




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2021

DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.14 am): I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. This bill was introduced into the parliament and referred to the committee for examination on 25 March 2021. The committee was required to report back on the bill by 14 May 2021. Fifteen submissions were received with not one single economic or business representative providing a submission.

The LNP will be opposing the bill. There is absolutely no effort by the government to reduce debt as the title suggests. Added to this, there is a further reduction in transparency with the cessation of Building Queensland and the Queensland Productivity Commission—two of the remaining independent bodies that were initially set up to provide economic oversight and advice.

Some of the stated objectives of the bill are to: support the state's contribution to the Queensland Future Fund by providing for the transfer of the Queensland Titles Registry to a newly formed company that will be contributed to a trust within the Debt Retirement Fund structure; introduce a fee unit model to streamline the annual process of indexing regulatory fees; abolish Building Queensland and the BQ board and integrate BQ's staff, assets, records, resources and liabilities into DSDILGP; abolish the Queensland Productivity Commission and integrate its functions into Treasury and the Queensland Competition Authority; and mandate that legislation that requires or authorises print advertising or publication by government agencies shall be satisfied by online advertising or publication, subject to appropriate exemptions.

A key theme of stakeholder commentary regarding the proposed Titles Registry transfer was an emphasis on the valuable services that the Titles Registry provides and the importance of ensuring that those services continue to be delivered without interruption and for the benefit of the Queensland public. AgForce submitted—

The risks of outsourcing are difficult to articulate and foresee however, we believe that these secure title arrangements are so important to the Queensland economy that these should be directly managed by the government as a public service.

In response to stakeholder commentary about the 'corporatisation' of the Titles Registry, or privatisation of registries generally, Treasury provided the following assurances—

All current services of the Titles Registry will be preserved and there will be performance requirements imposed on Queensland Titles Registry

...

Registry Co will be contributed to a trust managed by QIC Limited, the Queensland Government-owned investment manager. Units in the trust will be held by a number of State-owned entities. This will mean Registry Co will be held by State entities through the asset ownership structure.

Treasury emphasised that employees of Registry Co will no longer be public servants. Additionally, Treasury advised—

Consultation is ongoing with the Together Union and Titles Registry staff in relation to employment conditions for transferring staff, including in relation to immunity and indemnity.

The bill proposes to repeal the Building Queensland Act to abolish BQ and the BQ board. The Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council, Consult Australia and Engineers Australia objected to the bill's proposed abolition of Building Queensland and integration of its functions into DSDILGP, with all three stakeholders emphasising the importance of the infrastructure body's independence from government. The ASBEC submitted in this regard that the provision of independent, expert and transparent advice to the Queensland government is an essential function of BQ. They stated—

A governance and reporting structure that enables BQ to provide advice independent of perceived, potential or actual political influence is critical to BQ's credibility both in the eyes of the public and for decision makers.

Consult Australia similarly cautioned—

Bringing functions of Building Queensland into DSDILGP's immediately compromises the first component of good infrastructure governance, that being independence.

Consult Australia warned—

The influence of politics and election cycles on infrastructure projects amongst state/territory governments has been an ongoing issue.

They further stated—

Without an independent infrastructure body, the project prioritisation process, interrelationship and coordination with Infrastructure Australia will be unclear to agencies and the infrastructure sector. This has the potential to erode transparency and create uncertainty.

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...

At a time where there is a desire to fast-track the delivery of projects to help boost the economy, it is important that robust analysis is undertaken for project selection. ... Importantly, where Building Queensland business case analysis has determined that a project is not viable ...

Engineers Australia also expressed their concerns, stating—

The decision to abolish the Building Queensland Act and the independent governance functions within it prior to designing the new governance arrangements unnecessarily exposes Queensland to a period without independent governance arrangements in place and uncertainty regarding what governance arrangements will be in place.

As stated in the committee report—

However, the government did not undertake community consultation on the repeal of the Building Queensland Act as it considered 'the structural reform of Building Queensland only impacts the internal operations and governance structure of public sector entities and there is no material impact on the community'.

Consult Australia had a different view, stating—

It is disappointing also that organisations like ours and the community were not consulted.

Engineers Australia stated—

A change of this magnitude requires consultation among stakeholders.

This will remove any transparency from government projects. The Palaszczuk government will simply say that it is commercial-in-confidence, giving them an out and allowing them to pick and choose projects where they will gain the greatest political advantage.

Not satisfied with this, the government bill also removes the independent statutory body the Queensland Productivity Commission. There was no community consultation on this significant amendment either. There are no surprises there. The QPC's productivity and regulatory review functions are to be integrated into a newly-established Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction within Treasury. Agforce submitted—

Independence is critical to the success of both the QPC and highly successful OBPR which have worked without fear in assessing and providing scrutiny on Queensland legislation on behalf of Queensland, including particularly on issues such as vegetation management in Queensland and regulation of our sector. The Bill's proposal to abolish and reform these agencies under Treasury will hamper their ability to undertake independent review and provide frank advice to Government—and in doing so, provide transparency.

In response to these concerns Treasury stated—

The release of analysis and material produced by the new Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction will be subject to Departmental and Cabinet consideration as part of the usual policy process.

That says it all. Negative reports will never see the light of day. They will be withheld under cabinet confidentiality, which is very convenient. Maybe the office of productivity should have a look at the work rate of this Palaszczuk government, given that we only have one bill on the *Notice Paper* for this sitting. You do not need your toes—only your fingers—to count the total number of bills for 2021.

The war on the regions continues with this government, but this time the focus is regional newspapers. As stated in the committee report—

The Bill proposes to amend the Financial Accountability Act 2009 (FA Act) to insert a new part 5A to mandate that, subject to certain exemptions, the print requirement must be met by online advertising or publication either on a government website, in an online version of a newspaper, or on a different website if appropriate, rather than in a printed newspaper.

We have seen those opposite use this bill as an excuse to bash the former Newman government. I would like to remind those opposite that Campbell Newman was the premier of Queensland for two years, 10 months and 19 days, concluding 14 February 2015, which means that the Palaszczuk government has been devastating the Queensland economy for six years, three months and 12 days as of today. It is time for this government to take responsibility for its actions. It seems a bit rich to keep blaming others for your mistakes. Now this legislation will hide even more of those mistakes.

Yesterday it was interesting to hear Minister Enoch talk about the lack of public housing. There was article in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* yesterday that talks of the crucial need in the Toowoomba region alone for 600 more public housing spaces, so that is neglect by this government, not past governments. This government needs to start taking responsibility for its failures in health and the regions. The list goes on and on. This is a government of failure.