regard, the bill further provides that the new provisions do not have any effect on the Governor exercising reserve powers in accordance with constitutional convention. I can inform the House that, as a matter of courtesy, this week my department briefed the Hon. Paul de Jersey, Governor of Queensland, to keep His Excellency apprised of the bill currently before the parliament.

Queensland is a vast state with some remote communities. I thank the committee for considering a range of issues around identifying a suitable fixed date for general election polling days. In particular, concerns were raised about the impact a fixed polling day during certain months would have on North and Far North Queensland when wet weather and other weather events are more likely. I note that the recommendation to hold the normal polling day for general elections on the last Saturday in October was unanimously supported by committee members.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the constitutional provisions establishing the fixed four-year term for the Legislative Assembly are proposed to be entrenched so that like the current maximum three-year term the fixed four-year term cannot be amended by future parliaments simply by passing legislation. The voters of Queensland would again have to endorse any future changes. The introduction of fixed four-year terms will bring Queensland into line with the majority of other Australian jurisdictions. All other states and territories in Australia have four-year terms for their lower house and all of them, with the exception of Tasmania, have fixed terms. It will also bring the state level into line with local government in Queensland, which also has four-year fixed terms. If these bills are passed today, it potentially represents a significant moment in history for Queensland's parliamentary system. It will mean that electors of Queensland will go to a state referendum for the first time in over 20 years. It will mean that we are one step closer to changing a term which was set for this House over 100 years ago and entrenched in 1934. I commend the bills to the House.