




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2021

QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (3.03 pm), in reply: At the outset, I thank all members who have contributed to the debate on the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. In particular, I thank those members of this House from all political persuasions who have served our nation in the Australian Defence Force. We appreciate and honour your service. I would also like to thank the Assistant Minister to the Premier for Veterans' Affairs, Trade and COVID Economic Recovery, Bart Mellish, for all of his work on this bill. I am proud to be supporting legislation that will establish a Queensland Veterans' Council. The creation of the Queensland Veterans' Council via this bill will elevate the role of veterans in the management of their own affairs in a way that has never been seen before in this state.

I would now like to address comments made during the second reading debate. The member for Southern Downs and other LNP members have suggested that the proposed membership of the Queensland Veterans' Council would see the voice of veterans watered down. I want to make it clear to the House that the bill does not limit the number of veterans who may be appointed to the six appointed member positions. As I have foreshadowed, I will be moving amendments during consideration in detail to mandate that four of the six appointed members must be veterans or members of the veterans community. This means the membership of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be comprised of at least 50 per cent of veterans or members of the veterans community.

The government's model also provides for an additional eight members of the veterans community to serve on the veterans reference group to provide expert advice on veterans related matters to both the council and the highest levels of government. That means that under the government's model there will be at least 12 veterans or other members of the veterans community sitting on the bodies created by this bill. In contrast, I note that amendments proposed by the LNP will reduce the veterans community voices on the bodies created by this bill to four members—one-third of what the government is proposing. Under the LNP's proposal, none of the members of their proposed Anzac Square reference group must be veterans or members of the veterans community. The LNP's amendment would reduce the veterans' voice from a minimum of 12 to a minimum of only four.

It is also worth noting that the LNP's proposed model limits the requirement for half the Queensland Veterans' Council to be members of the veterans community to only include members nominated by veterans organisations. Not all veterans are members of a veterans organisation. As such, the opposition's amendments limit the opportunity for non-member veterans and members of the veterans community to be heard.

This leads me to the argument put forward by the member for Gregory that the Queensland Veterans' Council will diminish the veteran community's role in the administration of the Anzac Day Trust Fund. As I have explained, the proposal put forward by the government will include a minimum of 12 members of the veterans community on the bodies created under this bill. The government's proposal, with the amendments to be moved during consideration in detail, will increase the number of

veterans or members of the veterans community who can determine how the Anzac Day Trust Fund is administered from three to at least four. I reiterate what has already been said in this House: there is no change to the purposes for which payments may be made from the Anzac Day Trust Fund or the government's contribution to that fund.

The member for Southern Downs and others have suggested that the chairperson of the Queensland Veterans' Council should be a veteran. However, I note that the amendments circulated in the member for Southern Downs' name instead provide that the chairperson is to be a member of the veterans community. Therefore, it is a little unclear what the LNP's policy intent is. By not prescribing that the chairperson of the council must be a veteran, the bill currently provides the minister with the opportunity to appoint a range of people including a widow of a veteran, a partner of a veteran, a child or other family member of a veteran, or another non-veteran family member.

Finally, I would like to address the comments made by the member for Buderim during the debate, because I believe that they go to the very heart of what the Queensland Veterans' Council will be all about. Let me say from the outset that I respect the member for Buderim for his service to our nation and that I agree with the member that all levels of government must do more to assist veterans, their families and their community. That is why during the 2020 state election the Premier committed an additional \$10 million over four years to support our state's veterans and the organisations that assist them. We have also committed an additional \$1 million supplementary payment to the Anzac Day Trust to provide financial support for veterans affected by COVID-19 and to assist with staging COVID-19 safe commemorative events. This is in addition to the \$1.4 million in funding the Palaszczuk government is already providing to the Anzac Day Trust this year. The Palaszczuk government's 2020 election commitments also include funding for homelessness support for veterans and their families as well as employment services and expanded legal assistance for veterans.

We know that there is more work to be done. That is why the advisory function of the Queensland Veterans' Council is so important. I note that the member for Buderim suggested that the advisory function of the Queensland Veterans' Council is ascribed less importance in this bill than its other two functions—administering the Anzac Day Trust Fund and Anzac Square. On the contrary, this function is given equal weighting to the other two functions provided to the council in this bill.

The member for Burnett and other opposition members suggested in their contributions to the debate that members of the Queensland Veterans' Council should not be remunerated. This body will administer a million dollar trust fund, will be responsible for the day-to-day management of Queensland's premiere war memorial located in the heart of Brisbane's CBD and will be responsible for the incredibly important task of advocacy to government on issues facing veterans. Any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest for members of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be identified and managed in the public interest consistent with existing Queensland government policy.

In conclusion, the Queensland Veterans' Council will allow veterans an unprecedented amount of control over the functions of the Queensland Veterans' Council and in particular providing advice to government on veterans matters in this state. The bill builds on the government's commitment to the welfare of Queensland veterans and the advocacy of their affairs as well as our commitment to maintaining Queensland's monuments to their service and sacrifice. I commend the bill to the House.