




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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ECONOMICS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (3.41 pm): I rise as a non-government member of the Economics and Governance Committee to speak to the report titled *Inquiry into the report on the strategic review of the functions of the Integrity Commissioner*. That review was undertaken by Mr Kevin Yearbury. In his report Mr Yearbury made 27 recommendations relating to three key areas: the Integrity Commissioner's advisory function to MPs and other designated persons; maintenance of the lobbying register; and the overall performance of functions and organisational requirements of the office.

At the outset I note that Mr Yearbury's report contained a number of concerning comments made by the outgoing integrity commissioner in relation to her role. In fact, when asked if the commissioner would support a royal commission into integrity issues in Queensland she said, 'I would support a commission of inquiry into various matters.' This is alarming. Despite a commission of inquiry in Queensland carrying with it the same protections as a royal commission, the government decided to play games and deny that the commissioner had called for one.

The commissioner's statement, together with several other comments she made during the inquiry, clearly indicates that more needs to be done to ensure transparency, integrity and accountability in Queensland. During the public hearing the commissioner provided some very concerning evidence including: the lack of resourcing prevented her from maintaining an independent confidential service; she could not guarantee that confidential information she held had not been compromised by a public sector entity; there was name-calling and bullying of the integrity commissioner by another senior officer; and she had concerns about the controls of the Integrity Commissioner's office resources, assets and phone records.

It is vital that the position and office of the Integrity Commissioner be truly independent, deeply respected and adequately resourced. The matter of resourcing was a particular focus of the inquiry and concern for committee members when it was revealed that the demand for advice from the Integrity Commissioner since the 2015 strategic review had increased by a massive 250 per cent.

During her 4½-year tenure, the outgoing integrity commissioner provided ethical advice on 954 occasions and advice on lobbying matters on 92 occasions. This compares with a total of 573 occasions over the course of the previous 17 years. These numbers are impossible to miss. It beggars belief that this unacceptable workload was ignored. Why did the Premier wait to hear from the legislated five-year strategic review to ensure the optimal functioning of one of the most important roles in parliamentary accountability?

The committee heard that the influence of lobbyists also concerned the previous integrity commissioner, particularly during election periods, which comes as no surprise. Even the CCC concurs that this period of time warrants extra oversight. While Mr Yearbury recommended more information

about the nature of meetings with lobbyists be included in ministerial diaries, a number of stakeholders raised concerns that the current definition of 'lobbyist' does not capture a large portion of the lobbying that takes place in Queensland.

Hawker Britton, a government relations firm, said the current system allows for failures of transparency and accountability as it does not cover a large system of engagement of in-house government relations specialists, unregistered consultants and a murkier category of government contracted consultants retaining external clients. The other problem of course is that lobbyists influence staff who can then influence ministers and nowhere is this information captured and required to be revealed.

Similarly, the Coaldrake review report titled *Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector* was released in June. While it was not considered in detail by this committee, it does outline similar issues raised by the former integrity commissioner. Unfortunately, the Coaldrake review fell short of being a commission of inquiry and therefore did not have the powers and protections needed to encourage public interest disclosures. However, it did report some similar concerns. Some of these concerns were: the influence of lobbyists on decision-making; the overreach of some ministerial staff and their lack of accountability; the erosion of functions designed to hold government to account such as the Auditor-General; and the increased use of outside consultants and the subsequent loss of capacity in the public service.

This is how Labor hide their con. Those opposite would have us believe that they have bolstered the public service, but we all know the biggest investment has been made in the Premier's spin doctor factory and not on bolstering the front line. We only have to look at the multiple crises gripping our police, paramedics, nurses and teachers for evidence of this. This tired third-term Labor government uses taxpayers' money to generate enough smoke and mirrors to fool Queenslanders.