




Speech By
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QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL

 **Ms ASIF** (Sandgate—ALP) (7.47 pm): Tonight I rise to speak on the Queensland Productivity Commission Bill 2024. In doing so, I want to acknowledge what a properly functioning, independent productivity commission would mean for Queensland. It could serve as a critical institution for evidence-based economic reforms leading to a prosperous Queensland. A productivity commission should work at arm's length from the government—a commission working in the best interests of our communities and for Queensland. Unfortunately, the Queensland Productivity Commission proposed in this bill promises to provide independence but instead delivers control. It promises to deliver transparency but will enable secrecy. In fact, within the bill itself there is practically no mention of transparency.

The Premier and his Treasurer claim to be delivering on their election commitment to re-establish an independent Queensland productivity commission, but what they seek to deliver fundamentally undermines the core principles of an independent and transparent productivity commission. This bill creates nothing more than a think tank at the beck and call of the Treasurer—a think tank which would give this LNP government an excuse to cut the conditions of working Queenslanders.

What do we see in this bill? We see the establishment of a productivity commission which must seek the Treasurer's permission before conducting any self-initiated research and a productivity commission that must submit any research proposals to the Treasurer for his approval. Under this bill the Treasurer would be able to shut down any independent research proposals without public knowledge. No-one is going to have to know. A productivity commission that could not publish its findings without the Treasurer's approval is not independent; that is control.

The government claims this bill closely mirrors the Australian Productivity Commission, yet Treasury officials, when questioned in the committee hearing, could not explain why this Productivity Commission would lack the basic independence enjoyed by its federal counterpart. There are serious questions about how independent this commission can truly be. Under the previous 2015 act the Productivity Commission could conduct research on its own initiative without ministerial approval. Under this bill they must seek the minister's blessing just to publish their findings.

Organisations across Queensland have raised alarm bells. The Australian Institute for Progress submitted that provisions in this bill reduced the commission's independence and warn that this will compromise the commission's ability to provide fearless, quality advice to the government. They state that, to add the quality and fearlessness of the advice that the government receives, the commission should be allowed to launch its own inquiries, similar to the Commonwealth Productivity Commission. Queensland Canegrowers referred to the importance of transparency, given the minister's control over the commission's scope and publishing rights of independent research. The Queensland Renewable Energy Council requested that any research the commission is seeking approval from the minister for is made public. Stakeholders emphasised the critical need for genuine transparency and independence, yet it seems this legislation is designed to do the opposite.

Even more concerning is the requirement for the Productivity Commission to keep the minister reasonably informed of their work. How can we expect truly independent research when the commission must effectively report their every move to the minister? This is not oversight; it is oversight on a leash. While Treasury claims this ensures resources are focused on priority issues, I ask: priority for whom? Is it the government or the people of Queensland? We need a productivity commission that serves in the public interest, not one that is constrained by ministerial control.

The truth is simple: this government do not want an independent productivity commission; they want a political think tank that will let them think or do whatever they want—a body made up of their mates who will allow the government to take away the rights and fair working conditions of workers across our state, or perhaps cut vital cost-of-living measures such as our 50-cent public fares or the energy rebates we gave to every household in Queensland, under the guise of so-called independent advice. We have already seen concerning signs of this government's attitude towards transparency. They failed to meet the deadline for releasing cabinet papers, and when questioned about this failure by the *Courier-Mail* the Premier's response was silence. Is this the transparency Queenslanders were promised by this government?

Let us look at the government's first intended use of this commission: a review into Best Practice Industry Conditions. The Treasurer has already cited independent economic modelling of Treasury to justify pausing these conditions, yet when asked to produce this modelling through right-to-information requests he refused. When members requested access to this supposedly independent modelling, Treasury officials would not, or could not, provide it. This raises a crucial question: if Treasury can conduct independent modelling, why does the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction need to be transferred out of Treasury? The answer is simple. This is not about improving productivity; this is about creating a mechanism to justify predetermined outcomes.

What this bill makes clear is that there is no requirement to table reports in parliament, unlike the Commonwealth Productivity Commission. Instead, reports will only be published on the website after the Treasurer has had not one, not two, but three months to craft his response. There are no parliamentary oversight provisions and no parliamentary reporting lines, only clause after clause detailing how the commission must report to and only respond to the Treasurer. The commission would have unprecedented power of inquiry into any aspect of Queenslanders' lives but would be accountable to no-one except the Treasurer. The Treasurer can give any written direction if they are satisfied that it is reasonably necessary, they can demand advice within any timeframe, attach any conditions and even dictate the nature of public consultation.

I support the shadow treasurer's proposed amendments to this bill. These amendments would remove the requirements for ministerial approval of the commission's self-initiated research and ensure that any ministerial directions are published before research or consultation begins. These are basic transparency measures that any truly independent body should embrace. The people of Queensland deserve better than this facade of independence. Queensland deserves a genuinely independent productivity commission that can investigate issues without political interference, publish findings without ministerial approvals and serve the public interest rather than political interests. This is what Labor's amendments will deliver.

This bill in its current form represents another step away from transparency and accountability by this government. It creates not an independent productivity commission but a ministerial puppet—not a source of objective analysis but a political tool. I urge all members to support the shadow treasurer's amendments. Let us deliver what was actually promised to Queenslanders: a truly independent productivity commission that serves the public interest, not political interests.