




Speech By
Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Record of Proceedings, 4 December 2015

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

 **Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Sandgate—ALP) (12.11 pm): It is with great pleasure that I rise to support this legislation, as it will be amended, to introduce fixed four-year terms for the Queensland parliament. The length of parliamentary terms in Queensland has long been a subject of debate. We have heard that in a number of contributions to this cognate debate today.

This legislation would bring Queensland into line with the rest of Australia and, it has been argued by many people, provide the community and business with a greater level of certainty. I am not always an advocate of bringing us into line with other states. There are good reasons why Queensland is different. We have seen a constitutional evolution in this state since we were granted self-government in 1859. This evolution must be responsive to the needs of Queensland and Queensland people, not just be in line for the sake of being in line, to coin a phrase.

The time is right for fixed four-year terms. I think it is very important to reiterate that point to the Queensland community. Ultimately, this will be their choice. That is what we are facilitating today. We are facilitating a choice for the people of Queensland. This is not the choice of those of us in this chamber. This is about facilitating a choice for the people of Queensland in terms of our constitutional arrangements going forward. My argument to the people of Queensland would be that having fixed four-year terms for the Legislative Assembly of Queensland would be a great step forward and would improve our constitutional arrangements and the democratic system we enjoy.

If we look at the time from when Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1859, we see that members elected to this chamber in 1860 were elected for five years. They were five-year terms. These terms were drawn from the constitutional arrangements in place under the Westminster system in the British parliament. Those arrangements were deemed to not be acceptable to the people of Queensland and we saw a constitutional change occur in 1890 which made them three-year terms.

There have been all sorts of other constitutional changes happen and a range of other issues need to be dealt with. We cannot afford to deal with all constitutional matters en bloc. We have to have ongoing evolution.

I appreciate that there may have been some concerns expressed by people through the committee process and more generally in the community. People have said, 'Going to four-year terms is okay as long as we have all these other things.' I have seen that prosecuted by some quarters in the media today, particularly some quarters, I would suggest, to my left.

Mr Dickson: Only just.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: There are not a lot of people who would say that. If we had an all-or-nothing approach we would still have five-year terms and adult suffrage. I do not think the idea that we can only do constitutional reform in an everything or nothing way is acceptable. The people of Queensland deserve better than that. That is what we are offering them—better than that.

This is not our decision. This is us facilitating a decision by the people of Queensland. That is the case because we saw this entrenched in the Queensland Constitution in 1934 in response to concerns and understandings about the evolution of our Constitution at the time of the abolition of the Legislative Council. This matter is entrenched in the Constitution. It is therefore a requirement that the people of Queensland have their say on this matter by way of a referendum.

I acknowledge the work done by the committee in making suggested improvements to the member for Mansfield's bills. I think those improvements are important to note. Those improvements are about ensuring that this referendum can be held at a convenient time and opportunity and one that keeps it in line with other voting opportunities in this state. It has been widely foreshadowed that the government is proposing to hold that referendum on the same day as the local government elections—that is, 19 March.

I note that there are some from local government who are expressing concerns about that. I encourage them to have a greater level of confidence in the people of Queensland and have a greater level of confidence in their electors that they have the ability to, as they say, walk and chew gum at the same time. I have absolute confidence in Queenslanders. They are people who have the ability to understand the distinction between issues. I think there should be greater respect given to electors in Queensland.

I appreciate that, as a consequence of the timing of the holding of that referendum, there are other concerns and issues that people have. They want to get an understanding and a line of sight about what needs to occur to reassure people about our pathway of constitutional reform. This evolution is not singular; it is continuous.

I note that in recent years we have seen the evolution of our parliamentary committee system. I note the recommendation from the committee that we need to entrench our committee system constitutionally. I have some significant concerns about that in practical terms. The government has provided a response to the committee's recommendations. We have seen the decision by this House to refer the matters relating to the committee system and a committee system review to the Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

I can advise, by way of information to all members of the House, of the determinations made by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly at its meeting today. Subsequent to the referral of the inquiry into the strengthening and entrenchment of the parliamentary committee system to the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, the committee has resolved to call for submissions. The closing date for submissions will be Friday, 29 January 2016, with a public hearing to be held on Tuesday, 9 February 2016. The committee is due to report, as the House is already aware, by Thursday, 25 February 2016. It is important to note that that is occurring as part of, as I say, the ongoing evolution of our Constitution and our constitutional arrangements.

In commenting in particular on the need to make the distinction between this referendum and decisions that the people of Queensland have made in the past about extending to four-year terms, this opportunity is quite distinct because it is about fixed four-year terms. A number of members have expressed comments about the lack of certainty that arises in the context of the Premier having the prerogative to go to the Governor at any time during a three-year term. That is a problem with the current constitutional arrangements.

Madam Deputy Speaker Farmer, I ask that you pass on to the Speaker my appreciation for him having put this issue on the agenda. I do appreciate the member for Mansfield's role in making this come to fruition in the way in which he has worked very closely with the Attorney-General and in the way in which the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier have worked together to make sure this occurs. I am very happy that the Palaszczuk Labor government is reaching across the aisle to make this happen.

The passing of the bills today in this final sitting week ensures that the referendum can be held, as I say, on 19 March. It is a great way to end the year on a bipartisan note, and it will send a powerful message to the people of Queensland that this parliament can work together to deliver what the community wants. I ask the people of Queensland to also support this constitutional reform. As I reiterate, what we are doing with this legislation today is not making this decision on behalf of the people of Queensland. We are facilitating them to make their decision about how they see our Constitution will continue to evolve.