




Speech By
Hon. Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

 **Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources) (5.49 pm): I rise to support the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. From the outset I acknowledge all those who have served in the Australian Defence Force, whether in active duty or not. The sacrifice that they gave to their country will never be fully appreciated. I also acknowledge the sacrifice of their families who stayed behind.

As everyone in this House would know, my home of Townsville has a huge connection to the Australian Defence Force as Australia's largest garrison city. There is a large contingent of active-duty Defence Force personnel, veterans and their families in Townsville. It is essential that we look after those men and women in the best way that we can. That is why this bill is so important. It will establish the Queensland Veterans' Council that will provide feedback to the minister on issues affecting Queensland's, and in particular Townsville's, large veteran community. This council will involve veterans, which is incredibly important as we want to and need to hear from them directly. It is important that there is support in place for veterans. We are committed to listening to them through the Queensland Veterans' Council and the veterans reference group. This veterans reference group is in place to help deliver expert advice to government and will be important for the Queensland Veterans' Council in undertaking their decision-making processes. It is essential that we listen and learn from the large veterans community in Queensland and support them based on the right information.

Another key responsibility of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to administer the functions of the Anzac Day Trust. In 2020 the Anzac Day Trust provided 204 not-for-profit organisations with \$1.49 million so they could continue to deliver welfare services to veterans and their families. As a government we are committed to bolstering the Anzac Day Trust with an additional \$1 million over three annual rounds to provide financial support for veterans and veterans organisations affected by this global pandemic.

We know how important it is to support veterans and organisations that provide support, which is why this bill is so important. As a government we know how important it is to have support services available to our veterans. We have a track record of supporting them, in particular in my own community of Townsville. It was the Palaszczuk government that backed establishing the Oasis Townsville, which the Premier proudly opened earlier this year, alongside the former member for Mundingburra and minister for communities and minister for disability services and seniors, Coralee O'Rourke, who was critical in getting this facility built.

I can remember a time when the member for Thuringowa, the former member for Mundingburra and myself sat down with the assistant minister, the member for Ipswich, and Lieutenant General John Caligari AO, DSC (Ret'd) and he explained his vision of what was needed in Townsville. Because of those conversations the former member for Mundingburra championed that cause and that is why we have the Oasis Townsville. It provides veterans easy access to a range of services. We know that some veterans have a difficult time dealing with the transition to civilian life. That is what the Oasis Townsville is all about. It gives local veterans and their families a clear pathway to civilian life with the respect,

dignity and support that they deserve. This government supported the development of the project over the last five years, including providing the site. I remember, member for Thuringowa, when there was the old DPI station there that they were going to bulldoze.

Mr Harper: It was a Newman legacy.

Mr STEWART: I take that interjection. It was a Newman legacy. This government also provided \$4.3 million for works to develop infrastructure, including roads, footpaths and parking. During last year's election we committed to providing ongoing support to Oasis, which we are now doing by providing an additional \$1 million over the next four years to support service delivery at that centre. It is this government that backs our veterans and the veterans community and my community of Townsville. My community of Townsville knows the value of our veterans and our ADF. This was really driven home to me when I had the good fortune of walking the Kokoda Track with my father and my brother. Both now have passed on. We spent 10 days walking in the footsteps of some of the most heroic men that ever served our country. They defended Papua New Guinea because they knew that the enemy was on its way into Australia. To sit and listen to the stories from the fuzzy wuzzy angel who told us about what he did to help protect those men was absolutely astounding and is something that will live with me for the rest of my life.

The defence community is highly respected in North Queensland. We owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans for their service to our nation. It was just this year that ADF personnel from Townsville flew to Afghanistan to help evacuate people, putting their own lives at risk to help others. Nobody who was in Townsville during the unprecedented monsoon of 2019 will ever forget what the ADF did for our community. They put their own safety at risk to help people trapped by rising floodwater. They helped save property and they provided the entire Townsville community with reassurance during that tough time. Our Defence Force and our veterans make up a huge part of the fabric of Townsville and this bill will help support them. I commend the bill to the House.