




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.44 pm): I rise to address the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. In just over two weeks, Queenslanders and Australians will pause at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month to reflect and commemorate the service and sacrifice made by so many on behalf of our nation. We do so in order to commemorate the anniversary of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, a day we recognise as Remembrance Day following the conclusion of hostilities during World War I. This year on 11 November it will be the 91st anniversary of Anzac Square being officially dedicated as Queensland's state war memorial.

All Queenslanders and indeed all Australians are to be commended for the incredible respect, dignity and responsibility that is exhibited each and every year when coming together to recognise and mark such significant commemorations, including those on Remembrance Day and Anzac Day. This responsibility and duty goes to the core of what it is to be an Australian—to take time to pause and pay our respects to those who have served and fought for the freedoms which we all enjoy today.

In seeking to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council, this legislation as proposed by the Palaszczuk state Labor government presents a significant number of concerns for our veterans community and the potential impacts this will have into the future. On 22 April this year, the Premier and then minister for trade introduced the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021 into the Queensland parliament. The primary objective of this legislation is to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council as a new statutory body and, in doing so, consolidate three areas of responsibility which were previously held by other entities and various levels of government. Accordingly, upon its establishment, the Queensland Veterans' Council will: firstly, become trustee of Anzac Square under the Land Act 1994, taking responsibility for the ongoing management and operation of the square; secondly, assume the functions of the board of trustees under the Anzac Day Act 1995; and, thirdly, provide advice to the Queensland government on veterans matters.

In its examination of this legislation, the Queensland parliament's Community Support and Services Committee received 12 submissions—the vast majority of which raised a number of significant concerns about the changes contained within the legislation, along with the wholly inadequate process of consultation by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Whilst a number of concerns have already been canvassed in depth by my Liberal National Party colleagues, including the LNP's shadow assistant minister for veterans, the member for Southern Downs, I wish to reflect on perhaps one of the most problematic proposals contained within this legislation.

The bill as originally drafted would have the membership of the Queensland Veterans' Council composed of eight people, including two persons being dedicated veterans representatives nominated by veterans groups, four members to be appointed by the minister based on their experience relative to the responsibility of the Queensland Veterans' Council and two members who are ex-officio members—that being a state departmental official and the chief executive officer or their delegate of the Brisbane City Council. This would have effectively established a Veterans' Council in name only, with just two members being of the veteran community.

Indeed, this very point was highlighted by former president of the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch, Mr Stewart Cameron CSC, Air Commodore now retired, in his personal submission to the committee, where he stated—

The name Queensland Veterans Council is a misnomer, as veterans will account for only one quarter its members. As five of the members of the council (and potentially six if an additional Chair is appointed by the Minister), veterans will essentially be nothing more than spectators with no real power to direct or control the decisions of the Council.

This should be seen in contrast to the ANZAC Day Trust, which has four members, all of whom are veterans.

Whilst I acknowledge the Queensland state government's response to recommendation No. 2 of the committee report, as articulated in the Liberal National Party statement of reservation, this does not go far enough and the bill should be further amended to require that the Queensland Veterans' Council be chaired by a representative of an ex-service organisation. This would further ensure that veterans have a strong voice on the council and provide the requisite leadership on veterans matters.

It must also be noted that there are substantial concerns within the veteran community with respect to the incorporation of the management and administration of Anzac Square, and this legislation primarily places the main task of the Queensland Veterans' Council of managing Anzac Square first and the welfare of veterans second.

Our veterans are the ultimate custodians and guardians of the legacy of the service and sacrifice that has been made on behalf of our state and nation. For over a century our veterans have been at the very core of our communities right across our state, diligently ensuring that we commemorate those who have served whilst also educating the next generation of Queenslanders about why that service and sacrifice has been so important. To that end, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the many men and women of the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch who have performed this duty with the utmost respect and diligence. Next month the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch will be hosting a 30th anniversary celebratory dinner in Bellbowrie which I look forward to attending and joining with other members of the local veteran community to formally recognise the outstanding work that has been achieved over these last three decades by the subbranch.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge some local residents and members who have given so much to the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch and the veteran community, including Lieutenant Colonel Rick Maher, President of the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch; Doug Pickering and Di Pickering, who currently serve as the secretary and vice-president respectively; and Chris Moon, who has done an outstanding job as the local commemorations officer for the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch.

I also acknowledge the service of Mr John Strachan OAM, who has made a significant contribution to the veteran community since first joining the Queensland RSL in 1984 and holding senior leadership roles including district president and district vice-president as well as state deputy president of RSL Queensland. Currently, he is also the protocol officer of the Anzac Day Parade committee.

I would also like to acknowledge the late Chris Stephens for his incredible contribution. As one local RSL member relayed to me recently, Chris Stephens represented the very best of a generation that we will probably never see again. In addition to his volunteer work through the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch, Chris also volunteered his time at the Wesley Hospital and at the Army Museum at Victoria Barracks. Chris never lost his sense of service and he served his community right up until his recent death. I offer my condolences to his wife, Janis, and their entire extended family.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership and commitment shown by the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch as it continues to work towards establishing a local cadets unit. Listed as a key priority for the local veteran community, the formalisation of a local cadets unit will serve as a terrific vehicle to encourage and develop youth leadership whilst also engaging the next generation of Queenslanders and ensuring that the service and sacrifice of many made on behalf of our state and nation is secure into the future. I certainly am delighted to continue to offer my full support for this endeavour. I look forward to continuing to work with the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch and other local Liberal National Party representatives as well as Richard Ponsonby to see this vision of the subbranch become a reality.

As the state member for Moggill, I am fortunate to be able to work with and support a number of veterans and veteran organisations throughout the western suburbs of Brisbane. I also wish to recognise members of the Centenary Suburbs RSL Sub Branch and, in particular, Mal Lancaster PSM RFD with whom I met earlier this year about a number of veterans matters.

In closing, I thank all members of the Community Support and Services Committee of the 57th Parliament including the Liberal National Party deputy chair, the member for Burnett, as well as the member for Scenic Rim for their examination of the bill. I also thank all committee staff and the committee secretariat for their work in examining this legislation.

Finally, I again wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all veterans for their service and sacrifice and to those members of the Australian Defence Force who continue to serve in various capacities on behalf of our state and our nation.