




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (4.16 pm): First of all, I would like to apologise to the people of Mermaid Beach for the limited time I have to talk to these two very important bills—just five minutes for each bill, when I should have had 20 minutes to go through all the matters that I wish to canvass here in my free speech. I will address some matters in the condensed time that I have available.

The first thing that we can deduce from the particular cognating of these two important bills is the fact that the government is just fiddling around the edges of the Coaldrake report and certainly the Bridgman review. Four years on and they have not done anything until Professor Coaldrake—not a known LNP supporter, mind you—has come forward and said that there is a bad culture in the Public Service under the current government members ruling the roost in Queensland. We have to answer Professor Coaldrake's assertions somehow for the media and they have come up with this tinkering around the edges in terms of integrity and Public Service behaviour towards the Public Service. I find that, yes, there are matters in there we certainly would like to support—and I will talk to the good matters that the member for Macalister raised in a moment—but the fact of the matter is this is here only for the media purpose—

Mr McDonald: Window-dressing.

Mr STEVENS: For the purpose of window-dressing—I take the member for Lockyer's advice on that. I will go straight to the Public Sector Bill in terms of the matters that the member for Macalister raised about the LGBTIQ+ group of people and being under-represented, if you like, in government public sector matters. We talked to the presenter from that particular area—I think she was from the Teachers' Union, as I recall—about how difficult it was. However, they have no data, and that is a major issue that the Public Service Commissioner needs to address in terms of getting proper data so that decisions can be made. When I asked the submitter how many, she said 20. We have, I think, about 60,000 teachers in Queensland. Unfortunately they need to get more data, perhaps through anonymous surveys—and there were issues with that as well—but certainly that is a matter worth pursuing.

It is supposed to be merit based, as per the New Zealand model. The concerns that were raised through the committee were about recruitment and training to get that particular group above other areas to match them in merit. That is a matter that we will have to address under the Public Service legislation if not now then sometime in the future.

I note there are amendments to be moved in relation to the ECQ and their determination to be excluded as a group from this bill. I note the famous Labor way of excluding it now, but what will happen in the future? I am sure that would be something that Mr Vidgen would be worried about because what we do not see is a review type of amendment. We have to keep the ECQ totally independent and any move to include them—instead of exclude them—in this Public Sector Bill would be a totally retrograde step in my view.

In terms of the integrity bill—and I am looking at my remaining time. That is my five minutes on the Public Sector Bill, thank you very much; I might get an MPI next sitting in the new year to catch up. The integrity bill also introduces an offence of unregistered lobbying. This is in relation to the Integrity Commissioner, who presented to the committee on numerous occasions. I can assure honourable members that the Integrity Commissioner, as we have noted through the public comments, has been a very upset Integrity Commissioner of Queensland. It is not a great track record and I am hoping that when the new Integrity Commissioner finally starts she will get a better deal in terms of being treated with respect and fairness by the government after the terrible experience that the previous integrity commissioner suffered. I say 'suffered' because she did. She was quite emotional in terms of her public comments and in terms of her approach. The fact that her offer to come back and talk to the parliament about matters she had raised was rejected by the government is a blight and hints at more covering up. In relation to the Coaldrake report, the Premier jumped up and said, 'We will do it lock, stock and barrel,' just like the old famous Fitzgerald inquiry, and yet they have not even pulled the trigger on it. This is just tinkering around the edges. Basically it is a media 'tart-up' to try to show that they are doing something about these sorts of issues.

In terms of the integrity issues in particular, the Audit Office was very concerned about the Treasurer controlling their capacity to charge a certain rate for the work they do. Obviously in terms of his important work—and he has been very astute in my view in terms of the work he has done for this parliament—it is not for us, it is not for the opposition; it is for the parliament and the Queensland people to say how this government is spending their money and how they are approaching different matters. He is very concerned that he will be controlled by the Treasurer—if not this Treasurer, perhaps another Treasurer at a future date and another auditor. What we have is sleight of hand, the pea and thimble trick that the Labor Party always gets up to where they say, 'We'll send it across to the portfolio committee.' I take it that will be the Economics and Governance Committee. That is a committee totally controlled by the Labor members with a chairman's casting vote. It is held in secret and there is no public information. It is like a Star Chamber and you cannot say anything. I am sure the Treasurer would be talking to the chairman of whichever committee it is at that particular time and giving him riding instructions on what he is to do with Audit Office fees.

That is just a nonsense. It is the pea and thimble trick again and it will still be under the control of the Labor government. I do not wash with any of their little tricks. Basically, the auditor will have the same issue he currently faces. Unfortunately, as members of that particular committee, we have to put up with it.

I really feel that whilst they are fiddling around the edges in some semblance of trying to address some of the Coaldrake recommendations, none of this will go anywhere. There is still the fear out there that this government controls the executive bureaucracy and the executive bureaucracy have all the other public servants living in fear of making the wrong decision or joining the wrong union. Those types of things that might actually—

Mr Saunders interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Maryborough, if you wish to interject, you will do so from your own seat. That is the only warning I will give you.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your protection from the member for Maryborough. He is a dangerous animal! I get terribly frightened by the member for Maryborough! I do appreciate your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker.

It is absolutely critical to the people of Queensland that the Public Service delivers a fair, open and unbiased view, not a particular spin view at the hands of the government of the day. I am saying not only now but also in 2024 when we take over we want the same independent advice from the Public Service and we will make the political decisions. That is what I have also said in my local government career. Did anyone know I was the mayor of the Gold Coast? I knew I would get that in somewhere. I told the engineer of the day who wanted to add political spin to something, 'You just give me the engineering facts. I will deal with the politics.' That is what we want from our Public Service: no fear, no favour, just great advice so that the government of the day can make proper decisions. The government of the day can spin it how they like, but what they need is the facts in an unbiased manner from the Public Service. According to the Coaldrake report, they do not have the confidence to do that now.