




Speech By
Adrian Tantari

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (6.35 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill before the House, the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. The Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021 proposes to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council, the QVC, as a statutory body to administer the Anzac Day Trust, among other roles, recognising the very important role that veterans and their families play in administering the Anzac Day Trust for those organisations who support our ex-service men and women and their dependants.

This body will have responsibility for acting as the trustee of Anzac Square; the ongoing management and operation of Anzac Square in Brisbane; and the functions currently performed by the board of trustees for the Anzac Day Trust established under the Anzac Day Act to provide annual payments to institutions, organisations or associations to assist ex-service men and women and their dependants. In addition, the establishment of the QVC ensures that strong governance and accountability arrangements are in place to safeguard the use of public funds in Queensland.

This bill ensures that the Queensland veterans community are afforded a clear and direct pathway for communication with the highest levels of the Queensland government about matters important to them and providing advice to government on veteran related matters—a role currently performed by the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council, the QVAC.

The bill provides that the QVC will have up to eight members, with up to six members appointed by the Governor in Council and two ex-officio members. The six appointed members will include two members nominated by veterans organisations and four members with the relevant skills and experience to support the QVC in performing its functions. Significantly, there is no limitation on veterans filling these roles provided they have the necessary skills and experience.

The Community Support and Services Committee report recommends an amendment to the bill relating to the membership of the QVC—that is, at least 50 per cent of the members of the QVC must be veterans or representatives of the veterans community. This is a good amendment and one that I believe is well supported and one that has been accepted for adoption into the bill. Given this, the two ex-officio members will be the director-general of the department, or the nominee, and a nominated employee of the department that administers the act, which is currently the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the CEO of the Brisbane City Council, or a nominated employee of the Brisbane City Council.

On commencement of the bill, the terms of appointment of the trustees will end and the QVAC will be discontinued in its current form and replaced by the veterans reference group, which will support the QVC in providing advice to the government. The veterans reference group will consist of 10 members, two of whom are members of the QVC who are nominated by veterans organisations and eight other members with knowledge, skills or extensive experience in areas relevant to veterans including veterans' health, military service and veterans transitional assistance provision. These

changes stand as a clear commitment to the veterans community and show that their representation and participation in the QVC and the institutions it will administer is of the utmost importance to the government.

Given the functions of the QVC and the size and complexity of its operations, the bill provides that administrative support will be provided by the relevant department, and that is currently the DPC. Local laws made by the Brisbane City Council will continue to apply to Anzac Square unless a regulation made under the act provides otherwise.

In many capital and regional cities, towns and hamlets across the world, war memorials play an integral role in acknowledging the sacrifices made by men and women and their families during periods of conflict. Such war memorials afford a special place of remembrance of those lives lost and the stark reality of the human cost of war, like in my electorate of Hervey Bay at Freedom Park and other sites throughout the Hervey Bay electorate.

This bill will ensure that, in our state capital of Brisbane, Anzac Square will continue to be managed and maintained as one of our war memorials of which Queenslanders, and in fact all Australians, can be proud. We know that the historical origin of Anzac Square in Brisbane was the culmination of the broader Queensland community's response to the First World War. This tradition continued with the detailing of significant periods of conflict that followed, ensuring Anzac Square serves as a war memorial for all Queenslanders.

The main elements of this bill outline the role of the QVC as a new statutory body to assist with providing advice to government on veteran related matters, a role that is currently performed by the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council, and strengthening the Anzac Day Trust with an additional commitment of \$1 million over three annual rounds to provide financial support for veterans affected by COVID-19, particularly for veterans organisations to assist with staging COVID-safe commemorative events. The government needed to ensure this legislation had clearly defined objectives, particularly regarding providing advice to government on matters of importance to veterans. With this bill I believe an adequate balance has been struck to ensure the QVC will provide an unprecedented amount of coordination of veterans matters in Queensland and the broader veterans community.

This is particularly important to my electorate of Hervey Bay, as we have a large community of veterans whose expectation, rightly so, is that they be heard. It is important that the QVC, as a ministerial committee, is structured in a way that provides the appropriate forum for easy dialogue and communication between the Queensland veterans community and the Queensland government. The QVC will provide this advice conduit to the state government to ensure that policies regarding the provision of services and all relevant matters relating to veterans and their needs are covered when it comes to the veterans community. This will ensure that those men and women who served our country have the required facilities and services provided to them by facilitating communication with the Queensland government on frontline issues relating to veterans matters through the QVC.

I am pleased to see that consultation on the bill covered diverse key stakeholders in the veterans community, including: Returned and Services League of Australia, Queensland Branch; Brisbane Legacy; Australian War Widows; the former chair of QVAC; and the former deputy chair of the Queensland Advisory Committee for the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary. I also note that one of the consultation groups listed in the Community Support and Services Committee report was the Hervey Bay branch of the Veterans of Australia Association, a group that does a great job providing community support services for the veteran community in the areas of welfare and advice services and social activities. I thank them for engaging in the consultation on this bill. The veterans organisations that have had input into this bill ensure that veterans in Queensland—in this instance, those in the Hervey Bay electorate—have an opportunity to champion their needs and requirements as they transition into community life after their meritorious service.

I believe that this is a good bill. It goes a long way to ensuring Anzac Square, the Anzac Day Trust and the Veterans' Advisory Council will be provided with the structures and resourcing required for the ongoing maintenance and recognition of our veterans requirements. I congratulate the Premier and assistant minister for bringing this bill to the House and the Community Support and Services Committee for their work in formulating further amendments to the bill and for providing the veterans community with the opportunity to consult on the bill at its various hearings. This bill goes further to ensure that our veterans and their families are given the support and recognition they deserve following their service to our country and our state. I support the bill before the House.