



Speech By  
**Mark Ryan**

**MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD**

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**CONSTITUTION OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
BILL**

 **Mr RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (4.44 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate of the Constitution of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. As we have heard from previous speakers in the debate this afternoon, this is a bill which will enhance the integrity, accountability and transparency of government and will ensure that this chamber, this Legislative Assembly, is under additional scrutiny by the role of the portfolio committees and the additional powers they will have to initiate inquiries.

I note from the explanatory notes that the objectives of the bill are to statutorily recognise the core matters of the parliamentary committee system in the Constitution of Queensland 2001 and provide the parliament's portfolio committees with the power to initiate inquiries within their area of responsibility on their own motion.

The bill implements certain recommendations made by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly in its report No. 17, titled *Review of the parliamentary committee system*, tabled in this parliament on 25 February 2016. As the explanatory notes state—

To achieve these objectives, the Bill will amend the Constitution to provide statutory recognition of the 'core matters' of the Parliament's committee system in the Constitution. Including these matters in the Constitution will, as the CLA indicated in Report No. 17, not only emphasise their importance, but 'place a psychological political impediment on altering them without just cause'.

The Bill amends the Constitution to provide that:

- the Legislative Assembly must at the commencement of every session establish at least six portfolio committees which collectively cover all areas of government activity;
- every Bill introduced into the Assembly must be referred to a committee for a minimum review period of six weeks, but that the Assembly can declare a Bill urgent by ordinary majority under the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly; and
- the annual Appropriation Bills must be subject to the budget estimates process.

When preparing for this debate I was thinking about the public conversations that occurred in the lead-up to the recent referendum—a referendum which I was very happy to see succeed by a majority vote of the people of Queensland. Those conversations included many debates not only within this chamber but also outside this chamber. One particular debate was in the red chamber. On a particular evening there were proponents for and against. I, along with the member for Mansfield, was able to contribute to that debate in the red chamber and spoke in favour of the proposed referendum. One of the things that those opposing our argument raised in that debate was the issue about oversight of the Legislative Assembly. One of the things they said was, 'If you are going to have fixed four-year terms then it should be accompanied by additional oversight.' Some of them suggested the return of the upper house. There is probably not much appetite in the Queensland community for the return of the upper house.

One of the things that I thought was very encouraging was the recommendation of the CLA in providing that additional oversight. We have heard about the objectives of this bill to not only recognise in statute those portfolio committees but also, importantly, make sure that every bill, unless certain circumstances are supported by this House on the basis of urgency, is referred to the relevant portfolio committee for proper scrutiny for a minimum period of six weeks to allow the people of Queensland not only to be assured of that proper scrutiny but also to participate in that scrutiny. I think that is particularly relevant in this debate.

Further to those conversations about how to provide that additional oversight, whilst taking some people around the parliament today I noted that downstairs there are a number of boards that detail certain events in the parliament's history. I am sure that in due course there will be a board that refers to the introduction of fixed four-year terms and the additional oversight that portfolio committees have as a result of this bill passing the parliament today. One of the boards talks about the abolition of the Legislative Council. I thought it was interesting to note that the then premier, Premier Theodore, or 'Red Ted' to his mates, said—

Parliament, in order to give free and direct expression to the will of the people, must be remodelled. Everyone, I think, recognises that the Legislative Council has outlived its usefulness, and is serving no beneficial purpose at the present time for the people of Queensland. It is known what the Legislative Council has done in recent years in order to prevent popular measures becoming law—measures which were desired by the people. Governments have been returned with a decisive majority and a definite mandate to carry their policy into operation and have been thwarted by the Legislative Council.

That is a very relevant quote to the debate today because it is how we provide good oversight of the processes of the Legislative Assembly. When we look federally we see how that parliament is now operating and has operated for a number of years where the so-called house of review—the Senate—has either been a rubber stamp for the House of Representatives or has been an impediment to the will of the House of Representatives, the lower house. That was the conundrum that was faced by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council in the 1920s and before—that is, how to provide that proper oversight. The Legislative Assembly was the house of government that in the 1920s and before was the only House elected by the people of Queensland whereas Legislative Council members were appointed for life and were not accountable to the people of Queensland. How do we ensure that the voice of the people who vote is properly heard by the people of Queensland and ensure that that oversight is properly provided by a good process? Enhancing the parliamentary committee system and making sure those portfolio committees are not only recognised in statute but have the power to initiate their own inquiries and ensure that there is a transparent, accountable process is very important. That is one way that this bill enhances accountability in government.

I must acknowledge the contribution of the CLA for not only the quite detailed work around these particular recommendations that we are seeing implemented today but also ensuring that we communicate those enhancements to the community. A robust parliamentary portfolio committee system is something that we should celebrate. I remember when the portfolio committee system was introduced by the Bligh government and it was quite a change from the previous committee system. For the first time there was more openness and more participation from the public in that they were able to make submissions and they were able to come to meet with members of the committee and have their say, and I think we got better legislation as a result. We see how the portfolio committees operate in this parliament and we see the engagement from the community and we see portfolio committees producing reports that are not only well considered but are well recognised by those relevant ministers in charge of the legislation being considered by the committee.

This bill not only strengthens the role of portfolio committees but also enhances their power to do additional work and provide that additional scrutiny whilst also ensuring that the Legislative Assembly remains accountable to the people of Queensland. The work of the CLA in putting together the recommendations, which we are ultimately considering in this bill in this House today, should be acknowledged, as should the leadership of the Premier on this matter. The Premier has been a trailblazer when it comes to enhancing accountability, transparency and integrity in government and I acknowledge her efforts. Thank goodness that we have a Premier who is committed to all of those values and committed to all of the Fitzgerald reforms and ensures—

**Ms Palaszczuk:** Excellent assistant minister.

**Mr RYAN:** I take that interjection. People have faith in government because of our great Premier and her commitments to those wonderful values of integrity, transparency and accountability. I acknowledge the great work of the Premier and I acknowledge the work of the CLA in bringing these recommendations to the House and encourage all members of the House to support this bill.