




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (5.24 pm): I rise in support today of the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. In doing so, I want to acknowledge all of the veterans in Queensland and right across Australia, including those members who have served and are now serving in this place—the members for Macalister, Nicklin, Caloundra, Southern Downs and Buderim. Those men and women who have served our country dedicated their lives, careers and time to keeping our great Australia safe. I must also disclose my membership of Legacy Australia as a legatee. I take my responsibility to declare potential conflicts of interest seriously, and I have done so by incorporating my membership as a volunteer Legacy legatee in my register of interests from the date that I became a Legacy member.

The Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021 establishes the Queensland Veterans' Council as a new statutory body with three areas of responsibility: firstly, trustee of Anzac Square under the Land Act 1994 and the ongoing management and operation of Anzac Square; secondly, the functions of the board of trustees under the Anzac Day Act 1995; and, finally, providing advice to government on veterans matters. Anzac Square was dedicated on Remembrance Day 1930 as the state's war memorial. It is on Crown land, reserved under the Land Act 1994 for the purposes of historical and parks and cultural purposes and is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register. This bill will establish a statutory body for Anzac Square which supports the future strategic direction and operation of the state's war memorial, particularly to the extent that the memorial galleries educate and inform visitors about the service and sacrifice of Queenslanders and Australians in war, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

Anzac Square is an important landmark in the local urban form, right up to a state and national significance. Anzac Square has changed, grown and diversified over the years into a beautiful public space in the centre of our state's capital. Anzac Square, I am proud to say, commemorates all Queenslanders who participated in war, not just Brisbane residents. In 1928 a competition for the design of a Shrine of Remembrance was won by Sydney architects Buchanan and Cowper. Construction proceeded over the following two years and on Armistice Day, 11 November, 1930 the Governor, Sir John Goodwin, dedicated the shrine and the square. In 1933 the square was declared a reserve for park purposes and the Brisbane City Council was appointed trustee of the site.

Anzac Square remains as the focus of armed services commemorations, particularly on Anzac Day. It has evolved into a place not just for Anzac Day though. It is a place where, when I personally pass, I feel a sense of peace, a still calm but with sorrow, loss, grief and sadness in the midst of this bustling metropolitan centre. It is a reminder of the importance of peace, perhaps from those who the square immortalises—those veterans who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I am disappointed that amendments proposed by the LNP remove heritage conservation as a potential area in which the minister must be satisfied members of the Queensland Veterans' Council have qualifications or experience in. We on this side of the House understand the heritage value of Anzac Square to the people of Queensland and the need to ensure its ongoing existence for generations to come.

The committee's first recommendation is that the bill be passed. I thank the committee for its support of the policy intention underpinning the bill. The committee's second recommendation is that clause 13 of the bill be amended to provide that at least 50 per cent of the members of the Queensland Veterans' Council must be veterans or representatives of the veterans community. I am proud that the Palaszczuk government supports the committee's recommendation to ensure that at least 50 per cent of the members of the Queensland Veterans' Council are veterans and members of the veterans community.

One of the functions of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to monitor and provide advice to government on veterans matters, and clause 34 of the bill provides that the minister may establish a veterans reference group. The government recognises that the veterans reference group is essential to supporting the Queensland Veterans' Council in the performance of its advisory function and assisting the Queensland Veterans' Council to consult with a broad range of veterans organisations. The veterans reference group also provides a mechanism for government to engage with the Queensland veterans community.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to making sure Queensland remembers the courage and sacrifice of its dedicated service men and women, including through the new \$4 million grants program which will assist organisations to support the state's veterans and create more opportunities for Queenslanders to honour their service to the nation. The Palaszczuk government is proud to deliver this significant election commitment to help ex-service organisations as well as eligible not-for-profit organisations upgrade their buildings and facilities and purchase equipment so that they can continue to support Queensland veterans and their families. I am pleased that these organisations have this opportunity to build for their future and for the veterans and the families they support.

Ex-service and not-for-profit organisations that support veterans can apply for grants of up to \$50,000 for minor capital works and for grants between \$50,000 and \$250,000 for major capital works over three annual rounds. There are also community grants of up to \$50,000 available to ex-service organisations, councils and not-for-profit community organisations to support them to create or restore memorials, avenues of honour and memorial gardens and to deliver commemorative activities and events.

As demonstrated by the large public turnout on Anzac Day this year, Queenslanders are eager to recognise our veterans publicly now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased. Communities are keen to restore or erect monuments, compile honour rolls, construct memorial trails and gardens and undertake history and educational projects. I take this opportunity to invite members to the Centenary of Anzac Memorial at Emu Park—one of the most impressive memorial trails in the country—which was the vision of Emu Park veteran the late Mr Ross Coulter, brought to life by the amazing Emu Park RSL and its members.

I am proud that the Premier announced this year that War Widows Day will be celebrated annually in Queensland on 19 October from next year—a first for Australia. The date of 19 October was the birthday of Mrs Jessie Vasey, who started the first Queensland branch of the War Widows Guild in Toowoomba in 1947. What an amazing way to celebrate next year's 75th anniversary of what is now Australian War Widows Queensland than to formally dedicate this day as an annual recognition of the people left behind by those who have served in Australia.

The day will further highlight Australian War Widows Queensland's stated aim to empower, support, inspire and celebrate war widows, carers and families affected by defence services. Queensland will be the first to do this, to honour the widows and widowers of members of the Australian Defence Force. I know that widows and widowers of members of the Australian Defence Force bear their sacrifice with dignity and fortitude.

As a Legacy legatee, I hear firsthand from widows, widowers and the children of veterans about the impact of their family members' contribution to keeping Australia safe. I take this opportunity to honour Joyce, Zander and her daughter Ciana, my Legacy clients who I am very humbled to provide support to as a legatee. Becoming a Legacy legatee is something I implore all members to consider doing. By becoming a legatee, you will become a part of Legacy's proud traditions and actively live its values. These traditions and values have been passed on from generation to generation of legatees in caring for the families of veterans.

There are over 4,000 volunteers around Australia who work directly with Legacy families to provide support and friendship, to ensure that Legacy's promise to care for the families of deceased or seriously injured veterans is kept. The spirit of Legacy is service. Legatees are strongly committed to the work of Legacy and wear the Legacy torch symbol upon a pin with pride. Legatees are the backbone of Legacy and, supported by paid staff and other volunteers, deliver the majority of their services.

When a legatee joins Legacy, they are inducted and commit to the Charter of Legacy: 'The spirit of Legacy is service'. I ask for the indulgence of the House to read the Charter of Legacy. It states—

The care of dependants of those who served the country; namely, veterans who gave their lives or health on operational service or subsequently, and Australian Defence Force members who die in service or as a result of their service, affords a field for service.

Safeguarding the interests of dependents, especially children, is a service worth rendering. Personal effort is the main essential. Inasmuch as these are the activities of Legacy, it is our privilege to accept the legacy of the fallen.

I commend the bill to the House.