




Speech By
Verity Barton

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2016

CRIME AND CORRUPTION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Miss BARTON** (Broadwater—LNP) (4.55 pm): I rise today as a member of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee to oppose the proposed changes to the Crime and Corruption Act. At the outset, I thank my fellow colleagues on the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee and, of course, acknowledge the work that has been done by the secretariat to help prepare this report.

There are a number of issues that I would like to raise in my contribution this afternoon. I will not touch on everything that is contained in the bill because I am aware that my good friend and colleague the shadow Attorney-General has touched on a number of matters in his contribution, as has the deputy chair and the member for Beaudesert.

At the outset, I want to touch on the definition of 'bipartisan support'. When we were going through the process of adopting this report and considering what recommendations or changes we would like to make with respect to amendments, it was very disappointing that the members of the government were not prepared to entertain a notion that we should define 'bipartisan support' as that being the government and the officially recognised opposition in this state. This government talks about wanting to be a consultative government and wanting to live up to community expectations. When you talk to people about what they think 'bipartisan' means, they think that it means the government and the opposition. They think that it means Labor and the LNP.

Clearly, this government is so concerned about being able to take advantage of the system, is so concerned about being able to ridicule the integrity of the system and abuse the integrity of the system, that it will not even entertain the notion of defining 'bipartisan support' in the ordinary way that everyday Queenslanders would. If you look at the Oxford Dictionary when it comes to the definition of 'bipartisan', it talks about two major parties who disagree on the majority of things coming together. Quite frankly, given that we have a hung parliament, I cannot think of a better definition of 'bipartisan'. When you consider the importance of the role of the chairman of the Crime and Corruption Commission or the role of the commissioners of the Crime and Corruption Commission, these are incredibly important roles not only within the framework and the system of managing crime and corruption in this state but also generally across-the-board. When you think about the lack of goodwill that the government has with respect to the definition of 'bipartisan', it is really quite disappointing that it would ignore what is generally the understood definition by the people of Queensland.

We have seen already in this term of government this Labor government completely take advantage of the obscure definition, and they have. In an attempt to divert attention away from the fact that the official opposition would not support their nominee for the chairman of the Crime and Corruption Commission, they substituted one of their own members with a member of the crossbench. I had constituents contact me absolutely appalled that the system would allow them to do so. The whole point of the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier making nominations with respect to the respective members of the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee is to ensure that there is true representation across the parliament. To have members solely nominated by the government—with

respect to the substitution, the member for Mount Isa was a substitute nominated by the government—approve the appointment of someone who holds quite a very important role in our state is absolutely disgusting.

The government should hang its head in shame not only for seeking to take advantage of the system but also for not recognising that it has done the wrong thing. What it should do is amend the definition of 'bipartisan' so it is truly reflective of what the understood definition of bipartisan is, which is members of the government and members of the officially recognised opposition coming to an agreement. Given that we are talking about very important positions, it is absolutely disgraceful.

I want to touch on the reinstatement of anonymous complaints and the fact that they will not be keeping investigations and complaints confidential. I was on both the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee in the last parliament when we considered the changes that made the Crime and Misconduct Commission into the Crime and Corruption Commission. One of the reasons we considered that we should have statutory declarations outside of very extraordinary circumstances is to ensure there are no frivolous complaints and to ensure there are no vexatious complaints. Referring someone to the Crime and Corruption Commission is a very big deal. It is incredibly serious. What we have seen in the past is political parties, most notably, as my good friend and colleague the member for Beaudesert pointed out, in the lead-up to the 2012 state election and most recently in the lead-up to the 2016 Brisbane local government elections, take advantage of the fact that they can refer someone to the Crime and Corruption Commission and they can then talk about it.

We have always had in our system a belief that one is innocent until proven guilty, but the reality is that, when you talk about someone having been referred to the Crime and Corruption Commission, when you talk about someone having to go to the star chamber of the Crime and Corruption Commission, mud sticks. We have seen time and time again political opponents use referrals to the Crime and Corruption Commission in a frivolous and vexatious way to play political games and to besmirch the reputations of their political opponents. It is absolutely disgusting that someone would be able to do that (1) without needing to put their name to it and without needing to stand up and defend the allegations that they make and (2) without needing to keep the contents of the investigation and the complaint confidential until that investigation is completed.

People absolutely take advantage of the system and it is disgraceful that in 2016 people are using complaints to besmirch people's political reputations. On the Gold Coast during the most recent local government elections we saw people refer to previous Crime and Misconduct Commission investigations of many years ago where people had been cleared. They tried to use those investigations and those complaints to smear someone's reputation.

It is disgraceful, because it makes an absolute mockery of the Crime and Corruption Commission if people are going to take advantage of it and use it as a political football. It is absolutely disgraceful that the Labor Party in this state does not give a damn. It does not care because it is the Labor Party in this state which takes advantage of this. They use it, as I say, to besmirch the reputation of their political opponents. We have consistently seen these things play out in the media. We have consistently seen submitters to this inquiry—like Professor Sampford and the Local Government Association—say that it has significant implications for the integrity of the system. As I said, it is absolutely disgraceful.

There are two other things with respect to the bill as proposed that I want to touch on. As the shadow Attorney-General has pointed out, the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee is currently undergoing a statutory review. I think it is absolutely disgraceful that this government does not think its own members on the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee will be able to undertake this review freely and be able to make sound recommendations. I know that the member for Toowoomba North, who is the chair of the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee, intends to make a contribution to this debate so I do not intend to stray too much into what he may canvass. Given that the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee is in the process of, or is about to undertake, its statutory review, it makes absolutely no sense that this government does not trust that committee of this parliament—a very senior and serious committee of this parliament—to go through its statutory review process to consider important matters such as anonymous complaints, the definition of 'bipartisan' and whether investigations should be kept confidential.

The only other thing I want to touch on with respect to the substantive bill was the change of language from 'chairman' to 'chair'. I appreciate that members of the Labor Party think that the word 'chairman' apparently means 'man' but it does not. The word 'chairman' as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* is a person chosen to preside over a meeting. It really concerns me that this government has nothing better to do than go through legislation and find what it thinks is gendered language and change it and say that they are the great saviours of gender equality in this state.

Quite frankly, it does not matter to women on this side of the House whether the person is a chair, chairman or chairperson. What matters is not their title but how they do the job and the way in which they carry out their functions. It is irrelevant whether that person is a woman or a man. It is irrelevant whether the title that person holds is chairman, chairperson or chair. There are bigger things we need to think about when it comes to the Crime and Corruption Commission than whether we have gender-neutral language. It is nice to know that they have nothing bigger to deal with. This is another example of the Labor Party being frozen at the wheel if this is the only thing they have to worry about.

Before I complete my contribution, I would like to touch very briefly on the amendments that the Attorney-General has tabled. Like my good friend and colleague the shadow Attorney-General, I have not had a chance to look at them in great detail but prima facie they seem like very fair amendments. I think we can all agree that the JP QCAT trial has been a very worthy one. I think we can all appreciate in a bipartisan fashion as members of the LNP and the Labor Party that justices of the peace do a very good job in our community. They have a very important role to play in our community. I put on the record my acknowledgement and thanks to justices of the peace, particularly those in my community, who make the time to volunteer as justices of the peace, whether it is at shopping centres, the courthouse or making themselves available to meet with people who find them on the justices of the peace register and simply need someone to sign documents. As I say, they play such an incredibly important role that I have paid for both members of my team to train and qualify as justices of the peace so there is a readily available justice of the peace service for people in my community, if they cannot make it to shopping centres or are unable to go online and find out where a JP is, at my electorate office between 8.30 and 5.30, Monday to Friday.

As I said, I will not be supporting the changes to the Crime and Corruption Act as proposed by the government. I do, however, look forward to hearing how the government will try to explain away its changes as the rest of the debate continues.