




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (12.10 pm): I rise to support the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill. Through this bill, the formalisation of a number of important processes through the establishment of the Queensland Veterans' Council as a statutory body can be implemented. I would like to thank the committee chair the member for Mansfield and the members of the Community Support and Services Committee for their work on this legislation. Additionally, I thank the Premier for the introduction of this bill and the ongoing support for our veterans and Assistant Minister Mellish for his work in this regard.

I would also like to put on record the acknowledgement of those members of this parliament who themselves have served in uniform. As a former chair of the Senate defence subcommittee during my time in the federal parliament, I am ultimately aware of the issues that face our troops not only while they are serving but also after their period of service has been completed. As a nation, we come together on occasions like Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and other commemorative days to mark the contribution of those who have served us in uniform and, of course, those who have made the ultimate sacrifice while fighting for our nation.

Those commemorations went through a period during the 1980s and early 1990s when attendances dropped off in some places and there was commentary from some quarters about whether they had lost their relevance to the nation. I do not think so. That turned around in 1995 when the Australia Remembers campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War inspired hundreds of thousands of Australians to once again make those occasions important to a whole new generation. Since then, I think momentum has grown even more. People are involved in those ceremonies today, even as our veterans of many conflicts become fewer and fewer in number.

An important part of those commemorations is to have a focal point, a place that stands in the heart as an obvious but also sacrosanct home of these ceremonies. Many of these regional towns still have stone memorials, erected using funds from grateful citizens, standing in their town squares near RSL halls or in local memorial parks honouring those who gave their lives in what we knew as the Great War. These still play important roles in local ceremonies today. Around the nation, whether it be at the War Memorial in Canberra or the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, we see Australians gathered by the thousands. They pass on important stories, they share special moments with their children and they remember, either for themselves or those who no longer can.

In Brisbane Anzac Square is an icon. It is known by location or by image to many Queenslanders and certainly to the vast majority in the south-east of the state. It is appropriate that the management of this iconic place, this sacred place, involves direct input from the very veterans that it is designed to represent. That is something this bill will achieve. As part of the Queensland government's Anzac Centenary commemoration program, we partnered with the Commonwealth and the Brisbane City Council for a \$21.98 million Anzac Square restoration and enhancement project. This includes a

redevelopment to create the modern gallery spaces that now exist. In 2019-20 we committed \$2.4 million per annum for the creation of these new spaces and to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council in the Office for Veterans within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The bill before us now proposes that the QVC act as trustees of Anzac Square reserve. The council will have a role: to manage, maintain, preserve and develop Anzac Square as a memorial to honour the service and sacrifice of Queenslanders and other Australians in war conflict, peacekeeping and peacemaking; to approve and oversee the staging of commemorative activities and events at Anzac Square; to commemorate the services and sacrifices of Queenslanders and other Australians; to approve, manage and promote public programs at Anzac Square to inform, educate and promote understanding among Queenslanders and visitors around the history, the experiences, the service and the sacrifice of Queenslanders and other Australians; and to manage the cultural heritage significance of Anzac Square.

Due to having the Gallipoli Barracks in my electorate of Ferny Grove, I have spoken to many veterans over the years. I have heard about their service. I have heard about their struggles. I have heard about their pride in the uniform and the special status in our community that is earned by those who have served. This bill is a chance for us to lift the level of guardianship of this most sacred momentum to the men and women to whom it means the most: those who have served in the Defence Force, their families and the broader veterans community. The bill entrenches the role of veterans in guiding the use of this important monument going forward. The bill and proposed amendments by the government will guarantee that at least 50 per cent of the council will be members of the veterans community. It builds on our government's commitment to veterans and maintaining Queensland's monuments to their service and sacrifice.

I have always been proud of Australia's fighting men and women no matter where they have served in the world. As the chair of the Senate defence subcommittee, I had the privilege of travelling to Afghanistan and witnessing their professionalism, their expertise and also their commitment right up close. That journey saw the delegation travel to Al Minhad Air Base in UAE and then on to Tirin Kut to visit our ADF. While there we were loaded on to Black Hawks, travelled up to a forward operating base, on to Kandahar and then Kabul. It is an experience I will never forget. It is an experience in which I appreciated the good, honest work and commitment that our ADF personnel provide in serving. While visiting the FOB near Tirin Kut we spoke to local Afghans who expressed concerns about losing our ADF who were on standard rotation. Having expressed through translation they would be replaced with a group of similarly experienced ADF, an ease of confidence settled in.

I have rarely been in more capable hands in my life during that time in Afghanistan. I take to task, however, the assertion by the LNP that the chair of the Queensland Veterans' Council should be a veteran. Following my return, the committee which I chaired led an inquiry titled 'Care for ADF personnel wounded and injured in operations'. The four years experience as the chair of that committee and our experience in Afghanistan provided me and also committee members with a good opportunity to deliberate on our findings and recommendations of improving the life for those veterans and returned service men and women.

Whether someone is a member of this parliament or other parliaments around the country, the essence of a good parliamentarian is holding the empathy, the competence, the commitment and the values and to express those to their constituents. I believe all members of this chamber carry in their hearts the same high level of respect and gratitude for our women and men in uniform as I do. A part of Australia's national identity is formed around the courage and the sacrifice of our uniformed services from the beaches of Gallipoli to the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan. We owe it to those who have served to understand and teach our children about the sacrifices that were made for their future. This bill introduced by the Palaszczuk government is another way in which we can further the support.

In conclusion, I want to put on record my sincere gratitude to many organisations in the electorate of Ferny Grove. One such organisation is Wounded Heroes and, in particular, Martin Shaw, who tirelessly goes out and assists our veterans in times of need whether through fundraising or assisting the widows of those veterans in times of need. In particular, I mention a very good friend of mine Mark Orreal from Samford, who was once the subbranch secretary of the Samford RSL, which I lost to the now member for Pine Rivers. He is a champion for the veterans and also the beliefs that veterans hold near and dear. This is a bill that will go a long way in continuing the support that the Palaszczuk government provides to the veterans in Queensland.