




Speech By  
**Ali King**

**MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2021

### **QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021**

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (11.40 am): I rise in support of the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. I begin by offering my respects to every member of this House who has served or continues to serve, particularly I note the member for Macalister. She is a very hard act to follow at any time but particularly on this topic. I also note the members for Southern Downs and Buderim, and I know that there are others.

Like the member for Logan, I have been privileged to stand on the shores of Gallipoli and see the sunrise, although not on Anzac Day. It was in 2004—perhaps before the current enthusiasm for drinking and eating pies on the beaches of Gallipoli hit its full peak. The contemplative moments that I spent there are some of my most cherished memories, following on a family tradition of my father and uncle attending there and my great great-uncle serving there. It really does bring home the meaning of heritage.

I know that that sense of heritage and the importance of veterans service is something that is profoundly felt in my own electorate of Pumicestone. We have a very proud veterans community and a very active veterans community. I want to offer my acknowledgement to some of those veterans associations—in particular, the Bribie Island RSL sub-branch and its president George Franklin. I was sorry not to be able to join him at the recent Presidents Lunch. Also, the National Servicemen's Association on Bribie and the Beachmere sub-branch of the RSL are hugely active. Their commemoration of particular veterans days are community focused. They involve our local schoolchildren and they bring home the meaning of service and the vast and important cultural lessons of war to a new generation of people in a really powerful way. I want to acknowledge them in particular.

I also want to pay special respects to my friend Kanga, a former Navy officer who always finds me at those events and invites me to share a rum with him and takes me by the arm and makes a cheeky comment about the Navy's appreciation for women politicians.

**Mr Madden:** And rum.

**Ms KING:** And rum. This bill continues the long and honourable support of Queenslanders for our veteran communities and Queensland's most significant memorial site—Anzac Square. It puts veterans front and centre in the management of the institutions they hold most dear—Anzac Square and the Anzac Day Trust. It does that by establishing a new statutory body—the Queensland Veterans' Council—to take responsibility for Anzac Square and the Anzac Day Trust in its vital role of assisting ex-service men and ex-service women and their families and also by advising the government on matters relating to veterans, and that is so very important.

Of the eight members of the Queensland Veterans' Council, there will be six appointed by the Governor in Council and two ex-officio members. Due to the heavy responsibilities placed on statutory bodies like the Queensland Veterans' Council, the governance structure and membership of the council must include a high degree of skills and experience to protect the future of these important institutions.

The Palaszczuk government has always believed that Anzac Square and the Anzac Day Trust should be managed by veterans and for veterans. We always expected that veterans' voices would make up the majority of Queensland Veterans' Council membership.

While the bill as originally drafted did not limit the number of veterans on the council, we have heard loud and clear from stakeholders during the consultation that they want a legislative commitment to a minimum threshold of veteran representation on the council. That is why we have accepted the recommendations of the Community Support and Services Committee and will move an amendment during consideration in detail. That will ensure that at least 50 per cent of members of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be veterans or representatives of the veteran community. I note the member for Macalister's comments about the very inclusive definition of veterans community and veterans included in this bill, and I welcome that. This amendment represents our government's commitment to listening to the veterans community, to making sure veterans know they are valued and placing their views front and centre in managing these important institutions.

Our government fundamentally believes that veterans, their families and their communities must be at the forefront of decision-making about matters most important to them. A central function of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to provide advice to government on veteran related matters. The Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council has performed this role over many years, and I know that the veterans community and the government deeply appreciate their dedicated service.

This bill establishes a veterans reference group to support the Queensland Veterans' Council with providing advice to government on key matters. That group will be made up of 10 members, two of whom will be council members nominated by veterans organisations and eight other members with relevant knowledge, skills or experience in veterans welfare, health, military service and transition out of military service. Again, because our government values the views of veterans, we are accepting the committee's recommendation and will move an amendment during consideration in detail to require the establishment of the veterans reference group. We are changing this provision so that the legislation specifies that the minister 'must' establish that group rather than 'may' establish it.

Turning again to the report of the Community Support and Services Committee, there was a surprise hidden in the statement of reservation from the LNP members. In that statement of reservation, the member for Burnett and the member for Scenic Rim said that they 'question the appropriateness of paying remuneration to members of the QVC, as it may impact on their ability to provide unbiased advice and compromise their impartiality'. I found it concerning that the LNP committee members recommended that the bill be amended to remove all remuneration for council members beyond reasonable reimbursement of expenses. It was disappointing to see this questioning of the ability of veterans to provide unbiased advice. Surely on matters relating to veterans we can put politics aside and hope to find some bipartisanship.

The Palaszczuk government rejects this idea that veterans are incapable of providing unbiased advice. We believe strongly that chairs and members of government boards and advisory bodies make an important contribution and they make that contribution at often great personal cost. In their service on the council, veterans will be giving back to the veterans community and the broader Queensland community, as they did during their service in the forces. In asking council members to work for nothing, what message would it send about the respect held for our veterans institutions? On this side of the House we believe that the labourer is worthy of their hire and that the work and effort of council members is worthy of recognition and remuneration.

In creating the Queensland Veterans' Council as an independent statutory body, our government is creating a robust, streamlined and modern legislative framework for veterans matters in Queensland. We are elevating the voices of veterans through a formalised advisory role to government and in the management of the charitable institutions and heritage places most important to them. In so doing, we are demonstrating our Palaszczuk government's support for Queensland veterans in line with the respect of the wider community right across our service state of Queensland. I commend the Premier, our assistant minister for veterans' affairs and the committee for their work. I commend this bill to the House.