




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.23 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. I wish to thank the members of the Community Support and Services Committee and their staff for their consideration of the bill. There were 12 submissions. A number of the organisations that submitted are volunteer organisations. I wish to thank all of the volunteers who are associated with our veteran community. Volunteer groups like the RSL, the Australian War Widows of Queensland and Legacy do a tremendous job. I commend them for the volunteer work they do for Queensland veterans.

The bill sees the establishment of the Queensland Veterans' Council as a new statutory body. The new Queensland Veterans' Council will have three areas of responsibility previously held by other bodies or levels of government. Those responsibilities include being a trustee of Anzac Square, with responsibility for the ongoing management and operation of the square. They will take over the functions of the board of trustees under the Anzac Day Act 1995. They will provide advice to the government on veterans issues. There was one stakeholder, the Brisbane City Council, that advised that they have no objection to the state government taking over the control of Anzac Square. I acknowledge the work the Brisbane City Council have done in continuing the restoration of Anzac Square.

Anzac Square is an important part of our current Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services. It is a constant reminder of the sacrifice that many have made throughout many conflicts. It is also land that is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register. Many other memorials across Queensland are listed. Local governments in many communities play a great role in maintaining those monuments and memorials for our veterans. For instance, the Paroo shire has a heritage listed memorial. Council recently undertook to restore the fountain in the main streets. It is fondly known as the Cunnamulla War Memorial Fountain. It is a spectacular white fountain. The community hold their Anzac Day events there. They are very fond of that memorial. I say to anyone that if they are in Cunnamulla they should make sure they go and have a look at the fountain.

There were a number of concerns raised by stakeholders in relation to this bill. These relate to the lack of veteran representation on the Queensland Veterans' Council. They called for increased representation to ensure that veterans had a majority voice. Concerns were raised about non-veterans making decisions on issues that only veterans have an in-depth knowledge of. I think that is particularly important. My uncle served in the Second World War and my grandfather served in the First World War. They did not talk or could not talk about what happened in the wars that they served in. They did not talk to their family at all about what happened. In many cases people cannot talk about it. It is important that we have those veterans who have that in-depth knowledge. In terms of making those decisions, they are the only ones who have that knowledge. It is very hard for others who have not had those experiences to make those decisions.

Other issues raised included that the main task of the Queensland Veterans' Council is the management of Anzac Square and not veterans welfare issues. The Queensland Veterans' Council chair is not required to have a military background. Concerns were raised about public servants being

on the Queensland Veterans' Council. Concern was raised about the administration of the Anzac Day Trust not being exclusively by nominated veteran members. There was concern that there would be reduced funding for veterans support as Anzac Square will take most of the funding allocated. We note from the committee report that there has already been significant investment in Anzac Square. We have certainly seen a good outcome from that investment.

Submitters also put forward a number of suggestions. It was pleasing to see they came from volunteer groups that are very much at the coalface when it comes to the veterans community. These suggestions included: an increase in veteran representation on the Queensland Veterans' Council to half or more; the Veterans' Council chair to have a military background; public servants to only provide support and be non-voting members; and establishment of an Anzac Square reference group. Like the proposed veterans reference group, this group would sit under and provide advice to the Queensland Veterans' Council.

They also propose that people with the nominated asset management skills set out in the bill for the Queensland Veterans' Council would be members of this group and that decisions on the activities of the Anzac Day Trust be made by only veteran members of the Queensland Veterans' Council.

I note that there are a number of amendments from both the government and the opposition. I hope that these amendments address a number of the concerns raised by the submitters who are also volunteers who are intrinsically involved with our veterans community.

Before I conclude, I wish to extend my thanks to all of the volunteers who assist our veterans across the veterans community and also thank veterans, and particularly those members in our House who have served, for their sacrifice and what they have done by putting themselves forward to serve for our country.