



Speech By
Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (9.04 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the Parliament of Queensland and Other Acts Amendment Bill. I thank the member for Coomera for his interjection before I stood and asking me to keep it to five minutes because he has an appointment somewhere, as many of us probably do.

As a member of the newly formed Finance and Administration Committee for the 55th Parliament I am delighted to stand to speak on this our first bill—the first of many, I am sure, that will be deliberated on by the Finance and Administration Committee. I take this opportunity, as others before me have tonight, to congratulate our chair, the member for Bulimba, the other committee members—the members for Coomera, Broadwater, Stretton and Condamine—and, of course, our hardworking secretariat.

It is well known that, with an equal division of members from both sides of the House on committees, there will be at times agreement, at times disagreement and at other times partial agreement on various sections. I can assure the House that the Finance and Administration Committee has had its fair share of robust discussion. What is important, however, is that the committee is able to continue with mature and honest discussion, allowing itself to be seen by departments, stakeholders and Queenslanders to be working as a unit, operating as a team with parliamentary staff, and essentially teasing out potential issues, ideas and benefits that come to us. I am not going to run across every detail on this, because we have heard it a number of times already.

Mr Crandon: Four minutes to go!

Mr CRAWFORD: I take that interjection. Thank you. We have already heard tonight some common ground on many parts of the bill before us. We have also heard some clear differing opinions on others. I will be brief where I can be. Essentially, the bill is roughly divided into three sections, being the autonomy of the Speaker, members' salary increases and the crossbench representative on the CLA.

In relation to the autonomy of the Speaker, as members will have heard, the bill proposes to restore some autonomy to the Speaker by making the Speaker rather than the CLA responsible for the management of the Parliamentary Service, including its budget. As others who have spoken before me have said, essentially, this is about bringing it back to the way it was, with the exception of the Clerk being responsible for employment. When we teased this out at a committee level there was a general consensus from all people we spoke to, as well as on the committee itself, that this was a good idea. Various people we interviewed were happy with the concept, especially given that the Clerk will retain control in the employment role for parliamentary staff.

The Premier stated when introducing the bill that during the election campaign the government committed to restoring autonomy to the position of the Speaker in parliament, and today through this bill we are delivering on that. The Premier went on to say that under this bill responsibility for the management of the Parliamentary Service will transfer from the CLA back to the position of Speaker, with the Clerk of Parliament remaining as the employment authority.

I think we can move on to the second section, which is the one which caused most of the robust discussion at the committee and, as we have heard, tonight. That is to amend the Queensland Independent Remuneration Tribunal Act 2013 with respect to four particular objectives: to retrospectively overturn determination 7 of 2015, which was the grant of a 2.58 per cent salary increase to members from 6 April this year; to allow the Clerk to recover the overpayments made since; to place a limit on the tribunal so that it cannot determine a percentage pay rise to MPs greater than the salary increases to public servants; and to provide that within 90 days of an announcement of a Public Service salary increase the tribunal must make a decision on the extent of any salary increases for MPs and that any increase must take effect from the same date that the Public Service receives its.

I turn to the statement made by the Premier when introducing this bill that the principle of linking MPs' salary increases to that of public sector employees was enshrined in a policy announced during the election campaign and how the Premier intends to honour this pledge and commitment with Queenslanders. This section of the bill was where the committee spent most of its time receiving statements, hearing evidence and conducting its own deliberations, of which there were many. What came from these submissions and from the hearings, as we have heard before, essentially was in relation to the role of the tribunal and whether this bill in some way removes or cripples the effectiveness of the tribunal to be truly independent. Arguments on the one hand say that an independent tribunal should have no restrictions and no interference, as we have heard. On the other hand, we have the argument that the tribunal should not deliver salary increases to MPs that may seem fair and reasonable when assessing skills, job descriptions and our roles but may, in fact, be unfair and deemed unjust within the community at large. We all know that the topic of politician or MP pay rises in the community is one that always attracts a great deal of debate. Whether you are at a barbecue or even just at a family event, everyone seems pretty keen to talk about it, as I am sure everyone in the House knows.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: I do not drive a government car, no.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: Yes, that is right. The announcement of this policy by the Premier when in opposition last year was warmly welcomed by the people of Queensland—not only the workers but the business operators, executive people, families and the like. In fact, I cannot recall one person saying to me that they firmly feel that MPs' salaries should be increased by a sizeable amount. On the same topic, I can recall hundreds of comments from people asking that politicians' pay rises be somehow linked to the average worker's pay or to CPI or to the economy or to some other productivity related calculation. The announcement by the Premier when in opposition is a true show of respect to Queensland public servants that if their pay rise is to be held at a level or raised slightly or raised by a lot then potentially so is ours. What is good for Queensland public servants should also be good enough for us. The Clerk tabled a document—the member for Broadwater mentioned it earlier; it is actually in Appendix E of the committee report which has been tabled—which shows that between 1995 and 2015 salary increases for core public servants and MPs have, over time, averaged out to around about the same at around 69 per cent.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: We are down half a percent. Some would argue this evidence has worked well. However, the tribunal only came into effect two years ago so we cannot say that the tribunal is responsible for that being the same because this has been going since 1995. What seemed obvious was that it was more a fluke that from 1995 to 2015 the numbers added up to about the same but there was no real science behind any of that. When we look at the core Public Service, in some of those numbers have seen steady growths between one per cent and 4½ per cent whereas over the same time we have seen MP pay rises not as steady. There have been more periods and more years where there has been nothing and when we have seen rises they have been between 1.6 per cent and 8.5 per cent. When we look at how the community perceives this, no doubt every now and again in the news they see an MP pay rise and, of course, when it is 8.5 per cent we know what they think.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order, member for Barron River. There is too much conversation in the chamber. I will wait for the House to come to order. The member for Barron River has the call.

Mr CRAWFORD: Whilst we got closely to the same place, the road for MPs was bumpier, the rises less often and the increases, when they did come, were often marginally higher than the

previous public sector wage rise. This creates the public perception that MPs are receiving dramatically higher rises and thus increased negative publicity for members of parliament.

Committee deliberations confirmed the utmost respect for the tribunal and the work that it has undertaken since its inception in 2013. The tribunal has undertaken its work in a truly independent manner and should stay in place. Discussion occurred in respect of section 29 of the act with regard to the tribunal's submission and proposal to achieve the government's intention by embedding within section 29 the requirement that the tribunal have regard to the benchmark of the Public Service. Further proposals from the non-government members were to perhaps change a word from 'may' to 'will', thus making the requirement stronger. The opportunity was discussed, but there was no agreement in the committee. The section 29 proposal, whilst a move in the direction of the government objective, does not fully achieve the government objective and would not satisfy the Queensland public that the full extent of the Premier's commitment has been undertaken and thus I could not support it.

When researching the evidence and the history of MPs' salary increases—and it was briefly referred to earlier by the member for Stretton—I refer to an urgent bill that was introduced by the former premier on 6 August 2013 being the very bill that we are now amending. During that debate the Leader of the Opposition at the time, the member for Inala, moved to amend clause 30 to include the words 'ensure that the financial position of the state and the state's fiscal strategy are taken into account'. That amendment was voted down by the government at the time. A further amendment was then moved by the member for Mount Isa which added the requirement for making a decision under clause 30 that it must not increase the salary of a member of the Assembly for a year or more than the greatest of the following: a percentage increase for an ambulance officer's wage or salary for the year; a percentage increase for a fire service officer's wage or salary for the year; and a percentage increase for a police officer's wage or salary for the year. The government opposed the amendment and, according to the committee report, voted it down without discussing it. The opposition leader and member for Inala tried again with a further amendment along similar lines and it was voted down with the majority that the government possessed in the 54th Parliament.

The government gets it. We get it now in government and those who were here in 2013 got it then. I think the member for Mount Isa was pretty close to being on the money in 2013 with his amendment and, as a former paramedic, I would have welcomed that amendment had it been successful. Unfortunately it was not. Perhaps if his amendment were considered back then, we may not be deliberating this topic tonight. Those on this side of the House have maintained a consistent and fair approach on this topic; those opposite are changing their minds between what was not acceptable to them in 2013 with some common-sense amendments and suddenly in 2015 they want to insert similar wording into the bill through the clause 29 idea. The government proposal is just, it is right and whilst not word for word with the member for Mount Isa's amendment in 2013 it fits, and I trust that tonight he agrees.

In relation to the argument around the 2.58 per cent and the 127 days and the argument that MPs will somehow lose out, we must look at not only the value of the percentage rise but how that translates to actual dollars and cents when we work it out, because a simple percentage figure is not necessarily the answer. When you increase a worker's pay on, say, \$50,000 a year—a public servant—by three per cent, you give them an increase of \$1,500. When you apply that same three per cent to a backbencher on roughly \$160,000, it calculates to a \$4,800 increase. The percentage is not enough. We need to look at the actual dollar figure. I welcome the tribunal to continue to determine MPs' salary increases and believe that this bill's intention will continue to give the tribunal the latitude it needs to properly assess the effects of salary increases, not just in percentages but in actual dollars and cents.

The community has a right to be vigilant on its views of MPs' salary increases and until there is a truly safe framework for the tribunal to operate in to determine salary increases, salary freezes or changes to salaries it determines to be fair, it is reasonable and it is truly transparent for the people of Queensland to place a limit on how high any salary increase can be. I believe that the most effective way to achieve this is to place a percentage cap on the tribunal's upper limit and to determine this percentage through the public sector salary increase, as outlined in the bill. If it is good enough for our police officers, our nurses, our paramedics, our firefighters, then it is good enough for me and I am sure that it is good enough for my colleagues sitting beside me.

The third and final section of the bill relates to enabling a crossbench member to be included in the membership of the CLA. Currently, the CLA consists of seven members, comprised of both government and opposition members, but it does not cater for any members of the House who are not part of either the government or the opposition. Currently in this parliament we have four members on the crossbench. In many Australian parliaments it has become the normality to have members who

are not members of the two main political parties. I believe that the membership of the CLA should respect this change in today's parliaments for now and into the future.

The proposal in the bill that went before the committee was to allow a crossbench member to be part of the CLA. There was a general acceptance by the committee and those who provided submissions that it was a sound idea. The committee found some issues surrounding the selection process for such a crossbench member. When there is no crossbench member of the House, clearly, there is no crossbench member on the CLA. That is pretty straightforward. When there is one crossbench member in the House, that member will be the member on the CLA. Again, that is pretty straightforward. But discussion surrounded the issue of when there was more than one crossbench member and how a crossbench member would be appointed to the CLA. Initially, the bill provided that the Leader of the House was to appoint the crossbench member. However, the committee agreed that, although the current Leader of the House is likely to make a sound decision if he were required, we are implementing a change that carries forward and needs to ensure that future leaders of the House will always act in the best interests of the crossbench without interference from others.

The committee recommended that it should be the crossbench members themselves who shall meet and determine who is to be their representative on the CLA—to determine among themselves without interference. I am aware that the Premier will be addressing this matter when she moves her amendment. It is noted that, in order to expedite the appointment, the crossbench needs to work with the Leader of the House as essentially they need somebody in a senior position to whom they can consult, get advice from and work with. So we agreed that the Leader of the House is the most appropriate person for that position. But we also agreed that the Leader of the House should not have a vote if any such ballot is to go forward when selecting a crossbench member for the position on the CLA. If the crossbench members cannot make a decision owing to a tied vote or for some other reason, it should be the Leader of the House who ultimately should make that decision and select the crossbench member to sit on the CLA. I support the bill.