




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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### **DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.57 pm): Whilst I am supportive of measures that deliver cost savings and enable Queensland's economic recovery from the effects of COVID-19, in particular Noosa's economic resurgence, I am concerned when there is a risk to independence and transparency, especially when the proposed savings appear to be minimal or hard to find. The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021, as has already been heard, covers multiple realms. I turn firstly to the proposed repealing of the Building Queensland Act 2015 and the abolition of Building Queensland, BQ. This organisation provides independent expert advice on major infrastructure and this bill intends to integrate BQ staff, assets, records, resources and liabilities into the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning.

Whilst there may be good intentions of enhancing the department's ability to provide infrastructure advice and assurance capability, there remains the possibility that staff will be disseminated throughout the organisation with their capabilities and extensive historical knowledge lost or diluted. If expert advice is the keystone to ensuring effective decision-making, we need to ensure that the current BQ staff are deployed in a manner that retains their expertise in government. Assurance is also needed that the current reporting functions of BQ will be easily defined in the existing capital program.

With concern I note the bill also intends to abolish the Queensland Productivity Commission, QPC, the state's independent economic review body, and integrate its functions into Queensland Treasury and the Queensland Competition Authority. Neither BQ nor QBC are regulators. They are independent advisers to government on key reforms and issues that stimulate, drive and grow Queensland's economy.

This bill, with its objective to integrate those organisations into state government departments, risks both the perception and the reality of independence and transparency, which are major pillars of our democracy. Independent policy advice plays a critical role in bringing to governments unbiased views and are key to delivering stronger evidence based decision-making and policy development. Equally, transparency eradicates political barriers and enables the flow of information that protects and reflects the public interest. Vigilance is needed to ensure independence and transparency, as political corruption and maladministration are easily institutionalised when the adviser to government is government itself.

The operational changes to the Titles Registry ensure it remains in public hands, secures the data held about land and, by including it in the Debt Retirement Fund, will improve the state's debt-to-revenue ratio—from what can be ascertained—and this would be positive. Other cost savings, such as the reintegration of the Public Safety Business Agency into the respective Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the Queensland Police Service, appear to be sensible options moving forward.

The proposed amendments to the Financial Accountability Act 2009 relate to the requirement to publish particular information online. The Queensland Country Press Association felt that, by removing the requirement for statutory advertising and notices to be advertised in printed newspapers, the government is withdrawing the revenue capabilities that keep our printed media alive and diverse, which is vital. Noted are the exemptions that allow information to be published in print, including notices regarding serious risks to public health and safety, product recalls and firearm amnesties, and most importantly retaining publication in regional newspapers that are outside of the Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast and Ipswich areas.

However, concerns remain, notably that the two major news providers are systemically taking over regional and local publications to the detriment of our local communities through centralised journalism and a move away from investigation, fact checking and reliable local reporting. Equally, the modernisation of information provision, through a move away from print to digital format, needs to ensure that vulnerable and elderly members of our community are not disadvantaged in the process. The effectiveness of the tangible local paper and its credibility for readers should never be underestimated in a world increasingly flooded with online misinformation. To this end, pleasingly there is growth, reinvigoration and reinstatement of a number of community and independent print publications that local people appreciate and support including, in my own community, the *Cooroy Rag* and *Noosa Today*.

Finally, with regard to the submissions that oppose the technical amendments to the Medicines and Poisons Act 2019, it is pleasing that concerns have been listened to regarding the compliant analysis certificate for the supply or use of tattoo ink with the health minister withdrawing this amendment to allow for further consultation with the industry. We look forward to an outcome that considers both the health of Queenslanders and appropriate compliance that meets Australia's high standards.

In closing, I thank the Economics and Governance Committee for their thorough review of the bill, departmental staff for their work and the submitters and attendees to the public hearings. With the cornerstone of our democracy being responsibility and accountability, I ask the government to be wary of interfering with processes that require the lens of transparency. Strong independent review processes are essential for both efficiency and credibility, and I will continue to advocate for an increase, not a decrease, of those. Creating a less than robust system of government by slowly diluting previous reforms is not where we should be going; hence, it is difficult to support this bill.