




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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### **QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (2.53 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. First of all, I would like to recognise those members of this chamber who have served in the Defence Force and thank them for their service. I think it is important we do so. There are also several opportunities here that I think we have missed—opportunities to do more for veterans. It would have been good if we could have included some of those aspects. The board composition was an opportunity to ensure veterans' voices were ongoing and heard louder than just two out of eight.

Before I go any further, I want to recognise a couple of institutions and organisations in Toowoomba that look after our veterans, particularly the Toowoomba Legacy and the President, David Melandri. They have 394 beneficiaries in Toowoomba including 12 children. They do a great deal of work and their hundredth year is in 2023. I also mention the Highfields RSL branch, Russell Czynski and all of the ex-serving members out there who run that organisation. As that community grows they do a wonderful job to ensure it grows with a deep respect for the RSL. There is also the Toowoomba RSL President, Scott May, and Deputy President, Sheldon Rogers. I will come to some of the programs that the Toowoomba RSL is running that could be opportunities for government, both this government and also the federal government, to consider going forward. Toowoomba also has a proud history with the National Servicemen's Association being first established in Toowoomba, and the current president is Bill McMillan. Then there is the Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex Servicemen and Women with President Roland Thompson. These are just some of the organisations in Toowoomba that work with our veterans.

In particular, I want to talk about opportunities where things that have been happening with veterans could have been incorporated to a certain extent in this bill. We could have not just looked at the space—and I am not suggesting for a moment that Anzac Square is not a space that needs to be looked after; it absolutely is. It is a revered space and one that we must pay great respect to and maintain and look after. I am not suggesting that at all. However, the welfare of the individuals who have served is something that needs to be considered. I have a list of programs that is being worked on by the young veterans of Australia who have funded some of them for the Toowoomba RSL subbranch. One such program is budget endurance racing where veterans and active service personnel elaborate and race a budget endurance car. This helps them deliver mindfulness, teamwork and communication skills. It is teaching practical skills and psychosocial engagement. There are current serving members and veterans collaborating together on that project. It brings a level of engagement.

There is also a program called Veteran Adaptive Sport Toowoomba where veterans and veterans' families are able to access non-physical exclusive sports and recreation activities such as archery. Recumbent bicycles are introduced and wheelchair Rugby is being used as an example of how veterans of all abilities can gain an understanding and collaboration. Again, mindfulness is one of the key components, particularly for those veterans who have suffered an injury. I think that participating in wheelchair basketball with their able-bodied colleagues is something that they enjoy very much.

There is also a drone program whereby the Toowoomba RSL provides licensed training to veterans to gain licensing and accreditation to operate unmanned aerial vehicles in accordance with CASA guidelines. Again, this is all about providing employment opportunities for veterans. It also provides opportunities for them to not only use skills they may already have but also develop new skills. It can also help them transition into the community to bring about some of those employment opportunities.

There is another program called Skill at Arms. This is a collaboration with a rifle-shooting club to facilitate opportunities for Toowoomba based veterans to practise and retain their rifle skills. It has been very popular with the veterans. With the Olympics coming up, seeing some of those veterans' transition to various aspects of shooting that are in the Olympic category will be very useful. Again, this is all about trying to help the returned veterans get involved in the community and pursue activities. They have done some four-wheel drive trips with veterans and their families. Again, this is about getting a group together. They have driven out to Birdsville and back. It is about bringing those veterans together. I think that providing an opportunity for that social engagement, communication and just talking to each other has been very useful for them.

Something that happened back in March 2020, as the pandemic was coming on, was Flags on the Homefront, a really interesting program. As we know, many Anzac services were cancelled that year. The Toowoomba RSL put out the call for people who might want flagpoles constructed and then had a team of people go around and put flagpoles in people's front yards specifically so they could still have an Anzac service. I helped with one of those—I do not want to claim any more than that—but they put up a power of poles around the electorate.

Something else that is important and has been helping many veterans in terms of their welfare is their passion for military history. Obviously Anzac Square forms part of that military history, but I think it is very important that people are involved in projects where they are restoring historical objects, researching historical objects and writing some of that down for future generations to read and understand. Certainly in Toowoomba there is a proud history, particularly around Milne Bay and the Battle of Milne Bay, with the battalion from our region that was sent over to serve at that time. Again, it is a good program around the welfare of veterans.

Something that is unfortunately required—it is a program run by the Toowoomba RSL branch—is helping to organise and conduct funeral services for recently passed veterans, providing the veteran with dignity and their families with support as they deal with the passing of their veteran loved one. It is a program we all could support. These are just some of the programs that I think people in this place should be aware of. When we are contemplating things that affect veterans—whether it be their voting rights on a board or looking after Anzac Square, or whether it be to do with any of the memorials or other services—it is important that we remember that veterans are Queenslanders who answered the call to serve and served. When they get back, it is particularly our responsibility to provide a framework and an environment where their service can be honoured, their memory can be cherished and support can be given to help them transition back into Queensland society.

In particular, I want to talk about designing and advocating with local council for the delivery of a memorial to be located at Mothers' Memorial Park in Toowoomba to commemorate the service of Toowoomba veterans, both in peacetime and post war. Currently the program does not have any funding as the concept needs final local council approval. Mothers' Memorial used to sit in the centre of town but it was moved. At the time it was controversial, but the area it now sits on is a much revered area where people go to contemplate and commemorate the service of many of our veterans.