




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (11.26 am), continuing: I continue my contribution from yesterday and, in doing so, I also declare that I am a member of the Returned and Services League of Australia as outlined in the register of members' interests.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council. The QVC will be responsible for the management, maintenance, preservation and development of Anzac Square and the administration of the Anzac Day Trust and to provide advice to the minister on veteran matters. I am not quite sure what the member for Gympie was concerned about in saying that the bill was mistitled, because it is the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill and it does establish the Queensland Veterans' Council. It really does what it says on the box.

Anzac Square is Queensland's pre-eminent war memorial. Located in the Brisbane CBD, Anzac Square is the home of the Shrine of Remembrance and the Eternal Flame and was first dedicated on Remembrance Day 1930. I first marched onto Anzac Square as a 19-year-old, when my regiment exercised Freedom of the City throughout Brisbane. My parents proudly snapped a photo of me in my slouch hat, my pollied and polished boots in front of the shrine, like generations of service personnel before me. In the photo I am young, I have a lopsided grin and I have not finished my training. My instructors were Vietnam veterans and they were as rough as guts. I had no idea that I would ever become a veteran. My service changed me irrevocably. It took an 18-year-old who was directionless and set me on a path that I continue on today. Whilst it shaped me, it did also break me, but I would not change it for anything because military service is unique.

This led me to look at the definitions contained within this bill. The term 'veteran' has represented a bit of a moving feast over the past few years, at least from the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs perspective. In years gone by the term 'veteran' was used quite sparingly and reverently, with very prescribed eligibility criteria and usually limited to specific deployments or conditions of service. However, as the nature of ADF deployments has changed, the criteria to be considered a veteran have also changed. I note that within the definition in this bill, a veteran means any person who is or has served within the ADF. This would be one of the most inclusive definitions of 'veteran' that I have ever come across. When the term 'veterans community' is used it becomes significantly wider—all veterans, their partners, their children and their parents. Given that Queensland is a service state, as I mentioned earlier, this would capture a large portion of the Queensland community.

I would like to address the assertion that because the objective of providing advice to the minister on veterans matters is listed third at clause 3 it is not a priority. That is somewhat disingenuous. Certainly when dealing with military personnel, when your commanding officer gives you three specified tasks to do you do all three tasks and you do them to the best of your ability, regardless of the order in which they are given to you. I am pleased to see that the committee's recommendations have been acted on with the increase in veterans representation as appointed people on the Veterans' Council as well as the requirement for the establishment of the reference group.

While I am on my feet, and with the indulgence of the House, I would like to make reference to a particular veteran whom I had the pleasure of working with and called a mate. John Robert Carey was a sapper who served in the early days of the East Timor deployments. I met him after he got out and joined the QPS. He was very quiet about his military service. Before my first appointment he took me aside and spent an inordinate amount of time talking to me about the road upgrades that he and his fellow engineers had done along the road to Same. It is an engineer thing, I guess. He wanted me to take photographs of what remained of their road upgrade. When I set off on my convoy we stopped at the first set of gabion baskets and then the second. After that, I just took photographs from the moving vehicle because there were about 78 of them. I came back from that patrol with my SD card full of blurry photographs of retaining walls—whatever. He was very proud of his work—his legacy.

John passed away earlier this month in—once again I have to report to this House—heartbreaking circumstances. He was the son of Colleen and Robert and father of Benjamin and Patrick. I reflect that he was younger than I am. He was a good mate, a proud soldier and a dedicated detective. Every time I see one of those pretentious fences that people pay a fortune for that contain gabion baskets containing rocks I automatically think of JC and that road to Same.

I think of all the veterans who have made a sacrifice and who have stood up and done their time with no fuss. They have got in and done their job. We will now have a Veterans' Council that will be able to not only represent veterans on matters of physical importance such as Anzac Square and the grants that come from the Anzac Day Trust—I know my RSL associations really do rely on those—but also ensure they have a voice when it comes to veterans matters and have a level of representation, no matter how quiet they are about their service. There will always be people who stand up and make reference to the things that are important to veterans. I am proud that this House enables that through this legislation. This is for you, JC. Rest in peace. I commend the bill to the House.