




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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MOTION

Non-Government Members, Resources

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (3.33 pm): I rise to speak in support of improving the parliamentary and electorate resources made available to non-government members, especially to those who are non-aligned members. I thank the member for Noosa and the member for Traeger for bringing this matter forward today.

The government has 20 ministers, all with significant additional staff who can in turn be seconded to support other government members as required. Each minister is backed by a department, with all of the accumulated wisdom and knowledge made directly available to each member. Every government member has access to the government's researchers, yet I note that, even with all the extra researchers, the government itself still fails to produce the details for public consideration when rushing matters through this unicameral house of parliament. The opposition members have an allowance of 20 per cent extra staff, who in turn can lend support to opposition members. However, these arrangements leave members non-aligned to these two major parties bereft of additional assistance.

It becomes incredibly problematic for non-aligned members to give the parliamentary program the level of scrutiny that is possible for the major parties and their members. Members will be well aware that the parliamentary *Notice Paper* lists a significant number of legislative matters during sitting weeks. No fewer than 10 bills are listed to be debated, along with committee reports and other matters to be considered in detail. So often, it is not until late on the evening before or even after we have begun a sitting that significant changes to the orders of the day are known. These last-minute changes are manifestly unfair, especially on the crossbench members, who are afforded the resources of just two electorate staff. Crossbench members are thus at a tremendous disadvantage both in the House and in the level of services they can reasonably deliver to their electors, especially in the larger regional and often remote electorates.

It is true that Queensland electors are increasingly demanding that they be represented by more non-aligned members of parliament. The reasons are many and varied, but the trend is undeniably clear. It is therefore incumbent upon the government to reassess the existing system of staff allocations which discriminates unfairly against a class of members duly elected to have access and influence on government, its organisations and its actions. It is clear that the lack of regulation and scrutiny afforded by the discretionary way that additional parliamentary resources are provided to the crossbench is problematic. The discretionary nature of the decision-making process and the lack of scrutiny has the potential to undermine public trust in the parliament.

In light of Ethics Committee report No. 189 and the findings that the Queensland Premier was able to use her position of power to threaten and intimidate minority members in an attempt to disadvantage their office's capacity to perform its duties, it is essential that minority members have access to adequate staffing allocations to continue to allow all members to perform their duties to the best of their ability.

The Ethics Committee recommends that parliamentary resourcing for crossbench members be supported by an agreed framework for the application of that discretionary power in order to uphold the principles of equal representation and equal ability to participate in the democratic processes of the parliament. Equality of representation is the oldest tenet of parliamentary government. It goes all the way back to the Magna Carta of 15 June 1215. To deny this ability runs contrary to almost 800 years of representative government. This issue is at the very core of democracy and this situation must be addressed.