




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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MAJOR SPORTS FACILITIES AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (2.30 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Major Sports Facilities Amendment Bill 2022. As the minister mentioned, Stadiums Queensland is the authority responsible for managing, operating, using, developing and promoting facilities in Queensland, and those facilities do include some of the most iconic stadiums not only in Queensland but also in the country. We have the Gabba, Suncorp Stadium, Queensland Country Bank Stadium in Townsville, Cbus down the coast, Metricon Stadium at Carrara, the Brisbane Entertainment Centre, Queensland Tennis Centre, Sleeman Sports Complex, and also the Queensland Sports and Athletics Centre at Nathan. Do we still have Stockland Stadium? Is it the 10th?

Mr Hinchliffe: It is being divested.

Mr MANDER: It is being divested. So it is probably officially still with Stadiums Queensland?

Mr Hinchliffe: At this point in time.

Mr MANDER: Thank you, minister.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr MANDER: The reason I sought that clarification—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Order! Through the chair, please.

Mr MANDER: The reason I sought that clarification is that all the websites talk about the 10 facilities. I counted many times and there were nine. I assumed the other one was Stockland.

Mr Walker: It is like a tackle count.

Mr MANDER: I will take that interjection, actually, because it is a perfect segue to what I want to mention next. That is, I have a unique perspective on many of these stadiums because I have had a personal experience with most of them. Most of them are very non-controversial. Most Queenslanders are Rugby League fans, because Rugby League runs in our blood. My earliest memories of football was going to Lang Park. I think I can remember going there in 1970 and I said to my dad, 'Dad, which side are we going for?' He said, 'We are going for the red and black, the West Panthers.' We went through those glory days of 1975-76 and sliding down the old hill behind the outer, the hot chip shop which was just fantastic, getting up there on the scoreboard so that every time they went to the scoreboard, as a kid I waved so I could go home that night and show Mum that I was there. Those are my earliest memories of Lang Park.

The redevelopment of Lang Park was a decision that I fully supported—and I know it was quite contentious at the time with the Beattie government, and from memory I think it was about \$240 million or \$230 million—because it is very important that our premier stadiums are up to world standards. It is more than just a financial cost benefit. There are many benefits to having great stadiums. You will not understand the machinations of the NRL, but when you are a Rugby League referee—

Government members interjected.

Mr MANDER: Let me give you some insight. As a Rugby League referee you never ever ask for a game; you are just told what to do. I refereed in 14 seasons of first grade and I asked for one game. I went to the head of the referees at the beginning of the 2003 season and I said, 'Please give me the opening game at the redeveloped Suncorp Stadium.' I was the only Queensland-based referee and I was very fortunate enough to be given that appointment. It was unfortunately a bad day for the Broncos; Newcastle flogged them. There was a bit of controversy about the surface: it was a little bit sandy, to say the least.

Mrs Frecklington: What about the referee?

Mr MANDER: The referee was outstanding—no controversy whatsoever! Referees like one-sided games; there is never any contention—not that we make that happen! I have some very good memories of Suncorp Stadium that go back to when I was a child. When I go to Townsville—I have never refereed at the new stadium, which is one of my regrets. I would have loved to have refereed for another 10 years so I could do that, but my body would not be able to take it physically. However, I did referee the very first Cowboys game at Stockland Stadium when they played Canterbury. That was a big night. Fantastic—

A government member: You would have been surrounded by Cowboys supporters.

Mr MANDER: I will explain that. I cannot go into the full details of this because there will be a corruption inquiry if I do, but it was a very important game because it was the Cowboys' first game. The authorities were pretty conscious that they wanted them to be competitive. I will not say what was said to me before the game, but anyhow, in the eighth minute of the game, I sent off Adrian Vowles, the Cowboys home player, which was not really a great thing for the game, to send somebody off in the first eight minutes of their first game. The Canterbury players had to watch out because I was looking for someone else to send off, and Jason Smith came to the party and 12 minutes later I sent him off, so that was great, and we had 12 players each side. I have great memories of Stockland Stadium.

The Gold Coast is interesting. I refereed all versions of the Gold Coast whether it was the Chargers, the Giants or the Seagulls. Of course, they played at Carrara in my day and, before that, at Seagulls Stadium. What has happened there now at Metricon is an unbelievable transformation and a fantastic stadium. On one occasion I went down there to watch the Aussie rules. Hang on, I have these mixed up. Cbus is the Rugby League stadium and Metricon is for Aussie Rules, of course. I have only video refereed at Cbus. You might not have known, but I refereed 293 first-grade games and I video refereed another 200, so—

Mr McDonald: How many Origins?

Mr MANDER: I will not take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. They were good experiences. One of the other ones which was great experience was when the Queensland Sports and Athletics Centre was actually ANZ Stadium. ANZ Stadium, you might remember, was the home ground for the Broncos for some years.

I still remember a very famous incident there—famous in my mind—when I was actually the reserve referee and I was watching the game from the video box which is right up high in the stadium. There is a very old lift in that stadium. The referee on the field did a calf muscle and I thought, 'Holy moly, I've got to get down to the field!' They are all treating the referee and then what seemed like an eternity waiting for the lift to go from the very top floor down to the bottom. However, you do not go down to the bottom floor, you go to the mezzanine floor and you have to go out of the stadium.

By this time the commentators were all wondering, 'Where is the reserve referee?' I came down and I had a tracksuit which was not like a traditional tracksuit—it was a grey sort of thing which looked like normal clothes. The commentators saw me running down through the grandstand and thought I was in the crowd having a drink and eating a pie and they thought, 'Thank goodness Tim Mander is here to watch the game because he is here on board to referee the game!' It was the greatest ovation I ever received when I ran onto the field when they realised that a referee was there. At the end-of-year Grand Final Breakfast, where they have a bit of fun with the year past, they had this little video clip of me running down the grandstand onto the field and then they superimposed a telephone box making out I was like Superman, and I went into it and then I came out with my referee gear on. It was quite funny.

These were some of my experiences with the facilities managed by Stadiums Queensland. There are some very fond memories. I also have been to all these other centres, whether it was for the Commonwealth Games to watch the weightlifting at the Sleeman Sports Complex or the Queensland Tennis Centre which is fantastic or the Brisbane Entertainment Centre where I have seen some great concerts—not to mention Bob Dylan six or seven times. They were all great experiences.

I now turn to the substance of the bill. How did this bill come about? In 2018 the Queensland state government established the Stadium Taskforce to address concerns raised by some—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MANDER: That took a whole 10 minutes. The Stadium Taskforce was set up to address concerns raised by some of the hirers of major sporting facilities in the Stadiums Queensland portfolio including issues related to the operation of venues, costs related to venues, particularly those located outside of Brisbane, costs of government services and venue infrastructure needs.

The final report was provided to the government on 28 November 2018. I know there is a bit of familiar ring about this, but it is now just one month short of four years since the government received that report and yet just now we are finalising all those recommendations—over 50-odd recommendations. Most did not need legislative change, but some did, which is why we are here today. To keep the Rugby League theme going and to quote Benny Elias, it feels like déjà vu all over again. It was only yesterday we were debating the Racing Integrity Bill and how it took four or five years to act on. We have seen that pace again with how long it has taken the government to act on this particular bill.

The objectives of the bill are: to implement the recommendations of that task force and to modernise the legislation behind the statutory body. I totally agree with that principle. It is important that these bodies are agile and flexible and have appropriate authority delegated to them so they can act in a timely way to take advantage of situations. The bill has my full support because of that.

There were absolutely no submissions whatsoever. I do not know what we can take from that. Perhaps the bill was so straightforward that nobody was opposed to it. For that reason and the reasons I have just mentioned, the opposition will not be opposing the bill.

Mr Hinchliffe: Such a good minister.

Mr MANDER: He is such a good minister. He is the second best racing minister, according to the racing minister. That is questionable, but we will put him in the top 10.

A government member: You're acknowledging it.

Mr MANDER: I said according to the racing minister. Later in my contribution I will raise some failings of the government in this space. Firstly, I want to address the contents of the bill.

The bill amends the Major Sports Facilities Act 2001, which established Stadiums Queensland as a statutory body whose functions are to manage, operate, use, develop and promote major sports facilities in Queensland. Stadiums Queensland is governed by a board which is responsible for the overall corporate governance of the authority which has portfolio responsibility for major sports facilities declared under the Major Sports Facilities Regulation 2014.

The explanatory notes of the bill detail 12 points which set out how the government intends meeting its objectives, as I mentioned earlier. I will not go through these chapter and verse—the minister has mentioned most of them—but I will mention a few.

The bill will amend the powers stipulated in the Major Sports Facilities Act 2001 to allow the responsible minister to deal with property in lieu of Governor in Council. This gives great authority to the minister. It will allow the responsible minister rather than Governor in Council to approve the acquisition of a sports, recreation, entertainment or event/exhibition facility. It says that the minister may give Stadiums Queensland a written direction about the performance of its functions or the exercise of its powers. The minister gave some examples of that. Of course, the upcoming Olympics and Paralympics are classic examples of how we want these stadiums to be used.

It will allow Stadiums Queensland to have more flexibility to use the facilities beyond their normal use. I see one of the examples is the childcare centre at Metricon. I think it is important that our facilities are used as much as possible and are not just sitting there to be used once a week or every couple of weeks. The facilities should have a whole range of different uses if that is appropriate. The amendment will also specify the skills and experience required for individuals to be appointed to the board. As I said, we have no issue with these changes or the majority of the provisions in the bill.

There was one thing that did catch my eye which raises a few questions. The statutory minimum number of yearly board meetings for Stadiums Queensland is to be reduced from at least 12 times a year to at least nine times a year. I am not sure what signal it sends that as we move into the period leading up to the Olympics we are asking one of the major bodies that is responsible for stadiums to meet less regularly. I do not think that is necessarily a positive look. I am not sure whether that has anything to do with the remuneration. I notice the report said board members were not remunerated as much as those in other states. I do not know if the solution was to make them work less but keep the same pay. I do not think that is a good signal. We have less than 10 years to get ready for the games and it is important that not only are we working hard but also it appears we are all working very hard to make sure our stadiums are ready for that particular major event in 2032.

We are yet to see a really clear and coherent plan for sporting venues for the 2032 games. We are also yet to see a plan for the associated infrastructure required to support the games. In fact, it remains totally absent. There is a major cloud over the Gabba redevelopment in terms of the practicality of the proposed refurbishment and the cost. Back in 2018 the task force noted that the Gabba may one day form part of the Olympic bid. Recommendation 5.5 of the interim report states—

Enhancements to the Gabba be made in conjunction with stadium access improvements delivered through the Cross River Rail project and any potential 2032 Olympic bid.

For some time the government has been planning a Gabba refurbishment if it won the games. The original cost that was made public was a billion dollars. Now the speculation is that that could not only double but possibly triple to around \$3 billion.

I see that the previous federal government committed to fifty-fifty funding for this project and the running of the games. I heard nothing last night from the federal Labor government about funding for the Olympic Games. I also question what sort of planning was done when this initial announcement was made. The billion dollar figure seems to have been plucked out of the air. Many people are concerned about what the investment for the Gabba refurbishment may be when it could be up to \$2 billion or \$3 billion. All that for a paltry extra 8,000 seats! It does not seem to have fantastic economies of scale.

There are serious questions to answer about the announcement made regarding the Gabba, the government's ability to put a proposal forward, the government's ability to cost this properly and, of course, the government's ability to actually deliver this. This has basically been presented as the centre legacy piece of the 2032 Olympic Games. That is of major concern. Thank goodness the Labor Party will not be in government after 2024 and we will be in control of those types of operations. No matter what happens during the next two years we will be able to bring that back on track again.

It is really important that this is done right. The Olympic Games is a fantastic opportunity. It is why there has been bipartisan support from the very beginning for the Olympic Games. I think the benefit to the state is just enormous. The catalyst for growth in relation to infrastructure support, particularly with transport, is something we are really hoping we can produce for Brisbane residents so these games can be the best games ever convened.

The starter's gun has fired for the Olympics. It is important that groups like Stadiums Queensland are positioned to be able to respond. I am concerned about how horrifically slow it was to bring this about. I am concerned about the government's record in delivering on major events in a timely and cost-effective way. It is time for the government to get on with it. The LNP will not be opposing the bill.