




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.44 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Public Sector Bill 2022 and the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I am proud to be part of a government that is moving ahead with implementing milestone reforms that will strengthen the integrity of the Queensland government and make it fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world. These bills implement recommendations that have come out of the three recent reviews into Queensland's public sector and the state's integrity bodies. The Public Sector Bill implements the recommendations made in Peter Bridgman's public sector review titled *A fair and responsive Public Service for all*. Primarily, it puts into place the new Public Sector Act which will provide all Queensland public sector employees with a modern, simplified and employee focused legislative framework that will be more fair, inclusive and responsive to the needs of Queenslanders.

The Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill implements recommendations that were made in Peter Coaldrake's report titled *Let the sunshine in: review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector* and Kevin Yearbury's report titled *Strategic review of the Integrity Commissioner's functions*. The recommendations this bill introduces include amendments to promote the independence and the authority of the Queensland Auditor-General, the Queensland Ombudsman and the Queensland Integrity Commissioner.

Queensland's public sector employees do an incredible job every day keeping the vast machinery of government running smoothly. Whether they are firefighters, health staff at our local hospitals, teachers, customer service officers or police officers, they all have a crucial role to play in delivering public services that will help make the lives of Queenslanders better. I have been reminded, like many in this House, of the fantastic work they did in response to the extraordinary events over the past few years, like the COVID-19 pandemic and the floods earlier this year. They have shown agility and resilience in the face of some of the toughest situations we have seen. In fact, their performance leaves us in no doubt that they are quite the opposite of how the member for Mudgeeraba described them, when she referred to these regional public servants as 'duds'.

A government member: Shame.

Ms HOWARD: It was very shameful. In February and March this year, Ipswich faced devastating floods that caused damage to some 500 homes and left many people homeless. When the floods hit, our public servants were on the ground immediately—operating the community recovery hotline and setting up community recovery hubs in flood devastated areas like the one we had in Bell Street in Ipswich. The community recovery team were fantastic in helping Ipswich people apply for emergency grants and source emergency housing, and they worked together with local non-government organisations to deliver wraparound support services to help some of the most vulnerable members in

our community get through what was a very traumatic experience. All of the people who were evacuated to our evacuation centre found homes after the floods, thanks to the great work of the public servants in the department of housing.

Earlier in the year, Queensland experienced its first biggest COVID wave and our public health workers were ready to go—helping patients admitted to emergency wards, testing thousands of people at our fever clinics and running community vaccination hubs. There have been other challenges this year—like the housing and homelessness crisis which has seen the department of housing staff in Ipswich do an incredible job helping people and getting on top of many of the issues they are dealing with. There are other public sector employees in Ipswich—too numerous to mention here—who are also doing an amazing job serving the Ipswich community. I thank them for all of the good work they do. When I was standing for election in 2014, people were running across the street to tell me they were going to vote for me because the LNP had sacked them and they were looking forward to returning the favour.

The Palaszczuk government appreciates and respects the important work that public sector employees do in Queensland, and that is why we are implementing this Public Sector Bill. We accepted all 99 of the Bridgman review's recommendations in full or in principle because we are committed to a responsive and high-performing public sector, focused on integrity and improving the lives of Queenslanders. The bill extends the scope of the public employment legislation to include all public sector entities and to ensure that the principles of fairness and responsiveness are consistently applied to Queensland's broader public sector, not just its Public Service. This will ensure consistent application of public sector employment arrangements as well as include conversion mechanisms to maximise permanent employment in the public sector. It is so important to people who are dealing with cost-of-living pressures to have that certainty.

This government has a strong commitment to increasing employment security for all workers, including our public sector employees. Public sector employees who are secure in their jobs are better placed to innovate and give full and frank advice to government which helps maintain the integrity and responsiveness of government. Further, public sector employees are better able to serve Queenslanders knowing that the government of the day is not going to sack them or undermine them. Public sector employees want to go to work every day without having to worry whether or not their job is safe, and they want to go to work confident that the Queenslanders they help will be able to continue getting the services and support they need.

I would like to remind the House—I think quite a few people have reminded the House about this—that when the LNP were last in government under Campbell Newman they sacked 14,000 public servants across Queensland. You may not know that—14,000! Eighty-four of them were staff from the West Moreton Health Service. They also dismantled the Crime and Misconduct Commission, axing 26 staff, which weakened the CMC's capacity to pursue major crimes. It is not surprising that they did this, given the LNP has never appreciated the vital work our public sector workers do, and it is why you cannot trust the LNP when it comes to protecting public sector jobs. Maybe it is because they believe that public sector jobs are expendable and they can outsource the jobs to their private sector mates, or maybe they do not appreciate the frank and fearless advice that goes against their ideology. In any case, a diminished public sector is far less responsive to the needs of the public which leads to the people losing confidence in the government overall. We saw this really clearly when, after just one term, the government was kicked out in no uncertain terms.

In extraordinary times, like those we have experienced over the last few years, it is imperative that we have that responsive public sector that can pivot quickly and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. One of the important lessons during the COVID-19 response was that need for increased mobility in the public sector. This bill recognises that by creating a more flexible framework for temporarily mobilising public sector employees to other entities within and beyond the public sector.

We will ensure that strengthened measures are put in place to embed a culture of respect and inclusion in our public sector. It is important that these people feel safe and respected in their workplace. We know that mental ill health is a big issue and that many of the people who are experiencing it are people who work on the front line, and it is important that we honour that.

This bill will also support the statement of commitment to a reframed relationship to recognise the important role that public sector entities and employees have in supporting the government in reframing its relationship with First Nations people and improving cultural capability across the public sector.

The Coaldrake report informed part of not only the Public Sector Bill but also the integrity bill presented here today, along with Kevin Yearbury's 2021 *Strategic review of the Integrity Commissioner's functions*. Primarily the integrity bill's purpose is to strengthen and enhance the

independence of our state's integrity bodies—the Queensland Auditor-General, the Queensland Ombudsman and the Queensland Integrity Commissioner. Queenslanders must have the assurance that their government and public sector entities are working in the state's best interest and not for their own private gain.

It reminds me—and it is worth mentioning—that a lot of Ipswich people saw what happened in the former Ipswich City Council when a workplace culture became riddled with corruption risks and was allowed to operate unchecked for far too long. Several councillors and their staff used their positions of power for their own personal gain and, as a result, the community's confidence in their own council collapsed.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms HOWARD: I am talking about Ipswich people and what we have been through and what happens when integrity and transparency are left to fall by the wayside. Failures of integrity and accountability by the former Ipswich City Council resulted in numerous failures in governance, such as the council's disastrous attempt at the Ipswich CBD redevelopment, extravagant spending of ratepayers' money by councillors and staff on overseas junkets, and inappropriate relationships between the council and property developers. It is precisely why we need good integrity in government—and it is why it is imperative that we shine a light on our government and public sector entities—to ensure they remain fair, open, accountable and fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world.

Queenslanders rightly expect that the government and the public sector are working in their best interests all the time. While there is some cynicism of government these days, the fact remains that most of us still need government support in some form, especially during challenging times when people are at their most vulnerable. I am really proud that the Palaszczuk government and the public sector have always had Queenslanders' backs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters. I commend this bill to the House.