




Speech By
Adrian Tantari

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (4.38 pm): I rise to speak to the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. In doing so, I will address the bill at large and not the ramblings and rubbish that we have heard from speakers opposite. When the committee held hearings, the majority of the witnesses clearly indicated that they were in support of what this integrity bill is about.

The bill extends the commitment by the Miles government to progress public sector integrity reforms. It follows the passage through this House of the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. That bill implemented a number of reforms from the Coaldrake report, *Let the sunshine in*, and the Yearbury report, *Strategic review of the Integrity Commissioner's functions*. The Coaldrake report was the product of a review focused on culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector, and it included recommendations to strengthen integrity and oversight in Queensland. The Yearbury report was the result of a five-yearly review of the functions of the Integrity Commissioner and recommended proposed changes to the functions of the Integrity Commissioner and supporting organisational arrangements and regulatory provisions. This second bill is now required to implement the outstanding recommendations of the Coaldrake and Yearbury reports to strengthen the regulation of lobbyists and lobbying activities, amongst other things.

I was a member of the Economics and Governance Committee that reviewed the bill. The committee considered advice from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Public Sector Commission and detailed feedback from stakeholders that provided 16 submissions and held a public hearing in August. The committee heard from submitters including the Queensland Integrity Commissioner, the Australian Professional Government Relations Association, the Property Council of Australia, the Queensland Council of Social Service, the Queensland Law Society, the Queensland Audit Office, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Generally, they were in support of the measures designed to increase and improve the regulation of lobbying activity. However, some submitters took issue with various aspects of the provisions, including the definition of what is and is not a lobbying activity, and the application and requirements for registration.

There was also general support for measures to enhance the independence of identified statutory integrity bodies and to enhance integrity body independence via committee involvement in funding proposals, integrity body appointments, strategic reviews and the tabling of reports. There were some conflicting views on the expansion of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction over non-government organisations and other provisions of contracted government service delivery, although the underlying principle of accountability in the delivery of all government services was supported.

The bill will make amendments to the Auditor-General Act, the Ombudsman Act, the Right to Information Act, the Integrity Act and the Crime and Corruption Act 2001. The core features of the bill include increasing regulation of lobbying activity, amending the conditions for registration as a lobbyist, introducing a prohibition on registered lobbyists, enhancing the independence of core integrity bodies, enhancing the jurisdiction of the Queensland Ombudsman, establishing the Office of the Queensland

Integrity Commissioner as a statutory body and clarifying the trusts that the Auditor-General is required to audit. It is interesting that the former speaker said that this bill did not go far enough, because that list is extensive. I am really struggling to understand what the former speaker was talking about.

The bill proposes to enhance core integrity bodies' legislation to give relevant parliamentary committees greater involvement in the governance decisions for those integrity bodies. That will include parliamentary committees agreeing to the recruitment process, remuneration and a number of other issues. The bill provides that where a committee approved funding proposal is altered during a budget consideration the relevant portfolio minister will be responsible for tabling a response, including the reasons for the alteration. These measures seek to balance the need to enhance the independence of integrity bodies while not placing a significant administrative burden on parliamentary committees. The bill will also expand the Queensland government's functions under the Ombudsman Act to include non-government service providers where the providers are contracted to deliver public services on behalf of government, in line with the Coaldrake report recommendations.

These issues relate to the very heart and soul of democracy and are the bedrock upon which our state functions: the concept of integrity in governance. Queenslanders deserve nothing less than a governance model that is transparent, just and free from undue influence. The bill amends the Integrity Act 2009 to enhance the regulation of lobbying activities, as I said earlier, as recommended by the Coaldrake and Yearbury reports. Core definitions will be strengthened, situations where conflicts of interest arise due to lobbyists performing roles for political parties will be regulated, and the regulation of lobbying activity will be clarified and strengthened.

With regard to professional lobbying activities, this government has a record of ensuring that those activities are managed and performed with the utmost transparency. Let us be clear: in essence, lobbying can be a beneficial activity. It provides a channel for industries, interest groups and citizens to voice their concerns and interests to those who shape policy and legislation. However, like all powerful tools, if misused it can corrode our democratic system. In times past, we have witnessed instances where lobbying has strayed from its noble purpose. Instead of representing genuine interests, some have wielded it as a weapon of undue influence to shape policies not for the common good but for a privileged few. That is not the Queensland we aspire to. Strengthening the integrity of lobbying activities is not just desirable; it is imperative. This bill takes the necessary steps to ensure that the Queensland people are fully informed and aware of the actions taken by those professional groups, to ensure the utmost transparency in dealing with the government that serves on the behalf of Queenslanders.

Consistent with the Coaldrake report, the definition of 'lobbying activity' has been broadened to include all those who attempt to influence government decision-making. The definition of 'lobbyist' has been removed as the intention is to capture the activity rather than the individual. Chapter 4 of the Integrity Act is structured to assist in understanding in what circumstances lobbying activity should be registered in the renamed lobbying registry. Notably, the bill introduces a prohibition on registered lobbyists performing a substantial and senior role in a Queensland state election campaign for a political party. They can give advice or act as a lobbyist but they cannot do both.

Democracy is not a spectator sport. It thrives when we are vigilant, informed and engaged. Queenslanders have always prided themselves on a sense of community and a shared purpose. In conclusion, tightening professional lobbying activities and enhancing the independence of core integrity groups is not merely a legislative action; it is a commitment to transparency and fairness. It is a commitment to every Queenslander, ensuring that their voice, regardless of wealth or influence, is valued equally. When dealing with integrity legislation in Queensland, we must remember that the aim is to foster a culture of integrity for the people of Queensland. I congratulate the Miles government for the passing of these integrity laws, ensuring that this will be the case. It will be interesting to see how the LNP choose to frame their argument for integrity. It is very clear from what we have heard—

Ms Richards: Their runs are on the board.

Mr TANTARI: Their runs are absolutely on the board. We have lists of the areas of integrity that were slashed and burned under their last government. It will be interesting to hear what their next speakers will talk about with regard to how they define integrity in this state, which is well and truly documented for all to see.

Finally, I acknowledge the work of the Economics and Governance Committee in reviewing this bill and the committee secretariat for the great support they give to the committee in its work and in producing the report. I also acknowledge the former premier for introducing the bill and enhancing integrity in governance by writing into law the recommendations of Coaldrake and Yearbury. I support the bill.