




Speech By
Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2022

INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise to make a short contribution in order to give other colleagues an opportunity to speak in this cognate debate. I will focus on the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and I acknowledge that the Public Sector Bill is also part of the debate.

This bill is cited as part of the government's response to the Coaldrake review into government integrity and the Yearbury review into the functions of the Integrity Commissioner and is the first of two integrity bills the government plans to introduce. By amending the Auditor-General Act 2009, the bill will establish the Queensland Auditor-General as an officer of the parliament. It will also increase independence by appointing staff under the Auditor-General Act 2009 rather than the Public Service Act. The Auditor-General will also be prevented from holding office or being employed by a public sector entity within two years of leaving office.

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 integrity issues. The Integrity Commissioner's staffers will be appointed by the commissioner, but the budget of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner will still be set by the government. The bill introduces an offence for unregistered lobbyists, but the Integrity Commissioner will not have the ability to investigate any lobbying issues identified. This 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 reviews of other integrity bodies.

The QAO noted that these were important first steps in implementing the Coaldrake review recommendation; however, concerns were raised about the fees charged by the Auditor-General which are currently approved by the Treasurer. The Coaldrake review supports the removal of the power of the Treasurer to set fees. The bill instead gives this power to the relevant parliamentary committee—that is, currently the Economics and Governance Committee. The committee may, however, consider the government's indexation rate and advice received by the Treasurer. In other words, the Treasurer still has a significant influence over the fees set by the QAO, diminishing its independence. The member for Mermaid Beach made the point that, at the end of the day, the vote goes to the government members of the Economics and Governance Committee, with the casting vote held by the chair of that committee.

These legislative changes are supposed to be the first tranche of reforms to come out of the Coaldrake review; however, there is no time line for full implementation. In fact, the parliament is only just now finalising the recommendations of the Bridgman review that was handed down years ago. The implementation of the Coaldrake review recommendations cannot wait for years. The Queensland Audit Office's concerns about the influence of the Treasurer on fees and charges by the QAO cannot be ignored. They fly in the face of the Premier's commitment to implement the recommendations lock, stock and barrel.

To summarise, as I mentioned earlier, Professor Coaldrake recommends removing the power of the Treasurer to approve the fees of the Queensland Audit Office. Instead, this bill gives the power to a parliamentary committee that the Treasurer can advise—that is, currently the Economics and Governance Committee. This bill is the first tranche of the Coaldrake review related reforms. The government has not committed when the full reforms will be implemented lock, stock and barrel. Will it take years to introduce further reforms as it has with the Bridgman review? This legislation is intended to make it look like it is acting on an integrity crisis that has gripped this government. It is a half-hearted effort. For example, where are the cabinet documents that the government promised to release within 30 days? Who does it think it is kidding with the way it introduced this legislation to make it look like the power of the Treasurer to influence the Audit Office through approval of its fees had been removed? This shows that this government has not changed. The government is only interested in maintaining its power.

Integrity issue after integrity issue have been cited by the Leader of the Opposition and others: the mangocube affair with Minister Mark Bailey's use of private email for official business and altering reports to remove comments damaging to ministers; the Jackie Trad saga with the purchase of a property near a Cross River Rail station and the use of public funds to fight the release of a CCC investigation; the Premier's Chief of Staff affair where \$267,500 was granted to a company associated with David Barbagallo and, when that was revealed, within weeks—in fact, it might have even been days—the Chief of Staff quickly resigned his position with the government; and changing the electoral system to the benefit of Labor. Who remembers that? We spoke about it earlier today—18 minutes notice to change the rules around the electoral system to benefit the government.

We then had Labor aligned lobbyists working out of 1 William Street during election campaigns. Once again, who could believe that this is actually happening? But we are in a Labor-led Queensland and this has to stop. This shows why a full commission of inquiry into the government's integrity crisis is needed. In closing, I thank our secretariat for the hard work that it has done on both of these reports. I will leave the Public Sector Bill for others to make comment on.