




Speech By
Bart Mellish

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

Record of Proceedings, 12 March 2025

QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (12.31 pm): On a surface level, the bill's introduction to re-establish the Queensland Productivity Commission does have precedent, of course. Productivity commissions do exist on a federal government level, as well as in the South Australian and New South Wales governments, and previously we did have one here in Queensland, as has been canvassed. However, when you look below the surface, the emerging, destructive patterns of the new Crisafulli government continue. We see another bill rushed through public hearings and briefings from key stakeholders with a lack of transparency regarding Treasury's modelling used to justify the commission's need. This bill outlines a commission that is in the pocket of the Treasurer to be a vehicle to further push the LNP's agenda. This bill would provide, in its current form, a hammer in the hands of the Treasurer by giving full control to published advice and research. This bill will prevent the commission from investigating its own research without the Treasurer's permission. This bill will ultimately restructure government machinery to serve the LNP's agenda.

As referenced in the committee report, under this legislation, if the commission intends to initiate and publish research in its current state, firstly the commission must give the minister notice of its intention to do research; the minister can approve or refuse the commission doing this research; the minister can amend the research proposal; and, finally, the minister can decide whether or not the commission can publish this self-initiated research.

Mr Ryan: Does not sound very independent.

Mr MELLISH: Absolutely. I take that interjection. Clearly the government has no intention to legislate an independent productivity commission.

What do stakeholders say? Looking into the very brief committee hearings, the Business Chamber of Queensland said, 'We do think that independence is a very important element of a productivity commission.' The Queensland Renewable Energy Council said, 'Providing that level of transparency at arm's length through a Queensland productivity commission is certainly something that we wholly support.'

Clause 3 under 'Main purpose of the bill' does state that the Productivity Commission will provide independent advice. However, there is nothing in the bill to effectively establish independent action by the commission such as the ability to publish directions from the Treasurer. There is clearly not enough in this bill to actually ensure independence of this proposed Queensland Productivity Commission.

Supposedly, commissions are to function as independent bodies to give advice and undertake research to assist in policy decisions and other works of government. Unfortunately, this bill clearly does not respect this well-established principle. Yet again, this is a move by the Treasurer that does not quite sit right with the LNP's promise of transparency. Recently when the Treasurer announced the pause of Best Practice Industry Conditions—BPICs—he cited 'independent economic modelling of Treasury'. He then refused to share that independent modelling when the *Courier-Mail* lodged a right-to-information request for it. If independent modelling can be done by Queensland Treasury, why does the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction need to be transferred out of Treasury?

In a similar vein, we asked in a separate committee hearing of the Department of Transport and Main Roads what savings figure it put on pausing BPIC. We have heard some pretty outlandish figures across its entire budget but, out of at least a \$37 billion QTRIP—a \$37 billion transport budget—we were given no percentage and no dollar figure from transport officials. It is clear that this government has no intention for this Productivity Commission to be a source of independent research and independent advice.

The opposition does, however, remain committed to holding this government to account for yet another broken promise, this time the promise of an independent productivity commission. As such, I support the shadow treasurer's commonsense amendments as they are around removing the Treasurer's ability to interfere in the self-initiated research of the commission; the commission having the ability to instigate its own research without the Treasurer's approval; and the commission being allowed to publish that research without the need for the Treasurer's approval. Because the government is deeply opposed to transparency, as this LNP government is and will never let truly independent findings be published, if the Treasurer does give written directions to the commission, Queenslanders deserve to know exactly what has directed them before the research commences.

These amendments remove the Treasurer's ability to interfere in a self-initiated research of the commission. The government promised an independent productivity commission. That should mean the commission has the ability to instigate its own research without the Treasurer's approval and it should be allowed to publish that research without the Treasurer's approval.

What will the Productivity Commission look into? At the moment we have only heard about politically motivated issues but, in terms of the government's actions since taking government, I would suggest that the Productivity Commission should look into what they are planning to do on their Sunshine Coast direct rail project. We have heard backflip after backflip. We have heard a potential broken promise on this. The Deputy Premier wants to look at alternatives. The Productivity Commission, once it is set up, should look into Sunshine Coast direct rail and see what the loss would be to the community when the LNP breaks its commitment to get this line to Maroochydore by 2032.

Mr Crandon interjected.

Mr MELLISH: I am glad the member for Coomera supports Sunshine Coast direct rail all the way to Maroochydore by 2032.

Mr Crandon: Not as much as I support the Coomera Connector.

Mr MELLISH: The Coomera Connector is a fantastic project—

Mr Crandon interjected.

Mr MELLISH: I will take part of the member for Coomera's interjections there, but I note that he will not say whether or not he will support a tolled Coomera Connector and he will not state on the record—

Mr Crandon interjected.

Mr MELLISH: I look forward to that being looked into by this Productivity Commission in due course. As we have learned from the last sitting, the Treasurer is not one to take advice he does not like. He is not one for proper process. He has appointed his mate from Toowoomba to be the Under Treasurer. I have plenty of mates from Toowoomba as well, Treasurer.

Mr JANETZKI: Mr Deputy Speaker, I take personal offence to those remarks and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McDonald): Member for Aspley?

Mr MELLISH: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have plenty of mates from Toowoomba as well, but I did not try to make them my own director-general.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Aspley, you will withdraw in total, please.

Mr MELLISH: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is the Treasurer, of course, who presided over a ratings outlook downgrade under his watch. To quote from Standard & Poor's at the time—

It is unclear how the government will address spending pressures and how much lower expenditure and debt will be in the upcoming budget. This uncertainty is captured in our negative outlook. Furthermore, this government hasn't incorporated its own fiscal strategy or any of its decisions in fiscal forecast.

That is a quote from Standard & Poor's, clearly not a Labor aligned lobby group or any sort of left-wing source on that note.

At the moment as it stands, this commission would be accountable to no-one except the LNP Treasurer of Queensland, who would assume new powers through the Productivity Commission to inquire into any aspect of Queensland life. The commission would move beyond giving advice to being an active participant in setting and implementing the LNP government's agenda.