




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.08 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate of the Public Sector Bill and Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I am going to try to be super quick because there are still members who wish to speak and from my understanding the debate is going to be guillotined. On the surface the amendments are relatively minor. However, they have the capacity to deliver some important changes. Firstly, the Public Sector Bill 2022 implements stage 2 legislative reforms and gives effect to the 2019 Bridgman review's primary recommendation to provide all public sector employees with a modern, simplified and employee focused legislative framework.

To ensure that public sector employment arrangements are consistent, the bill amends a number of acts that regulate the employment of particular public sector employees. In addition, it establishes public sector employment conditions and arrangements, including those in relation to employment security, with universal application to all public sector employees within the scope of the bill. This is especially important for our teachers, nurses and other frontliners, with sadly a high percentage of our teachers continuing to leave the industry within five years of graduation. However, from my understanding, this bill will not address the reasons they continue to leave.

Submissions to the bill were overall supportive, with concerns, as already outlined and as we have heard, regarding that Queenslanders with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or intersex variations were omitted. However, the department responded that they would ask the Public Sector Commission to collect information to inform future policy directions.

This bill is a welcomed, needed and balanced approach for Queensland's incredible public servants. It gives the opportunity to move into that efficient, innovative space that has been sought. Let's be honest: we do have some issues and we need to be open about that without getting angry so that they can move into that space with the help of the Public Sector Commission.

However, I want to talk about what the benefits, protections and employment security are for similar positions or equal positions in the incredible private and not-for-profit sector, especially given the current disparities that already exist. Our not-for-profits provide a range of essential services including aged, palliative and disability care, and our small to medium businesses are the backbone of our communities. Within the Noosa region, these include tourism and related industries such as retail, accommodation and food and real estate services. These are labour intensive and a major driver of jobs and growth in our communities, contributing to Queensland's visitor economy with over 25 per cent of Noosa's workforce employed predominantly in part-time employment.

Furthermore, aged and disability care are crucial in our region. With the impact of COVID-19 on Noosa's key industries unprecedented, they are continuing to suffer extreme labour shortages through pay scale inequities and lack of affordable housing. Even pre COVID, many considered, and have, switched industries for more secure jobs and higher pay scales which exist in the Queensland Public

Service. The question is: how will the increasing disparity between the private and public sectors be resolved? These organisations and our small and medium businesses are left struggling to compete against tax funded positions that offer higher pay, security and benefits that are standard in the Public Service. This is inequitable, unfair and needs to be addressed. Yes, we know this is in the federal realm. However, we now have a federal Labor government, so let's see some further movement in this space.

I turn to the integrity bill, which proposes to implement some of the recommendations from the Coaldrake report, particularly around the independence of the integrity bodies of the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Integrity Commissioner. There were a handful of submissions, all of which were supportive. The role of parliamentary committees in relation to these integrity bodies is a vital one and was highlighted in the Coaldrake report. It recommended that 'the independence of integrity bodies in Queensland be enhanced by aligning responsibility for financial arrangements and management practices with the Speaker of parliament and the appropriate parliamentary committee, rather than the executive government'. This is an appropriate and welcome recommendation to address what has been a number of concerns from Queenslanders and MPs.

However, how would this be implemented? Funding arrangements would need to be coordinated with the budget process, Treasury would need to brief the committees on any relevant budget parameters and the committees would need to investigate and provide advice to the Treasury for incorporation into the budget. Similarly, the appointment of the head of an integrity body should be referred to the committee. Importantly, committees should be vested with a power to initiate investigations and reviews of integrity bodies as the Public Sector Bill proposes for government to do so they can perform their oversight role properly, as the current arrangements are insufficient to deliver the responsibility and accountability expected.

With the Clerk of the Parliament acknowledging during this year's estimates hearings that we have a long way to go with respect to accountability and the work of the committees, implementing the above, as well as undertaking the requested review of the current committee and estimates processes, will see the desperately needed improvements that have been sought now by Queenslanders and MPs for some years. We have raised this now many times. Yes, all of this requires an increase in resources to parliamentary committees given the burden of existing workloads and rushed time frames for inquiry. However, the outcome will align with community expectations and put to bed any existing concerns.

Thank you to the ministers, committees and their secretariats for their work with these bills, as well as to all submitters. Thank you to all of our public servants because we get to work with them every day. Thank you also to the workers in the private and not-for-profit sector for it is they who make sure Queenslanders have what they need every day. I commend the bills to the House.