




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (2.39 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. The objective of the bill is to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council as a statutory body. The Queensland Veterans' Council will have three areas of responsibility: trustee of Anzac Square under the Land Act 1994 and the ongoing management and operation of Anzac Square; the functions of the board of trustees under the Anzac Day Act 1995; and providing advice to government on veterans matters.

The bill will provide for the creation of the Queensland Veterans' Council as a statutory body to strengthen and modernise the legislative framework for veterans matters in Queensland. The bill specifies that the Queensland Veterans' Council will have three main areas of responsibility: maintenance and management of Anzac Square as the heritage asset for the state; management of the trust fund; and providing advice to the government on veterans matters.

In 1974 the land where Anzac Square is located was placed under the control of the Brisbane City Council as trustee of the site and they remained trustee to this time. The newly created QVC would undertake the role of trustee of Anzac Square memorial. Anzac Square memorial is a place of significant focus for Queenslanders and it has been here where annual Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services have been held in Brisbane since the memorial was opened in 1930.

Australia's involvement in World War I exacted a heavy toll in death and injury. While originally envisaged as a World War I memorial, Anzac Square has become the focus of all armed services commemorations. Anzac Square is the place in Brisbane city where all Queenslanders can honour and uphold the ANZAC spirit and remember the men and women who have served their country in conflict and in peace since the Boer War. It is, as it rightly should be, a place of great significance to the community.

Significant restoration work was undertaken on Anzac Square between 2014 and 2019. The project included a major redevelopment of the undercroft, allowing Anzac Square to expand its original purpose to include a platform for educational and interactive exhibitions. Upon commencement of the bill, the trusteeship and the management of Anzac Square would transfer to the QVC which would then enable it to continue to safeguard Queensland's pre-eminent state war memorial for all generations. Anzac Square is too important for us not to guarantee its oversight in memory of those who lost their lives in the many theatres of war.

The second objective of the bill is to create capacity for the QVC to administer the Anzac Day Trust Fund. The trust fund was established to offer annual grants to institutions, organisations and associations that support and assist ex-service men and women and their dependants. The Palaszczuk government wants to ensure Queensland veterans, their families and dependants can continue to access the welfare services and financial support they deserve. We will continue to honour those who served and provide the opportunity for ex-service organisations to hold commemorative events.

My local Sunnybank RSL Sub-Branch and the Salisbury RSL Sub-Branch provide valuable and valued support for our veterans. The Sunnybank RSL Sub-Branch host a range of activities, including a drop-in centre, bowls, bingo, tai chi and Friday lunches for members. This social engagement is vital. I am looking forward to being able to catch up with members at this year's Remembrance Day service at the Salisbury RSL Sub-Branch and the Our Community Remembers combined service hosted by the Sunnybank RSL Sub-Branch in November. The Our Community Remembers combined service was an initiative from 2020 and provides an opportunity for the veterans and wider community to commemorate those conflicts which would normally be commemorated throughout the year but could not occur due to the imposition and uncertainty of COVID restrictions.

The other objective of the bill is to allow the QVC to undertake the functions and roles currently provided by the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council, a ministerial committee. The QVC, with support from the veterans reference group, will communicate directly with the Queensland government and provide advice to government on veterans matters. Legislation is the only way to establish the QVC as a statutory body. In addition, legislative amendment to the Anzac Day Act is the only way to abolish the Anzac Day Trust as a statutory body and transfer the governance of the trust fund to the QVC. I commend the bill to the House.