




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (4.49 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Public Sector Bill 2022. On 28 June 2022 Professor Coaldrake delivered the landmark report, *Let the sunshine in: review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector*, the Coaldrake report, to the government. The report makes 14 direct recommendations and recommends implementation of a suite of other recommendations from former reviews and inquiries, all with the hope of strengthening the integrity and oversight framework in Queensland. Mr Kevin Yearbury's September 2021 report, *Strategic review of the Integrity Commissioner's functions*, the Yearbury report, also recommended a number of changes to the functions of the Integrity Commissioner. It is proposed to implement some of the recommendations from these reports through these two bills.

The objectives of the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 are to effect amendments to the following acts to better promote the independence and authority of the Queensland Auditor-General, the Queensland Ombudsman and the Queensland Integrity Commissioner. The bill also amends the Auditor-General Act 2009, the Ombudsman Act 2001 and the Integrity Act 2009. The bill also amends the Public Sector Act 2022. The proposed amendments which make those changes to legislation that are considered uncontroversial are largely supported by the respective integrity bodies they impact and do not have any or only very minor funding or policy implications for government. To better enhance the independence of the Queensland Auditor-General the bill will amend the Auditor-General Act to establish the Auditor-General as an officer of the parliament and introduce a requirement that the Auditor-General take an oath before performance of their duties. The Deputy Auditor-General will no longer be employed under the Public Service Act, but will be employed as if they were a member of staff of the Audit Office.

In keeping with these acts and also in this instance the Integrity Act 2009, the bill sets out the functions of the parliamentary committee as they relate to the Auditor-General. To further the objective and independence of the office, the bill will also restrict the employment of a person who has held office of Auditor-General upon the termination of that office so that the person may not hold an office in or be employed by a public sector entity within two years after the person stops holding the office. The bill did remove the obligation for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit at the request of the Legislative Assembly, but I understand some amendments are being moved to change that. All these amendments combine to create more independence and autonomy for the Auditor-General.

The bill amends the Integrity Act 2009 to provide that the Integrity Commissioner is not subject to direction in the way in which the Integrity Commissioner performs their functions or the priority to be given to the integrity issues. The bill also creates the Office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner which is controlled by the Integrity Commissioner. The bill provides that the officers of the Integrity Commissioner are subject only to the direction of the Integrity Commissioner. Consistent with the intent

of recommendation 7 of the Yearbury report, the bill amends the Integrity Act to remove the requirement for stated statutory office holders to provide a copy of their declaration of interests to the Integrity Commissioner. Declarations of interests still need to be provided to the relevant minister.

The bill introduces an offence for unregistered lobbying. A new section, 71A of the Integrity Act, provides that a lobbyist as defined in the act that is not a registered lobbyist must not carry out a lobbying activity for a third-party client. This prohibition goes to the heart of the requirement that lobbying be engaged in ethically and not with the promise of reward for success. Similarly, creating an offence for unregistered lobbying will encourage ethical lobbying and will underline the fact that lobbying can and does have a significant impact on the business of government. The public should be able to easily access information about who is lobbying government and this information should be up-to-date and accurate. The bill amends the Ombudsman Act 2001 to reduce the strategic review period for the ombudsman's office from seven years to five years as suggested in the Coaldrake report. This is consistent with the timing of the strategic review of the other integrity bodies.

With reference to the Public Sector Bill, the policy objective of this bill is to implement the public sector legislative reforms arising from the recommendations of an independent review of public sector employment laws by Mr Peter Bridgman titled *A fair and responsive Public Service for all*—the Bridgman report. The government commissioned this review, which was completed back in May 2019, to recommend changes to public sector laws, policies and procedures to ensure the Queensland public sector was fair and responsive, an employer of choice and a leader in public administration. It concluded there were significant issues in public sector employment laws and practices that required resolution to ensure a fair, responsive and inclusive public sector. The review made 99 recommendations for achieving these objectives. The government accepted all recommendations in full or in principle.

This government has been dragged kicking and screaming to admit they got it wrong and still then they hide behind the Public Service to attempt to absolve themselves of responsibility. These legislative reforms will go some way to restoring some sense of accountability, but the damage has been done and Queenslanders will not forget the dark days that have become the hallmark of the third-term Palaszczuk Labor government, a government in crisis, a crisis that was bubbling away long before COVID and it is now clear to Queenslanders that it has reached boiling point. The ongoing failure of this government to deliver the basic services that Queenslanders expect—health, housing, law and order, cost-of-living support—is now being replicated across nearly every portfolio.

To rub salt in the wound, the sheer arrogance of this government to accept responsibility for its failures and its lack of accountability and transparency has not been lost on Queenslanders. To stand up and announce reviews and inquiries does not absolve this government of its responsibility. The smoke and mirrors approach is wearing thin. While this legislative reform is welcome and long overdue, until the cultural integrity issues poisoning this government are fully exposed and ministers held accountable, Queenslanders' lack of faith and trust in this government will not be restored. We all hope and expect that the findings of all these reports and inquiries that have driven these legislative changes will trigger a new era of government accountability. While the LNP will not be opposing these bills, it is too little too late. Thank you.