




Speech By  
**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

---

Record of Proceedings, 20 May 2015

**PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (9.36 pm): I welcome the move to restore key functions to the role of Speaker of the Queensland parliament which were removed under the Bligh Labor government in 2011. As Speaker in the 54th Parliament I found that MPs and, yes, even journalists were confused about who was responsible for what—and who could blame them? These structures were poor, but that was the legislation's fault as the legislation was poor. Despite the best intentions of a few, the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, as the supreme governing body over parliamentary services and accommodation, bipartisan as it was, was a failed experiment. I will outline in summary the four reasons: firstly, it met in secret with no Hansard and no public gallery; secondly, the structure was fractured—in other words, it confused the heck out of people as to who was in charge of what, as someone must be responsible for decisions and be able to talk about them; thirdly, it excluded the crossbenches; and, fourthly, it was logjammed.

The secrecy fuelled confusion and frustration, and not just for the journalists who contacted me. I did have journalists who would contact me about issues where there had been decisions and I was not authorised as the Speaker to talk about them. Furthermore, I had no vote on those matters. Clearly, those things should have been able to be brought out into the public by someone who was responsible, not a committee that met in secret. Journalists understandably and rightly were frustrated. The system was confusing. As I have heard tonight, members do not understand or have not read the Parliament of Queensland Act. The CLA process violated the Westminster democratic principle of a minister of the parliament clearly being responsible. We see it as a concept that ministers of the Crown should be responsible and be able to answer for decisions. The same should be said of Parliament House. For example, if I were on the committee as the Speaker and I advocated to save journalists money and make sure they had a space to report from without being charged rent, I would have been in contempt of parliament for confirming those details. How ridiculous that there were conversations and advocacy that people on that committee could undertake and they could not talk about them. To illustrate further this issue of secrecy as a reason the bipartisan CLA experiment as a supreme management body failed, there was no Hansard and there was no public gallery for matters which should have been in public.

Under these rules, the Speaker was potentially subject to decisions of a committee that met behind closed doors and I could rarely talk about those decisions due to parliamentary privilege. Also, given that when presiding publicly from the chair of the House the Speaker potentially had to pull up the same people, from government and opposition benches, on the floor of the parliament, it is not a good structure. Despite the worst of the 2011 failed changes, by the rules of this House the Speaker has always been accountable to the parliament. That has never changed. However, I am pleased that there will no longer be any confusion about the fact that it is better for the Speaker to answer directly to the parliament, where there is a public gallery and Hansard, rather than to a committee where there is neither.

The second reason this CLA process failed was the fractured lines of authority, that is, someone who is clearly responsible for certain decisions. As Speaker, on a number of occasions I

spoke publicly about the fractured lines of responsibility and overlapping responsibilities. The 2011 changes, which shifted considerable power away from the Speaker to this bipartisan committee and the Clerk, were poorly understood and had significant unintended consequences, the greatest of which might have been confusion amongst members of the public, and I will outline a few others in a moment. Good governance requires clear lines of authority so that there is no confusion over who is responsible for decisions. The converse is true, that is, if everyone is responsible then really no-one is responsible. In other words, you need to know who has made the decisions and someone should be made to answer for those, quite clearly.

One of the most serious flaws—probably the most serious flaw—of these compromised authorities was epitomised by the issue of security. I firmly believe that whoever is in charge has a duty of care to fulfil their role diligently, competently and in good faith for the public and parliamentary good. That requires understanding what your role actually is. Certainly, that is what I sought to do without fear or favour as the Speaker of the 54th Parliament. At least the 2012 amendments to the Parliament of Queensland Act put the Speaker onto the CLA, which was the governing body, although as a non-voting member. The fractured lines of authority caused by the 2011 changes remained. Despite the 2011 changes, the Speaker was still responsible for security policy due to having oversight of behaviour on the precinct. In 2012, to ensure that the parliament was as safe as possible for members of parliament, their families, the staff and visitors, as Speaker I commissioned an independent security review by internationally regarded experts and counterterrorism police who recommended capital and operational upgrades. However, the CLA, not the Speaker, was responsible for capital works programs and the oversight of the budget to implement a number of those resulting recommendations. As those were closed-door meetings, I cannot outline what happened, I am restrained by parliamentary privilege and there was no public gallery or Hansard.

As is outlined on the public record, the issue of security and capital upgrades was quite a challenging process. In the midst of all of this, there was a break-in of the Parliamentary Annexe, that is, into the building. Subsequently, I am pleased to say that, with the support of the CLA, more security improvements were eventually made, including to the areas where the intruders had entered the precinct and the building, which are areas that had been identified in the original reviews. I would like to publicly acknowledge the CLA delegates who understood the importance of security. Unfortunately, due to secrecy I cannot. However, I will acknowledge that there was diligent work done by parliamentary staff, including my own from the former Speaker's office, who helped in the implementation of the improvements. The process is ongoing and I wish the new Speaker and the staff all the best in seeing it followed through and continually improved. Looking after the security and safety of members of parliament, the public, guests and staff in this precinct is a sacred trust. We have great staff who have nothing to do with the political process, but whose diligence and independence, together with that of the police, ensures that the 89 politicians of the Queensland Parliament can fulfil their parliamentary duties in safety. Who is liable if anything went wrong? I asked that question, but a clear answer could not be provided to me. The real issue was who was responsible for keeping people safe? My view is that it is better to keep people safe than prove liability after a tragedy. It is better to do all that one reasonably can to keep this place safe for all.

The third reason this secretive CLA closed-door experiment failed, bipartisan though it was, is that the crossbenchers were not represented. Yes, there were equal votes between government and non-government members, but traditionally the Speaker, regardless of political party background or personal political belief, represented the whole party, government and non-government, including crossbenchers. Under the 2011 laws, the Speaker did not even have a vote. As I have mentioned, the CLA eventually became logjammed. I know that it will continue as a body to which the Speaker can refer matters. I hope that it is seen as a strategic advisory body. Ultimately, the Speaker will still be responsible, but there is merit in having a body to provide advice on strategic issues.

Yes, there has been confusion about how these rules have operated and I have heard that in the debate tonight. One thing that we should know is that the CLA was bipartisan. Its membership included government and non-government members. The now Premier and now Treasurer attended those meetings, as did other senior opposition members, and nothing could be passed by the CLA without their approval. The only time when the CLA did not have control of the precinct was in the interim between the end of an election and the commencement of the incoming government. During the interim period, those powers lay with the Clerk until the new CLA was formed. The autonomy of the Speaker's role in this bill is autonomy from the secretive CLA that is a closed-door committee. I support these amendments to the Parliament of Queensland Act—

*(Time expired)*