




Speech By  
**Patrick Weir**

**MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE**

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### **QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL**

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (6.01 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. The objective of the bill is to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council as a statutory body. The QVC would have three areas of responsibility: to act as the trustee of Anzac Square under the Land Act 1994 and undertake the ongoing management and operation of Anzac Square; to undertake the functions of the board of trustees under the Anzac Day Act 1995; and to provide advice to government on veterans matters. Located between Anne Street and Adelaide Street in Brisbane, Anzac Square was dedicated on Remembrance Day 1930 as Queensland's state war memorial and lies on Crown land reserved under the Land Act for purposes of cultural and historical significance and parks. The land is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register.

On 5 December 1974, by Order in Council, land was placed under the control of the Brisbane City Council as trustee. The Brisbane City Council is currently the trustee of Anzac Square. Between 2014 and 2019 significant restoration work was undertaken on Anzac Square in four stages and the final stage 4 works were completed in August 2019. The project cost \$21.98 million and was jointly funded by the Australian government, the Queensland government and the Brisbane City Council. Upon commencement, the bill would transfer the trusteeship and management of Anzac Square to the QVC. The Anzac Day Trust Fund was established by the Anzac Day Act. The trust fund is currently administered under the Anzac Day Trust, a statutory body governed by a four-member board of trustees. Upon commencement of the bill, the QVC would become responsible for the administration of the trust fund.

The Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council is a ministerial committee that provides a forum for the Queensland veterans community to communicate directly with the Queensland government about matters relating to veterans. The QVAC is comprised of a chairperson and up to 11 other members from the Queensland veterans community, including veterans associations, associated ex-service organisations and people with a direct link to or interest in veterans issues. The members of the QVAC are nominated or identified by the Queensland veterans community. Upon commencement of the bill, the QVAC would cease to exist and its advisory functions would be undertaken by the QVC, with the support of the veterans reference group.

The bill provides that the QVC will have three main areas of responsibility: the maintenance and management of Anzac Square as a heritage asset for the state, the management of the trust fund and providing advice to the government on veterans matters. The bill also provides that the QVC would have the following functions in relation to veterans matters: to monitor matters affecting the veterans community, to investigate and report on any aspect of veterans matters referred to it by the minister, to consult with the veterans community when developing advice for the minister and to advise the minister about veterans matters and any other matter relevant to the performance of the council's functions.

RSL Queensland stated that it welcomed the action by the state government to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council. However, a number of submitters raised concerns that the bill seeks to establish one statutory body to perform three distinct functions that require different skills, experience, knowledge and methods of operation. The Bundaberg District Women Veterans Inc. stated—

... the whole focus of it—

the bill—

appears to us to be on the management and administration of Anzac Square. In a nutshell, Anzac Square is a memorial; veterans are people. We do not think those two necessarily sit easily in the same bill...

Submitters, including Mr O'Kearney and the Defence Force Welfare Association Queensland, supported the model used in New South Wales and Victoria where separate statutory bodies have been established to manage the state war memorials, provide veteran advice and manage grants.

The bill provides that the QVC would have a membership of up to eight people, comprising two ex-officio members consisting of the chief executive of the department or an employee of the department nominated by the chief executive and the chief executive officer of the Brisbane City Council or a council employee nominated by the chief executive officer; and not more than six members appointed by the Governor in Council. The six appointed members may include not more than two members nominated by veterans organisations and not more than four people nominated by the minister.

The majority of submitters raised concerns that, under the current proposal, veterans and representatives of the veterans community were underrepresented on the QVC. The DFVAQ stated—

The Veteran membership of the council must be increased to over 50% to achieve any credibility amongst the veteran community and indeed, the general public.

RSL Queensland stated—

It is important that the members of the council clearly understand veterans' issues and the views of veterans. Having two veterans in a membership of eight does not allow for this.

The Defence Force Welfare Association noted that the equivalent legislation in Victoria provides that the 'ex-service community are to make up the majority of the membership of the Victorian Veterans Council.' Submitters, including Mr Craig, Mr O'Kearney, Mr Shortridge, the DFVAQ and RSL Queensland, considered that the chairperson of the QVC should also be a veteran.

The bill makes provision for the establishment of a veterans reference group. The bill provides that the functions of the veterans reference group are to advise the QVC on any veterans matter referred to the group; to help the QVC to identify and consult with veterans, community veterans organisations and other community organisations when preparing advice for the minister; and to help the QVC to advise the minister about veterans matters. The membership of the veterans reference group is to be decided by the minister. However, the minister must ensure that the group consists of the appointed members of the QVC nominated by a veterans organisation and not more than eight other members of the veterans community with knowledge of or skills in the necessary areas. Submitters expressed concern that the clause should state that the minister 'must' establish a veterans group.

The member for Southern Downs will be moving amendments to address these matters. I note that the minister will also be moving some amendments but they do not go to all the concerns raised by the member for Southern Downs and the member for Buderim, who are both veterans. If this legislation is, as it says, to listen to veterans, it can begin that process right here in this House in this debate on this bill when these amendments are moved.

War memorials are of great significance to each and every community. Every town, be it large or small, has some form of cenotaph to acknowledge the sacrifice made by that town. As you travel around and look at some of those memorials, it becomes apparent the staggering cost that some communities have borne. The town of Charleville in the electorate of Warrego is one that always stands out in my mind.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you were also part of a delegation that went to Port Moresby a couple of years ago. We visited the war cemetery there. I do not think I have ever been as touched anywhere as what I was on that day. These are very cherished and treasured sites. All of these local communities have a volunteer group. Predominantly they are chaired by or have a lot of involvement from returned servicemen. They are a vital part of carrying on that tradition. I hope those concerns are addressed in this bill.