




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 30 April 2024

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Democracy

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.35 pm): Democracy is very much a matter of public interest, especially when Australia continues to slide down global rankings in democratic performance. In 2023, in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, we were equal 14th with Uruguay, below all of the Nordic countries and New Zealand. Queensland contributes to this poor performance by the issues I have raised on a number of occasions on key components for an effective democracy, which includes an independent review of public sector capabilities as the just released Even Better Public Sector for Queensland Strategy 2024-28 does not recognise or acknowledge major issues including that the housing crisis could have been avoided by having forecasting capacity and that the fallout from COVID-19, such as failing mental health across our state and unsustainable demands on our policing and health systems, could have been foreseen and provision made for them. The recent QAO report No. 4 on police resources highlights what I raised in a previous estimates hearing regarding demand modelling. As I have raised previously, we need to reform the committee system and the estimates process, including the Business Committee, which is constraining debate through sheer volume at the moment. We need to sit later or for more weeks to restore the right of all members to have their contributions heard.

When researching other unicameral chambers to see why they were performing better than Queensland, including in obtaining necessary bipartisan agreements that move beyond a political term or party, I was told that our issue was immaturity. Sadly, what Queenslanders are seeing and why they are so frustrated is that we are not maturing as we should. Instead, there is a reliance on media grabs, misinformation and fearmongering in our politics and election strategies. This diminishes trust. Last sitting I asked both sides of the chamber to support ending practices that hoodwink Queenslanders yet only the crossbench voted for greater transparency. Australia is one of the only advanced democracies where parties are completely exempt from privacy legislation, which is so wrong and must be addressed.

I have asked for integrity and credibility in the run-up to the next election but again, sadly, no. Two weeks in a row, a candidate in my electorate has been misinforming my community, first by saying that the future of our hospital is uncertain, which is incorrect. The slowness of renegotiating the lease to accommodate the expansion of the emergency department has been the issue, not that an extension or new lease would not occur. Secondly, after the interim report into youth justice reform was released, I asked both sides of the House to get on with committing to the recommendations and stop the politicking out of respect for all, including victims. Again, no. The same candidate in my community is broadcasting falsehoods, including that it was Labor that had delayed, stalled or blocked that report, which is incorrect. How can Queenslanders ever trust any member of the parliament or a political party when that type of behaviour continues?

As requested previously, during campaigns all need to state what they will deliver for our communities and state it clearly, concisely and without the broad motherhood statements that mean nothing. That includes committing to the recommendations in the draft interim report. I acknowledge that both sides have said they will be releasing their versions of community safety plans, and one was released today. However, when I was chair of the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee, I made a commitment to victims and their families that the inquiry was not a tick-box exercise and that it would lead to tangible action.

Over the coming days, on behalf of all Queenslanders I ask that both sides simply articulate what they will commit to from those 60 recommendations, leaving aside campaign slogans and media grabs. All in this chamber know that by continually setting an example of poor and combative behaviours we are escalating these behaviours in our communities. This is not productive in any way. It is time for Queensland politics and governance to grow up and for voters to reject the theatrics, smoke, mirrors and lack of solid commitments and instead seek transparency, integrity, credibility and maturity in their politics and politicians. Queenslanders do deserve better and we can do that by restoring their faith in our systems and in us. Let us move up in the democracy indexes, not slide further down.