




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (5.08 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Queensland Veterans' Council Bill was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 22 April 2021 and referred to the Community Support and Services Committee. The committee tabled its report on 11 June 2021. I thank all members of the committee for their consideration of the bill. I also take this opportunity to thank all those who made submissions to the committee.

The committee's report made three recommendations. I formally table the government's response to the committee report.

Tabled paper: Community Support and Services Committee: Report No. 6, 57th Parliament—Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021, government response [1761](#).

The committee's first recommendation is that the bill be passed. I thank the committee for its support of the policy intention underpinning the bill.

The committee's second recommendation is that clause 13 of the bill be amended to provide that at least 50 per cent of the members of the Queensland Veterans' Council must be veterans or representatives of the veterans community. In accordance with the provisions of the bill, the Queensland Veterans' Council will have a membership of up to eight people, comprising two ex-officio members and up to six members appointed by the Governor in Council. The two ex-officio members will be the director-general of the department that administers the act or an employee of that department nominated by the director-general and the Chief Executive Officer of the Brisbane City Council or a Brisbane City Council employee nominated by the Chief Executive Officer. The six appointed members will include up to two members nominated by veterans organisations on the request of the minister and up to four people with qualifications or experience in corporate governance, business or financial management, heritage conservation or another area the minister considers relevant or necessary to support the Queensland Veterans' Council in performing its functions.

The composition of the membership aims to ensure that the Queensland Veterans' Council as a governance body has a membership that can support the Queensland Veterans' Council in the performance of its functions. While the bill, as it is currently drafted, does not limit the number of veterans on the council and while no Labor government would ever seek to limit the number of veterans serving as appointed members on the council, we acknowledge that stakeholders want a commitment from the government of a fair minimum threshold of veterans representation on the council.

That is why the government supports the committee's recommendation to ensure that at least 50 per cent of the members of the Queensland Veterans' Council are veterans and members of the veterans community. Therefore, I propose to move amendments during consideration in detail to give

effect to the committee's recommendation and ensure that four of the appointed members of the Queensland Veterans' Council are veterans or members of the veterans community. This amendment is being adopted by the government as a commitment to the veterans community that their passion, their views and their representation will be of paramount importance to the council and the important institutions that it will be administering.

The committee's third recommendation is that bill be amended to provide that the minister must establish a veterans reference group. One of the functions of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to monitor and provide advice to government on veterans matters. Clause 34 of the bill provides that the minister may establish a veterans reference group. It is intended that the veterans reference group will support the Queensland Veterans' Council in providing advice on veteran-related matters and these functions are specifically prescribed in clause 35 of the bill.

The government recognises that the veterans reference group is essential to supporting the Queensland Veterans' Council in the performance of its advisory function and assisting the council to consult with a broad range of veterans organisations. The reference group also provides a mechanism for government to engage with the Queensland veterans community. The government accepts the committee's recommendation to mandate the establishment of the veterans reference group. I propose to move amendments during consideration in detail to give effect to the committee's recommendation and mandate that the minister must establish the veterans reference group.

The proposal to establish the Queensland Veterans' Council as a new statutory body demonstrates the Palaszczuk government's commitment to veterans and their families. It is proposed that the Queensland Veterans' Council will have three areas of responsibility and each of these functions are equally important.

Firstly, the Queensland Veterans' Council will become the trustee of Anzac Square and will have responsibility for its ongoing management and operation. Secondly, the Queensland Veterans' Council will have responsibility for managing the Anzac Day Trust Fund under the Anzac Day Act 1995. Thirdly, the Queensland Veterans' Council will provide advice to government on veterans matters.

Anzac Square is the state's war memorial. It was built as the Queensland community's response to World War I and it is a special place of remembrance to honour the service and sacrifice of Queenslanders and other Australians in war, conflict, peacekeeping and peacemaking. The significant redevelopment undertaken between 2014 and 2019 created new memorial galleries to allow Anzac Square's original purpose to expand to include education.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the expert curation of the memorial galleries by the State Library of Queensland and encourage people to take the time to visit the galleries and learn about Queensland's military history and experiences of those who have served. The establishment of the Queensland Veterans' Council will provide the new governance framework for Anzac Square and ensure the state's war memorial remains a place of special remembrance for generations to come.

Anzac Square is also a significant heritage site for Queensland. In recognition of this, the bill requires the Queensland Veterans' Council to prepare and implement a conservation management plan to be endorsed by the Queensland Heritage Council and reviewed every five years. The Queensland Veterans' Council will also be required to report to the minister and the Queensland Heritage Council about the implementation of the plan.

The Anzac Day Trust Fund was established in 1964 under the Anzac Day Act 1921 and has continued under the Anzac Day Act 1995. In accordance with the provisions of the act, the trust fund provides annual payments to institutions, organisations or associations to assist and support ex-service men and women and their dependants.

Last year the Anzac Day Trust provided 204 not-for-profit organisations with reimbursements totalling \$1.49 million so that they could continue to deliver their welfare services for veterans and their families. The Palaszczuk government has committed to bolstering the Anzac Day Trust with an additional \$1 million over three annual rounds to provide financial support for veterans affected by COVID-19 and for veterans organisations to assist with staging COVID-safe commemorative events.

The Palaszczuk government knows the importance that is placed in the proper administration of the Anzac Day Trust by members of the veterans community here in Queensland. That is why this bill makes no changes to the purposes for which the trust fund may be used and why it does not seek to draw funding from the trust fund to assist with other functions of the council.

Currently the trust fund is administered by the Anzac Day Trust, a statutory body which is governed by a four-member board of trustees. Under the provisions of this bill, the government's responsibility for the trust fund will transfer to the Queensland Veterans' Council. This will provide a modern governance structure for the trust fund.

A further function of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be to monitor and provide advice to government on veterans matters. As I mentioned earlier, the veterans reference group will support the Queensland Veterans' Council in the performance of this function.

The bill also provides the Queensland Veterans' Council with the ability to establish one or more committees to advise on matters relating to its functions. Such committees may be established to advise on Anzac Square or payments from the Anzac Day Trust Fund.

The bill provides the minister with the power to issue a statement of expectations or require the production of a document or information. Such powers may be used, for example, for the minister to set expectations around the level of consultation and engagement with the Queensland veterans community or if the minister requires specific information about the performance of the council functions. To ensure transparency, any statement of expectations or written notice to give a document or information is required to be included in the annual report which will be tabled in parliament.

Queenslanders have a long history of supporting our veterans. Consistent with the committee's first recommendation, I commend the bill to the House.