




Speech By  
**Bart Mellish**

**MEMBER FOR ASPLEY**

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**QUEENSLAND ACADEMY OF SPORT BILL**

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (7.55 pm): The opposition supports structural reforms to the Queensland Academy of Sport. With the approaching Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, we understand that the QAS must be agile, efficient and flexible. Legislating the QAS to become a statutory body with a board will help ensure it achieves these goals. The previous government initiated this reform last year in response to sector and stakeholder feedback. However, the Labor opposition shares many concerns about the bill's current form raised by many stakeholders during the parliamentary committee process. Regarding the governance of the QAS, the bill legislates that the minister has full discretion to appoint board members and direct the board's operations. Additionally, the board sets its own agenda and controls its finances but is not required to publicly report its strategic priorities, decisions and investments.

We share stakeholder concerns that this structure has a lack of governance safeguards. I quote the CEO of the Australian Sports Commission, Kieren Perkins OAM. He said—

Whenever you are receiving taxpayers' funds you need to, very appropriately, ensure that the utilisation of those funds fits within good governance, appropriate risk management and the right operating policies, procedures and processes.

The current structure is not fit for purpose to maximise both public trust in the body and sporting outcomes across our state, including women's sports, para-sports, regional athlete participation, and child and athlete safety. While women's sport continues to experience rapid growth across the state and country, the Labor opposition echoes stakeholders' warnings that, without clear outcome requirements, women's sports risks receiving diminished attention and funding. The fact that women's sport still receives only 10 per cent of funding nationally necessitates that the QAS must be focused on facilitating future growth and funding of women's sport statewide. In response to this, amendments from the opposition introduce annual reporting on activities and spending on women's sports. This enables a transparent benchmark from which the QAS can continue to reflect and improve.

In addition, the opposition supports the notion that the QAS board should include at least one person with lived experience of disability to drive disability inclusion and para-sport growth. As Dane Cross, CEO of Sporting Wheelies, a charity that focuses on empowering Queenslanders with disabilities to live a more active and healthy life, said—

The composition of the QAS board will shape its direction for decades. We strongly recommend that at least one board position be designated for someone with lived experience in para-sport or disability inclusion.

That is why I strongly support the opposition's amendments that will: ensure the QAS board includes at least one person with lived experience of disability; require the QAS to establish partnerships with disability sporting organisations; and improve transparency around para-sport funding and activities by the QAS. Furthermore, Queensland is the second largest and the most decentralised mainland state in the Commonwealth. That is why the opposition is extremely disappointed that regional Queensland is overlooked in this bill. This bill omits the real challenges that regional athletes face with funding, access and support. I quote from the submission of Ms Wendy Henning, president of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Associated Queensland, an association that is committed to advocating for opportunities for children living in rural and remote areas. She said—

We urge the committee to ensure that the bill explicitly includes children and young people from rural and remote parts of Queensland.

With the games fast approaching, it is essential that the QAS supports our regions to ensure all of Queensland can benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime event. I again quote Kieren Perkins OAM. He said—

... we need to have a national system that is well serviced and supported that enables us to find talent wherever it exists, nurture it, develop it, harbour it and then enable it to come together at the elite level ...

Unfortunately, high-performance sports can sometimes create environments where abuse can flourish amongst all ages. With future 2032 Olympians aged potentially as young as five years old today, it is essential that this bill ensures that our future athletes are kept safe through their journey to represent our country. To assist the QAS in keeping our next generation of athletes safe, the opposition's proposed harm prevention and safety committee will have ongoing responsibilities to advise the board as well as being mandated to develop protective structures. This ensures child protection is embedded in the QAS governance framework, not left to discretion, and aligns with national child-safe standards.

Before I conclude, I want to highlight that no child in Queensland should be disadvantaged from participating in sports due to the costs of sports memberships, registration and participation fees. That is why I call on the government to reintroduce the FairPlay voucher program. The program receives an unprecedented amount of demand from Queenslanders every time it is released, with almost one-third of children participating in their chosen activity doing so for the first time. This aligns with section 3 of the bill that specifies that the main purpose of the QAS includes assisting emerging Queensland athletes to achieve success at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and to identify and foster the development of Queenslanders who demonstrate the talent to develop into future elite athletes.

In conclusion, the opposition recognises that with the upcoming Olympics, legislating the QAS to become a statutory body would have great benefits to sport in this state. We need a QAS that is agile, efficient and flexible. However, the current bill provides a governance framework that is not fit for purpose to maximise the public trust and sporting outcomes of this state.