




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (12.27 pm): I rise to support the bills before the chamber this afternoon. I do so on the basis of my experience particularly as a previous senator. I do appreciate the fact that we have a unicameral House in Queensland. Having a fixed term arrangement provides certainty for government, it provides certainty for business and it provides certainty for the community and our constituents that we represent.

As I travel around my seat of Ferny Grove and talk to small businesses about the certainty that this bill would bring about, they are on the same page. They understand the purpose of what is behind having certainty in terms of having fixed term arrangements for a period of four years. Also, I find that local councils—generally the one body of government in our country that is the beneficiary or recipient of funds as a result of what is generally passed down from federal government to state to local—also prefer fixed term arrangements. I also understand, Madam Deputy Speaker Farmer, that during your committee's inquiry—a committee that you chair—that was some of the evidence that you received. I was fortunate to attend the Brisbane hearing where there were a number of citizens who appeared before the committee and gave evidence supporting this as well.

No doubt there were some people who held concerns about the situation of locking in a period of time, but I think in this day and age when you provide certainty, whether it be to local councils or to communities or to businesses in particular, that gives them a period of planning—they can plan ahead and work out how they can budget around those sorts of things. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you hear as much as I do, particularly in the years when there seem to be election after election—and has been the case in some terms, when there has been a federal, state and local authority election in the same year—when people just throw their hands up and say, 'I am sick and tired of going to elections.' This will put in place a practice where people can plan their life ahead, knowing full well there will be a set date for an election in a certain year. They will be able to plan to take their children away on holidays and so on. They can plan ahead to make sure that their lives are not disrupted. That is what this is all about: putting some practice in place to ensure that people can plan well in advance.

On that note, I am proud to stand in the chamber this afternoon and support the passage of this bill. I commend the committee for the work it has done. The work that you were involved in, Madam Deputy Speaker, is very commendable when you consider the places you went to. I understand you travelled vast areas of the state, many occasions travelling by bus to hear the views of every Queenslanders or those who were able to appear before the committee. That is highly commendable. Sometimes I wonder, Madam Deputy Speaker, how you, as chair of the committee, have the time and the ability to travel to those locations. I commend you and the other members of the committee who made that effort.

Mr Crandon: We all went, too.

Mr FURNER: I did say the committee members. I am including you by making that statement. I would not forget you from the equation. Once again, this legislation is about providing certainty and confidence not only for our communities but also for local authorities, government and councils to plan ahead.

I want to go the reasoning behind why the committee selected a date in October. What I heard in the evidence in the Brisbane hearing was the uncertainty and the concern of the wet season. We know the way that climate change is going there is always uncertainty about what sort of wet season will be ahead of us. It was very commonsensical of the committee to select the date in October so it is not in the wet season up north—so there are not circumstances like there were this year in January when the election was held and I believe, based on anecdotal evidence, people in remote areas of Far North Queensland had difficulty pre-polling and voting on election day.

I commend the committee on making that decision and for taking into consideration the people up north. I am sure the member for Dalrymple would agree that we always need to consider people in our remote areas. We always need to ensure that they are considered in everything we do in this chamber.

Mr Knuth: Because you care.

Mr FURNER: I do care. As a born and bred Queenslander—born and bred in the south-east corner—I have travelled this state extensively and many other states around the country, and I always have in the back of my mind the hardship and the remoteness faced by people who live in remote areas like you. It is always important that we, as parliamentarians in this House, have that in the forefront of our minds when we make decisions, particularly in a decentralised state the size of Queensland. We need to make sure that their consideration is well thought of in advance.

This bill certainly provides that. The selection of that date in October is well away from the wet season, unless there is a dramatic shift in climate change in the future, but I cannot see that in the decades ahead of us where hopefully that pattern of seasonal wet seasons will come through on a regular basis. We will keep the state election away from what may have been in this case difficult circumstances for people in remote areas of Northern Queensland in terms of exercising their democratic right in having a say on who and how this parliament operates.

In conclusion, I support this bill. It is great to have bipartisan support, on probably the final opportunity that we have in this House this year, in making a change that in my opinion is something we should have done many years ago. Nevertheless, this is the occasion and this is the chance that we get to decide on that. I commend the bill to the House.