



Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**


**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

---

Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Government Accountability**

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (7.18 pm): It was once widely accepted that functioning democracies contain five main defences against tyranny: a parliament with a real opposition capable of holding the government to account; an independent and accountable public service; an independent and nonpartisan judiciary; an independent and questioning press, prepared to confront all forms of power; and independent and disinterested universities. Whether any of these protections exist in their proper form today is questionable.

I suspect that if we were to ask most people in government now, they would argue that such checks and balances are little more than obstacles in the way of efficient, what-works governance. I think they are wrong. I still believe in the role of parliament in holding governments to account and providing transparency to the people. It is the legitimate role of the opposition and crossbench members to provide transparency to the whole process of governing and much needed alternative viewpoints.

Today, however, opposition and crossbench MPs are given very little opportunity for scrutinising all the laws that are being passed, whether through parliament or via delegated executive powers. Most MPs, particularly those on the crossbench, have little time or capacity to police the vast amount of discretionary power the executive has awarded itself, under permissive legislation in recent years—much of it done with almost no parliamentary scrutiny or debate. This makes accountability and transparency very difficult to achieve. This is a situation that is seriously undermining the foundational principles of our democratic and legislative process.

There are a number of mechanisms, however, that if their existing shortcomings could be fixed would go a long way towards strengthening parliament's ability to apply accountability and scrutiny to government. An overhaul of the state's freedom of information legislation is one such avenue, followed by similar overhauls of all laws dealing with government secrecy, commercial-in-confidence deals and the misuse of gag clauses. Currently, there is no real commitment to the principles of such legislation within the ranks of government or the Public Service—a powerful arm of executive government.

Other suggestions include widening the Ombudsman's powers or legislating the establishment of an oversight committee, chaired by crossbench members on a rotational basis. Other mechanisms worthy of consideration would be a public works committee, a public accounts committee and the creation of a beneficial owner register in Queensland.

Finally, there needs to be much greater tolerance of political dissent and a commitment to free and open debate in parliament.

**Mrs McMahon:** When you turn up.

**Mr ANDREW:** I am always here. Go and find me not here. I take that interjection from the member for Macalister. The executive branch of government has enormous powers and a measure of restraint about their use is crucial. Respect for individual autonomy is another necessary feature of responsible government. I am away working.