




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (2.36 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the cognate debate of the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Public Sector Bill. The Public Sector Bill finalises this government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Bridgman review in 2019. The provisions of this legislation will modernise the Queensland Public Service and strengthen support for employees.

The Palaszczuk government has always been a strong supporter of the Queensland Public Service. It works for and on behalf of all Queenslanders. It is committed to this government's focus on providing better services so that the people of this state can continue to enjoy their great lifestyle. As Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities I am humbled and proud of the work that the staff of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has conducted over the last few years, especially during the pandemic. It was during those difficult times that we developed the Agricultural Coordination Officers Working Group who worked closely with our local farmers and stakeholders to navigate those lockdowns, those biosecurity management plans, those border closures and worker shortages. DAF staff worked with industry on overseeing on-farm quarantine of Pacific Island workers, helping move produce from paddock to plate across this country. The work that DAF staff performed was truly inspirational.

This bill backs the wonderful men and women of the Public Service by, among other things, clearly defining the public sector and continuing key existing concepts such as 'public service' where relevant; creating a nation leading framework requiring chief executives of public sector entities, the Police Service and other entities to take steps to promote equity, diversity, respect and inclusion and strengthening accountability for and the oversight of those requirements.

This bill also reflects the government's stance on creating good jobs and job security. Queenslanders have a right to work and feel secure in their work. The provisions of this bill clearly specify that employment in the Public Service should be on a permanent basis unless other acts provide otherwise. It goes without saying that not everyone in the chamber is an ardent supporter of the Public Service. There are many on the opposition benches who were in cabinet when tens of thousands of staff were brutally retrenched, callously consigned to unemployment. Not only did those former employees suffer but also the people of Queensland suffered as the quality of the service dropped. In DAF alone 600 staff were made redundant. Biosecurity were cut by 26 per cent. The opposition speaks so highly about fisheries, but they cut 28 per cent of staff in the fisheries sector in Queensland.

It is good to follow the member for Southport because, in his contribution today, he clearly nailed his position and that of the LNP to the mast when he said that the Public Service needs a reset. That is code. All of us on this side of the chamber know that that is code for more dismissals should they ever end up in government. They are an alternative government. An opposition is known as the alternative

government. If they were ever placed in government and given control of the cabinet, we know what that code would stand for: more dismissals from within our great Public Service. By the time the LNP were done in 2015, they had a Public Service that was living in fear. You cannot have integrity in the Public Service when staff are in constant fear of losing their jobs, which is what awaits us if the member for Broadwater becomes premier. We know what he plans to do if he ever governs and that is to cut, sack and sell once again.

Thankfully, we have a government that backs our Public Service and, through this bill, provides a modern and equitable framework for public sector workers. As the Premier said in her introductory speech, the Palaszczuk government 'understands the importance of fairness, inclusion and security in public sector employment to ensure employees are supported in delivering frontline services to the community'. That is why this government commissioned the Bridgman report, which was the first independent review of Public Service laws in over 30 years. The Public Service Commission will be replaced by the Public Sector Commission, which will play a key role as the central human resources agency and, importantly, will drive that ethical Public Service culture.

I thank the Economics and Governance Committee, particularly the chair, the member for Logan, for their report on this bill and the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I note that a couple of the submissions that address both bills are from the Together union. Isn't it great that we have real unions supporting and submitting on bills before the House. By doing so they are advocating on behalf of workers and fighting for the protection of their rights. I have not heard or seen anything from those other organisations that purport to represent workers. Where are those anti-vax, anti-worker groups when the most significant reforms to the Public Service in a generation are being debated?

I also speak in favour of the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The government has always been committed to transparency. Where there is room for improvement we have and will act. This bill implements some of the recommendations of the Coaldrake report by enhancing the independence of the Queensland Auditor-General by making the position an officer of the parliament. It gives the Office of the Auditor-General the same status as other integrity offices such as that of the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner. It also brings the office in line with other jurisdictions across Australia.

The bill provides for the creation of the Office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner and ensures that neither the commissioner nor their staff can be directed to perform their work in any other way. This protects the independence of the office and that of the Integrity Commissioner. I note that this provision was supported by the Acting Integrity Commissioner in submissions to the Economics and Governance Committee.

This bill also introduces an offence for unregistered lobbying. This is all about ensuring that any lobbying in Queensland is done ethically and by registered parties. The integrity of the registered lobbyist system needs to be upheld so that information relating to lobbying activities is publicly available and accurate. This is about openness, transparency and giving the people of Queensland confidence that the business of government is done ethically.

I note that the Australian Professional Government Relations Association raised concerns about accidental or inadvertent unregistered lobbying. That involves people who might not understand the new rules and may be caught out as opposed to those who make systematic attempts to subvert the lobbying process. There will, of course, be some time for adjustment for everyone as these new rules are bedded down. I am comforted by the proposal of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, as outlined in the committee report, that they are looking at updating the existing lobbying register.

These bills implement the recommendations from the Coaldrake report to create a transparent and ethical public sector. As the Premier said in her introductory speech to the Public Sector Bill, driving this culture does come from the top. These bills set strong performance frameworks where the premier and the government of the day set clear expectations on performance and accountability. It is up to the chief executives of those departments to implement these expectations and the Public Sector Governance Council and the Public Sector Commission to ensure these standards and frameworks are maintained.

Going hand in hand with that is creating a stable, secure work environment for the hundreds and thousands of staff in the public sector. People are employed based on merit while also recognising the need to support equity, diversity and inclusion within the sector. We want a modern integrated public sector providing good jobs, a public sector committed to providing better services for Queenslanders and a public sector supporting our great Queensland lifestyle.

In the remaining few moments I want to comment on my department. During the lunch break I spent some time with department staff out the front of 43 George Street for a sausage sizzle to fundraise for a domestic and family violence refuge centre. That is the type of work that our honest and hardworking public servants do beyond their normal duties. They go above and beyond. They truly are

the salt of the earth. They are the type of employees who need to be respected, which is what the Palaszczuk government does day in, day out. We recognise the importance of our Public Service. We reward them appropriately. We give them encouragement, respect and also acknowledgement for the work they do, not only in their day-to-day jobs, from 8 am to 5 pm, but also in the work they do well beyond that, seven days a week. They are hardworking genuine people who deserve the recognition that only the Palaszczuk government gives them. This evening it gives me great pleasure to commend these bills to the House.