Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2021

DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

Mr RUSSO (Toohey—ALP) (11.24 am): I rise today in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. The objectives of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill are to: support the state's contribution to the Queensland Future (Debt Retirement) Fund established under the Queensland Future Fund Act 2020 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 Building Queensland board and integrate Building Queensland's staff, assets, records, resources and liabilities into Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning; change the governance structure of the National Injury Insurance Agency, Queensland by abolishing the board of the National Injury Insurance Agency, Queensland Agency and appointing the Insurance Commissioner as chief executive officer responsible for the management of the National Insurance Injury Scheme, Queensland; repeal the Public Safety Business Agency Act 2014 so that machinery-of-government changes may reintegrate the Public Safety Business Agency into public safety entities; 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.

Like many of my fellow Queenslanders both here in this chamber and across the broader community, I saw firsthand how the brutal LNP cuts to frontline services, education and transport affected this great state. Communities were hurting across Queensland. My community in Toohey was hurting. Changes introduced by Labor since 2015 have seen the Queensland economy grow and prosper. It was these economic strategies that have provided us with the resources and capacity to withstand shutdowns under the global pandemic. I know the Queensland government is implementing sound fiscal strategies that will deliver budgetary savings and support Queensland's economic recovery from the effects of COVID-19. That is the Labor way.

This bill is intended to progress elements of the state's approach to managing debt and public service delivery efficiencies, including by effecting a range of measures to implement the outcomes of some of the reviews and providing the legislative changes to enable these measures to occur. The bill provides for direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and other ancillary costs. Importantly, indirect savings are only one part of the government's broader savings agenda.

We already have the legislative framework in place for creating and administering the Queensland Future Fund. This was established with the August 2020 enactment of the Queensland Future Fund Act, which also instituted the first sub fund in the Debt Retirement Fund. The government undertook to formally give effect to the Debt Retirement Fund by contributing assets, including those associated with the Titles Registry and other investments, to seed the fund by 30 June 2021.

There have been comprehensive due diligence processes undertaken in relation to the identified assets to establish valuations for the assets, confirm their suitability for inclusion and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to facilitate their transfer to the Debt Retirement Fund. The groundwork has taken place for Queensland to be able to create special purpose accounts for the purpose of managing current and future debt reduction programs without the need to resort to the LNP model of slash, cut and sell.

The Titles Registry was among the first of the publicly owned assets to be earmarked for contribution to the Debt Retirement Fund, with the proposed transfer to enable the Titles Registry's value to be recognised on the state's balance sheet for the first time. The bill would give effect to the transfer by providing for the transmission of assets, liabilities, rights, responsibilities, obligations, operations and employees of the current Titles Registry to the 'operator'—the Queensland Titles Registry Pty Ltd—a newly formed company that would be contributed to a Queensland Investment Corporation managed trust within the Debt Retirement Fund structure.

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 those services continue to be delivered without interruption for the benefit of the Queensland public. Whilst there were concerns raised by a couple of stakeholders regarding the proposed arrangements, there was also strong support for the proposal, with stakeholders commending the government's decision to retain public ownership of the Titles Registry in contrast to moves by other states to privatise their equivalent registries. Treasury provided assurances that all current services of the Titles Registry will be preserved and there will be performance requirements imposed on the new company.

Contractual arrangements will be specified with further service levels for the performance of registry functions, including accuracy, governing the delivery of title registry functions. Further, the bill provides the state with step-in and directional rights, which would only be exercised in exceptional circumstances. The new entity will be held by state entities through an asset ownership structure.

It is proposed the bill will also repeal the Building Queensland Act and the Building Queensland board. This will allow for the integration of staff, assets, records, resources and liabilities of Building Queensland into the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. Queensland Treasury have advised there would be no forced redundancies resulting from the restructure. By incorporating Building Queensland into the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, it will provide for the existing capital program reporting to produce a single, efficient infrastructure pipeline that reports what is funded and on the way and what significant potential state investments have commenced business cases. The Auditor-General has previously observed that Building Queensland's infrastructure pipeline reporting 'creates duplicate reporting requirements for agencies', given the same proposals are incorporated in pipeline reporting for the State Infrastructure Plan. While the transitional implementation during 2020-21 will include some one-off implementation costs, the resultant savings generally will be realised from 2021-22.

The bill also proposes to amend the National Injury Insurance Scheme (Queensland) Act. The National Injury Insurance Scheme Queensland, through the National Injury Insurance Agency Queensland, funds necessary and reasonable treatment, care and support for people who sustain an eligible serious personal injury in a motor vehicle accident in Queensland. A levy on registered vehicles funds the fund. The amendment under the bill would abolish the board and transfer responsibility for management of the agency to a CEO. Changes to the governance structure of the agency are intended to drive greater efficiencies and provide stronger alignment of the governance of motor accident personal injury schemes. The Australian Lawyers Alliance supported the amendments as a savings measure that 'will lead to less money being spent on unnecessary litigation, poor stakeholder management and bureaucracy', and endorsed the appointment of the current insurance commissioner as the CEO of the agency, pointing to the commissioner's successful oversight of Queensland's compulsory third-party scheme and of the agency for an interim period when the NIISQ commenced. I commend the bill to the House.