




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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## **INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (5.20 pm): I rise to make a contribution to this bill, which has the primary purpose of progressing public sector reforms that came from Professor Coaldrake's report *Let the sunshine in: review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector*, which was released in June last year. This sunshine is vital for Queensland. As a unicameral parliament with no scrutiny from an upper house, it is the public conduct and integrity agencies, as well as the committee system, that take on key roles in the oversight function of government. Queenslanders should know how decisions are made and how policies are implemented and be assured that governments act with transparency and integrity.

This bill has three main components. The first is changes to lobbying laws that broaden the definition of lobbying activity to include all activities that attempt to influence government decision-making. This is welcomed. Amendments to the Integrity Act introduce a prohibition of dual hatting so that registered lobbyists will not be able to perform a substantial role in a political party during an election campaign. Greater powers are also provided in the bill for the Integrity Commissioner to manage noncompliance by lobbyists through allowing, for example, the commissioner to require training as part of registration and to issue compliance warnings and show cause notices. These changes were broadly supported by submitters, including the Australian Lawyers Alliance and the Australian Professional Government Relations Association, although they felt the power for the Integrity Commissioner to issue directives to a lobbyist on any matter was too expansive.

The second component is that the bill expands the Queensland Ombudsman's jurisdiction to include non-government entities providing services on behalf of government agencies. This allows the Ombudsman to investigate administrative actions taken by these entities and put forward recommendations. The bill makes the Integrity Commissioner an independent body for the purpose of the financial management act and associated legislation, providing the commissioner with greater independent control of the funds issued to them, which is good news.

The Queensland Council of Social Service raised concerns with the expansion of the Ombudsman's powers as it was not clear how wideranging the power is, with NGOs already being rigorously regulated. However, the committee in its report commented on the need for government to inform NGOs precisely about their obligations in this regard when they work with government.

The third component is that the bill implements changes to funding for integrity agencies and the appointment of agency heads via our committee system, and this is where I have a problem. For appointments, the bill makes two changes. The relevant parliamentary committee must approve the selection process for the agency head and then the appointment of the agency head. For funding, the bill provides that an agency can make a submission to that committee for approval, change or rejection and forward to Treasury to decide. Given that under our current flawed system government ultimately controls committees, these small changes mean the government will still control the agency funding

and the appointment of heads. Almost no real power has been transferred to committees. The integrity agencies themselves reinforced this. The Auditor-General said—

I am greatly concerned that the recommendations made by Professor Coaldrake will add to this list—  
of recommendations—

... if not fully actioned by government. By not ensuring the ongoing independence of the Auditor-General from the executive government, it limits the very nature of the independence, real or perceived.

The Information Commissioner seconded this view, saying—

... I consider that the Bill does not go far enough to fully address the specific recommendations made by Professor Coaldrake.

This bill is in direct contrast to Coaldrake's full recommendation—

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.

In addition, he also said—

... public faith is lost when there is not a serious attempt by governments to work with Opposition to make appointments which have bipartisan concurrence if not outright support.

This is not acceptable and furthers the issues I have been raising regarding the current committee system, and we continue to fight to have these reviewed as it is integral to a transparent and mature oversight mechanism. At a time when bipartisan agreements are essential more than ever to move beyond the combative focus of the chamber, the fact that we are not addressing this clearly demonstrates the flaw in all of our systems.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the minister and departmental staff and the committee and secretariat for conducting this inquiry into the bill. As well, I thank all stakeholders for their submissions and attendance at the public hearing.