




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 4 December 2015

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

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.02 pm): It is with great pleasure and a sense of profound optimism that I rise in the House today to speak on the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill. For me, this bill is a culmination of a long-awaited constitutional opportunity and is one of the most important issues from my time and role in the Queensland parliament. The bill reflects a journey that began for me three years ago in 2012 with the Hon. Tim Mulherin, the former member for Mackay, Curtis Pitt, the current Treasurer and others in the overwhelmingly minor opposition at that time. That journey was to try to bring about better governance with more certainty for the Queensland public and business community, as well as less pain and suffering for all Queenslanders in relation to the plethora of elections they are forced to participate in by the rules of this country on freedom of choice. I worked with those members to further the common purpose of delivering better governance for the state of Queensland. Unfortunately, because of their extremely small representation numbers in the House and the prospect that they may have been in opposition for quite a while, their decisions with their administrative party representatives precluded advancement of the process at that particular time. I understand their reluctance and concern in being in opposition for periods of four years, rather than three years. That has been the crux of the problem since Premier Bligh flirted with the prospect of four-year terms in her reign.

As fortune would have it, a very unexpected and extremely close result in the 2015 state election has given rise to the perfect opportunity to deliver better governance for Queensland for the future and less political pain for the citizens of Queensland. Indeed, it was the confusion surrounding the 2012 state and Brisbane council elections that highlighted the need for the Queensland public and business community to have surety as to when a government will call an election. All other states bar Tasmania are operating under a four-year term of government, with Queensland local governments also having fixed four-year terms. It only makes good common sense that the Queensland state parliament operates with the same length of term.

I remember well in Queensland when local governments shifted from three-year terms to four-year terms, starting in the year 2000. The naysayers to extending those terms in local government ran the same negative populist arguments that we hear today about these proposed changes for state government: it is too long to have a bad council, they cried; it is just politicians seeking longer terms for themselves, they cried. Yet look where it is today. All of the citizens of Queensland are comfortable with their councils having four-year terms and I certainly do not hear any outcry about next March elections being for a four-year term. So it shall be for state governance, once the people of Queensland get over the hump of what will be seen as a major change to the status quo. Change in politics is always the most difficult outcome to achieve, so I am particularly pleased that it will be the people of Queensland themselves who have the ultimate say on moving to fixed four-year term commissions for their politicians.

I have heard arguments that Queensland, as a unicameral governing house, should be cautious regarding this proposal and I reject that scaremongering completely, as the Queensland parliament does have a well regulated and conscientious parliamentary committee system that operates as a strong watchdog for the Queensland public. As part of ensuring that parliamentary oversight continues to exist regardless of the strength of the government executive in the years to come, we are looking at ways of enshrining the parliamentary committee system in the governance of Queensland. That will be the subject of further investigations being carried out by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly. I note that the Leader of the House is going to make further mention of that today.

At this point in the Queensland parliamentary history, the House is almost evenly balanced in terms of the two major parties, so it is the perfect time to consider this major change to the electoral period when neither side of the major parties can claim an electoral advantage. Our current Queensland parliamentary term is for three years. However, it is more often than not that our governments rely on political opportunity to call them at just two years and nine months, which is very familiar for us on this side, of course. If the referendum for four-year terms is successful, one of the enormous positive outcomes is that certainty of judgement day of political performance will be set in concrete. The political opportunism of calling elections at the premier's whim will be a relic of the past. Governments will be accountable on a set day in October for their political performance over the previous four years and no opportunities for calling an election for poll-driven purposes emanating from favourable or unfavourable outside events that could be taken advantage of will be entertained.

In my view, a corollary benefit of an October election date is that, should there be new incoming governments, they will have nine months to ready themselves for a new budget in keeping with their political beliefs, which is the most important role that any new government undertakes. I think it goes without saying that the current electoral cycle can be categorised by the first 12 months of a new government becoming familiar with the job at hand, the second 12 months providing a productive outcome-driven agenda and the last 12 months of a three-year term being on red alert for an election that may be called at any politically opportune moment by the Premier and the government. If we move to a four-year term, we will have at least a doubling of the productive period of government by another year, with the hoped outcome of a considerably increased amount of productive outcomes in the year leading up to the October election day. It is not surprising then that public policy outcomes are often derived for short-term political gain, capturing the attention of the media at the expense of benefits to the Queensland public. It is the Queensland public, upon the introduction of a four-year fixed term, that will benefit and see the gains of public policy outcomes—outcomes directed more at benefitting those whom we are elected to serve.

Clarity for the Queensland public in the processes and procedures of politics will also be gained through the adoption of a four-year fixed term. It is clarity that will increase confidence not only in the actions of their current government but also in the economic, investment and job creation environments within our great state.

The Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill will have a further stabilising effect on business confidence with current surveys indicating that 78 per cent of Queenslanders view elections and the election campaign period as containing a negative impact on the Queensland economy. Fixed terms would allow Queensland businesses to approach major project and investment decisions with confidence in whom they would be dealing with as well as a guaranteed tenure for the implementation of policies and projects that facilitate economic growth.

I can assure the House that I am well aware from a business point of view how a possible change in government in Queensland may affect a multitude of business decisions. A fixed four-year term will allow business that small amount of extra time to be able to deal with one government of a philosophical persuasion they are comfortable to work with. In closing, I call on all members of parliament to support the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill.