




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**

**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2016

**CRIME AND CORRUPTION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (10.12 pm): I rise tonight to speak in support of the Crime and Corruption Amendment Bill. This will again fulfil another of the Palaszczuk government's most important election commitments, and it will go some way towards restoring public confidence in the Queensland parliament and the public service. I believe that this legislation goes a long way to restoring public confidence not only in the work of the commission, but how the people of Queensland deal with government and government departments.

I decided to enter politics for a number of reasons, not the least of which was because I could not sit idly by and allow attacks on the Queensland justice system and the Crime and Corruption Commission largely because of the atrocious abuses of power that were being perpetrated by the previous government. The separation of power was repeatedly undermined, rule of law principles were ignored and, most relevantly for the moment, we witnessed a prolonged vendetta against the Queensland corruption watchdog.

Queensland's Crime and Corruption Commission had earned the reputation of being one of the state's most powerful independent and respected institutions whose purpose is to keep a check on police corruption and the political abuse of power. Not only did the LNP government repeatedly downplay the commission's functions and attempt to politicise its operations, but in 2014 it also passed some crippling reforms that weakened the independence and investigative power of the body. Information from anonymous whistleblowers was made inadmissible; the responsibility of the commission to prevent corruption was removed; and in an inexplicable move the wording of the act was changed so that the position of 'chairperson' was changed to 'chairman'.

The Queensland Labor opposition, as it then was, was vocal in its disapproval of these attacks, raising the objection that the policies were winding back the clock to pre-Fitzgerald standards of oversight. The then leader of the opposition let loose on the Attorney-General, clueing him into the fact that Queensland has been here before. You do not have to look too far back in the history books to know why the Queensland government needs legitimate accountable mechanisms and a fearless independent body to properly investigate. Our government places a high value on oversight, transparency and checks and balances, and we made this clear to the people of Queensland last year before the election. The Palaszczuk government was entrusted by the electors to return best practice principles of governance to our state, and this includes holding our political officers up to the scrutiny of an oversight body with real investigative teeth.

The reforms proposed by the Attorney-General's bill fulfil these expectations by reversing the worst of the 2014 LNP attacks. Perhaps the most important of these reforms is to allow evidence to be given anonymously. This will greatly improve the investigating power of the CCC and serve as a layer of protection for whistleblowers against retaliation. The Attorney-General's bill goes further than just winding back the Newman era attacks on the integrity of the CCC: the bill reinstates and strengthens the commission's preventative function; widens the definition of corrupt conduct; and reforms the appointment process and tenure of commissioners and CEOs.

The commission cannot remain independent when members have been hand-picked by the government of the day. The upside of the fiercely partisan nature of our parliament is that neither side will allow the appointment of anyone who can be perceived as holding political bias. Additionally, the improved wages and tenure provisions will serve to attract experienced and distinguished candidates to this top job. The bill also introduces a safeguard for the period of time during which the PCCC selects a new chair and CEO.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on the submissions made by Mr Fitzgerald in 2014. In his submission, which details the attempts of previous conservative governments to alter the CMC since it was established following the Fitzgerald inquiry, Mr Fitzgerald says—

The Bill before this committee takes the final step needed to remove the commission's independence entirely and bring it completely under government control.

He also stated—

Despite what politicians promise, there are no simple solutions to complex problems and neither Newman nor Bleijie has knowledge or experience of the complexities involved in balancing personal freedom and public safety through criminal justice.

Newman and Bleijie's conduct also suggests that they are unaware of, or unconcerned by, the principles and responsibilities of good governance and intolerant of dissent and decision-makers whom they can't control. Both seem to inhabit a political universe which is divided into "us" and "them", in which those who do not agree with their views or do what they demand are for that reason enemies and legitimate targets for abuse and government retribution.

He hit out at the former premier and attorney-general for launching what he described as unprincipled attacks on the courts and judiciary over the last two years. I recommend these important changes to the House.