




Speech By
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CRIME AND CORRUPTION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (9.49 pm): Today I rise to make a brief contribution on the Crime and Corruption Amendment Bill. We have seen many people in this House clamouring for the high moral ground in this debate. We have heard phrases like integrity, bipartisanship, community confidence, abuse for political gain, abuse of power, transparency and accountability—these in themselves are very worthy things for us to talk about in this place as we try to address the very nature of our crime and corruption watchdog. The question really is: does this bill add anything of value in turning these words into actions?

As we debate the bill, I would like to quote briefly from history. When he first discussed the CJC, which is now the CCC, Mr Fitzgerald said—

The exclusion or reduction of party political considerations and processes from the decision-making process with respect to the administration of criminal justice is an important consideration underlying the establishment of the CJC. Accordingly, executive authority and connection with the CJC must be limited to what is necessary to finance it, provide administrative and resource needs, and that necessary for public financial and other accounting purposes.

What Mr Fitzgerald was really saying was that this thing should not be a political football. It should rise above the partisanship of this chamber and we should make sure that the integrity of our state is well protected by being able to agree on how we should function. There is another person I would like to quote from, just to bring this into stark reality. The quote is—

The House needs to be acutely aware that the tasks given to this committee will require it to operate as much as possible in a non-partisan, non-political way. I stress those words. On page 309 of his report, Commissioner Fitzgerald used words that need to be given great attention by the House, because they are very significant and will have a significant influence and bearing on the operation not only of the Commission but also of the Committee.

That was Peter Beattie 26 years ago talking about making sure that we do not end up in a partisan fashion discussing how the CCC should operate and how it should function. We wanted to make sure that we have a body that the people of Queensland can have great confidence in because the people of this House have been able to agree in a bipartisan way on how best to make sure it operates. That might not always be possible but it should always be what we pursue.

I believe bringing these amendments in whilst there is a statutory review already underway is pre-emptive. Unfortunately, although it might satisfy some desires of some people to unwind what was done in this House before, I do not think it is really helpful in making sure that the CCC functions as efficiently and effectively as it can. In just a few short months, the report will be finished and the government will be able to look at it and put its response together and draft the necessary legislation to be able to deal with any of the issues that have been identified.

While there is a structural review and complete overview of the commission going on, I think it is pre-emptive to come in here with the five objectives of the bill. It is not that I have any great objection to the specifics of the bill. I have not turned my mind to the specifics of the bill because we are in the middle of writing a report about the whole commission. I say that with the greatest respect to the Legal

Affairs and Community Safety Committee, who I am sure worked very hard on this bill. They could only address what was put in front of them as the amendments; they could not address the whole structure of the CCC. That is the job of the statutory review.

For me to ask someone whether these are good ideas when they are put in isolation causes a problem because you cannot look outside those ideas. Then we have other branches of government looking at things that all form part of what we all desire. If we want business to operate effectively in our state and people to have confidence in how our state functions, we need to make sure we have a strong, independent, bipartisan supported integrity commission that is able to look at serious crime and serious corruption. I will quote Fitzgerald again. He said—

Organised crime is a special threat since it leads to the perversion and corruption of the basic institutions of our society. Its sophistication, adaptability and wealth make it extraordinarily difficult to combat. Organised crime cannot exist on the scale which it does without the knowledge and help of otherwise honest citizens, both individual and corporate. Organised crime can afford the best in equipment, technology and advice, sometimes provided by unethical professionals.

Again, if we are going to make changes to the CCC, it should be done as part of a large review. It should be done so we do not weaken the institution either in the eyes of the public or in reality. It needs to be done as part of a whole process where we can look at what it is we are trying to achieve. I am sure no-one in this House thinks we should achieve a partisan body that can be abused and used in a political campaign to take cheap shots at an opponent to try to gain power. We all know that, if someone gains power by using an institution of the state in an illegal way, that would be completely offensive to the people of Queensland. The frivolous complaints and reporting of political opponents in the lead-up to an election is something that I think needs to be looked at very seriously so that neither side and nobody at any level of government in Queensland has the ability to abuse this very important institution.

As I said, I do not wish to pass comment at this point on the proposed five amendments and the objectives. What I am concerned about is wanting the people of Queensland and the members in this House to have confidence in this institution. I want people who are running businesses to know that, when they put a tender in, someone behaving in a corrupt manner will not be advantaged. I want people to know and trust that serious crime in this state will have a watchdog chasing it out of this state. As I said, bringing in piecemeal amendments is really not the way to review this most important institution. This is one of the cornerstones that makes a modern democracy function well, and the cornerstone has to be upheld. It has to be done in a bipartisan way. It has to be done in a way that we all agree is best for our society. I really hope that, as we go through the review, we can come up with some bipartisan recommendations that the minister will consider and legislate.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: I am happy to take the interjection.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: Does the member not think it is time to rise above the petty politics?

Mr Power interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! The member for Logan.

Mr WATTS: I think it is time to rise above some of that and let's get some bipartisan agreement on how this thing should function, some bipartisan agreement on what we should do with frivolous political complaints, some bipartisan agreement on how we think it should be structured in terms of its governance model. I am happy to debate that within the overall review where members from both sides of this House can express opinions and hopefully we can reach an agreement on what is corrupt behaviour, what is official misconduct and some of these very important and difficult topics. I hope we can get that sorted out in the wider review so that we can come in here with some legislation that strengthens this institution, because it is a foundation stone that will make our state effective and efficient. It will allow it to compete with countries overseas and people here can have confidence in it. I think it has been a plaything of the political elements that operate in Queensland and I think that is a shame. I look forward to some good legislation after the review is complete.