



Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2021

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Building and Construction Commission, Hickman, Mr A

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (2.15 pm): During the recent estimates hearing, the Minister for Public Works made an emphatic statement that neither he nor his staff nor the Board of the QBCC interfere in the daily operations of the QBCC. He repeated that assertion today during question time. I contend that this statement is misleading and patently false.

Over the last few months, both current and former employees of the QBCC, hardworking and honest people, have said enough is enough. Some are restrained in what they can say because of legal restrictions in their contracts, some are afraid to speak out for fear of repercussions, and some have been brave enough to speak out publicly.

One of the latter is Graham Easterby, former licensing manager of the QBCC. He is also a former federal police officer and qualified carpenter, has had 10 years with Queensland Health and is a current QUT lecturer. He is a man of great integrity who made public the details of his exit interview when he left the QBCC in utter frustration. I note that *Courier-Mail* journalist Anthony Marx referred to this in his weekend column—

Mr Easterby stated that one of the main reasons for his resignation was the 'inappropriate influence/directions given to carry out my role as issued through senior management from board members, including how to regulate safety matters, and the granting of licenses'.

One of the chief culprits with regard to board members interfering in the operations of the QBCC is Andrew Hickman. Hickman is also the Queensland President of the National Fire Industry Association, the NFIA, and the CEO of FVS Services Group. QBCC board member Hickman initiated, promoted and directed changes to the fire licensing regulation framework that directly benefit his industry association and his private business at the expense of hundreds of small fire protection businesses—unnecessary changes that will put hardworking Queenslanders out of work and at the same time drive up costs for consumers.

These small businesses have been ambushed by Hickman, aided and abetted by Minister de Brenni, and without any resistance from a cowardly, now former commissioner of the QBCC. What makes it more galling for these small fire protection businesses is that they provide more personal and effective services than FVS, which has been accused of double-charging, charging for services not done and completing work that is not compliant.

To complete this ambush, these changes to regulations—changes that will make absolutely no difference to fire safety—compel currently qualified QBCC fire protection workers to upgrade their qualifications. Guess where they have to go to get these upgrades? The Services Trade College, which is wholly owned and run by the National Fire Industry Association and the Plumbers Union; in other words, the union's RTO.

Just this morning I was further informed by a small businessman who had to get four licence upgrades that courses which a few weeks ago cost \$6,500—that is bad enough—now cost close to \$19,000, but if you are a member of the NFIA it will be half that cost.

This is my 10th year in the Queensland parliament and this is the first time I have felt the need to use parliamentary privilege to expose what I believe is not just wrong but potentially corrupt. The crisis in the QBCC is wholly of Minister de Brenni's making. He has facilitated the undue influence of the board on the staff of the QBCC and the demise of hundreds of small businesses. In his exit interview Mr Easterby stated—

There has been conflicts of interest from Board Members for personal gain, requiring my team and I, to do licensing action against their competitors.

Because of these startling allegations the question to the minister is: will he admit that he misled parliament, and what action will the minister take to stop this corrupt behaviour?