




Speech By
Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR OODGEROO

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021

MOTION

Estimates Process, Referral to Committee of the Legislative Assembly

 **Dr ROBINSON** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (5.32 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Maroochydore, the former Speaker of the Queensland parliament and mother of the House. It is great to have the experience in the parliament that comes from being the longest serving current MP in Queensland. The Premier's personal attack on the member for Maroochydore this morning was below the standard you would expect of a Premier. It is the sign of a Premier who is running away from scrutiny and is tiring as she approaches 10 years of her long-term Labor government. I know that everyone on this side, a good many government and crossbench MPs and many thousands of Queenslanders value Fiona Simpson's contribution to Queensland.

This motion focuses on reforming aspects of the parliament and seeks to do so by directing the Committee of the Legislative Assembly in two main areas: to inquire into the Legislative Assembly's function in scrutinising government financial decisions and the operation of the committee estimates process and to do so with reference to similar parliaments elsewhere; and secondly, to consider a raft of specific measures to improve the bipartisan operation and accountability of the estimates committee system.

Part of the impetus for this motion today was the way the estimates process occurred around the current budget. The level of intervention by many government chairs to protect ministers from questions was almost unparalleled in my experience of this parliament. All other state parliaments and the Commonwealth parliament have two houses. Queensland started out with two houses. The upper houses are typically smaller and act as a place of review and further scrutiny and most commonly moderate and approve legislation passed by the lower Houses. As we know, in 1922 the state government abolished the Queensland Legislative Council. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the abolition of the Legislative Council.

That was one of the most infamous events in Queensland political history. Who would have thought—a Labor state government removing the upper house so it could get its way and avoid further scrutiny! Since then without an upper house we have been the poorer politically. A system of committees has evolved over time, and today we have the portfolio based system. We are all on the LNP opposition side working constructively within that system while noting the failure of this government at times to be fair with the advantage that it has.

When I first entered the parliament in 2009 as the member for Cleveland it seemed that the parliamentary committee system was a fairer one than the one that operates today. With the longer hours of the parliament there was more opportunity for the scrutiny of government bills and time to even debate many amendments. What are they? Sadly, today we rarely debate amendments. Things have gone backwards in terms of proper scrutiny. Some government MPs, particularly some ministers and some chairs, act as if the committee system belongs to the government when in fact it belongs to the parliament. To those MPs I say, 'The committees are not yours. Return the committees back to the parliament.'

In 2012 I had the honour of being appointed by the House as the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees. I believe that I may have been the last of the deputy speakers to also have the title Chairman of Committees, but I am not making any inferences about that. Perhaps the 'chair' bit was seen as a vestigial leftover from a bygone era when there was more rigour in this House. I thoroughly enjoyed the job, both here in Queensland and in my role on the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the CPA.

In that CPA role I was able to look at other Commonwealth countries and study other parliaments, both bicameral and unicameral. One observation I made when considering a number of countries is that those with weak parliaments that were dominated by strong and at times autocratic and controlling governments were not as functional as countries with strong parliaments. In short, when governments have too much power they tend to use that power to the fullest of their advantage alone. There are times when the governing style of this government seems to be more like an autocratic and dictatorial government in the guise of a Westminster system.

In conclusion, if the day ever came in this House where we could restore the Legislative Council in a system that was fair and fully representative of the decentralised nature of our state, provided fair representation for northern Queensland and involved fewer politicians overall, it would have my support. I support this motion.