




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (4.56 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. The intention of this bill is to provide the legislative framework necessary to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council as a statutory body. The primary roles of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to: manage Anzac Square in Brisbane on behalf of the people of Queensland as the state's war memorial, ensuring that Anzac Square remains a special place of remembrance of those lives lost and the stark reality of the human cost of war in which Queenslanders can be proud; take on the functions of the board of the Anzac Day Trust Fund, recognising the very important role that veterans and their families play administering the Anzac Day Trust Fund to those organisations who support our ex-service men and women and their dependants; and provide advice to the minister on veterans matters, ensuring that the Queensland veterans community are afforded a clear and direct pathway for communications with the highest levels of Queensland government about matters important to them.

Extensive consultation over the future governance of Anzac Square has taken place since 2017 with the former Anzac Square Steering Committee, the former Queensland Advisory Committee for the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary, the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council and the Brisbane City Council. Briefings were also given to: the Returned and Services League of Australia, Queensland branch; the Legacy Club of Brisbane; Australian War Widows Queensland; Mates4Mates; the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex Servicemen and Women, Queensland branch; the Defence Force Welfare Association Queensland; the Partners of Veterans' Association of Australia, Queensland branch; the Veterans of Australia Association, Hervey Bay branch; and individual stakeholders including the former chair of the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council and the former deputy chair of the Queensland Advisory Committee for the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary.

I would like to recognise the Community Support and Services Committee, of which I am a member, for its work in considering the desirability of this legislation. I would also like to thank the secretariat and Hansard for their always supportive work of committee members when they examine bills and conduct inquiries. I would like to thank the committee, after receiving submissions, for recommending that at least 50 per cent of the Queensland Veterans' Council should be veterans or representatives of veterans groups. I thank the assistant minister for having several conversations with me about that. Having spent time in the Defence Force myself, I am keenly aware of the size and diverse nature of the ex-service community here in Queensland. I feel this will go some way to ensuring that all the views of our community are heard and understood for what they mean to former members of our armed services.

I also note that the bill provides the minister with the discretion to determine which veterans organisations to approach when seeking nominations to the Queensland Veterans' Council. The discretion for the minister to choose which veterans organisations may nominate a person for appointment to the council allows the minister to vary the representation of veterans organisations on the Queensland Veterans' Council over time and provides the option for a broad range of veterans

organisations to be involved in the council, as well as a broad range of opinion to be heard by the council. There are currently over 3,000 ex-service organisations and 450,000 ex-defence personnel and their families living in our state.

In taking on the functions of the board of the Anzac Day Trust Fund, the Queensland Veterans' Council will continue to offer annual payments to institutions, organisations and associations that provide help, support or assistance to aged persons who served in the Australian Defence Force; the spouses and children of deceased persons who served in the Australian Defence Force; persons who served in the Australian Defence Force in times of war or armed conflict; and institutions, organisations or associations that provide help or support to aged persons, spouses and children of deceased persons who served in the ADF.

Importantly, the requirement for the Queensland government to make an annual grant for the purposes of the trust fund and the purposes for which payments may be made from the trust fund would not be changed. I congratulate the Palaszczuk Labor government for taking decisive action to ensure our state's war memorial is effectively managed and maintained, while ensuring our veterans community is represented, heard and supported to continue its good work in our community.

I am very grateful for the work of our State Library in its management of the undercroft at Anzac Square. It was very humbling to see all the different units. If anyone knows the military history of our state, they will know that prior to the Korean War most of the units were raised from their districts. They have the unit colours of all of those wonderful units like—I will give an example of where my mum and dad live—31RQR, which is known as the Kennedy regiment. They have all of the units ever to be raised in Queensland. There is an interactive display of people from diverse backgrounds and what war was for them and what they did. It really does highlight the length and breadth of service of our Queenslanders. I would implore all members and their families to visit. It is interactive and intuitive and preserves the memory of the thousands of Queenslanders who have served our proud nation.

I was a little bemused by the dissenting statement about remuneration for persons appointed to the council. This is important work protecting and enshrining the legacy of our great state. In my interactions with many different organisations and individuals, there is no doubt that they would gladly do it for free, but that is simply not fair. We are a vast state, and time and travel all have a dollar value. The aim is for participation from across the state and from many different groups.

In the past, RSL and Legacy were the only organisations representing veterans, but this has changed since the Vietnam War and subsequent conflicts and operations. Thus we have changed the make-up somewhat of the council. Legislation must be agile and reflect the circumstances of the day, which is the aim of this bill.

I again thank the Palaszczuk Labor government for taking more interest and action in the advocacy of Queensland's ex-service community. I praise the government departments that are preserving the memories of this important history. In closing, I would also like to reach out to former comrades in arms to get involved. The Premier and her department are listening. I commend this bill to the House.