




Speech By  
**Charis Mullen**

**MEMBER FOR JORDAN**

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**QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL**

 **Ms MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (3.17 pm): It is clear that we are going to still be waiting for that \$4 million for the business case for the Ipswich second river crossing because it is clearly not coming.

I rise to make a contribution on the Queensland Productivity Commission Bill 2024. The bill aims to establish the Queensland Productivity Commission as an independent statutory body with the view that it will have operational independence from government. The decision to establish a productivity commission in Queensland is one the new government made clear leading into the state election. However, as we know, the devil is in the detail and there are some glaring concerns with what the LNP government is seeking to do with the new Productivity Commission, especially around its independence and functions.

Firstly, it is clear from the submissions received through the parliamentary inquiry that there are significantly varying views on what the functions of the commission should and should not be. Some submitters sought a more expansive role beyond considerations of productivity. Others believed that the powers may be too broad, potentially veering into the work of other bodies, particularly the important place of the Queensland parliament and our roles as parliamentarians. Indeed, the established process of our parliamentary committees to consider legislation or regulations does raise the question of exactly what the commission's role would be and whether there is risk of overlap or usurping the parliament's roles and responsibilities.

There is also the other end of the spectrum, with one submitter asserting that the commission needed powers to enter, inspect, conduct and interview, and powers to require a person to answer questions at a hearing or conference—more of a royal commission rather than a productivity commission. I would maintain that the expectations of stakeholders around the functions of the Productivity Commission are mixed, and further guidance needs to be provided beyond 'having particular regard to productivity and economic growth and living standards in Queensland'.

Treasury submitted with regard to the regulatory review function of the commission that it is intended to be similar to the key functions currently carried out by the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. It does amuse me to see an office tasked with reducing red tape now being usurped with an entirely new statutory body created to do similar work. If that is not red tape, I am not sure what is.

In better understanding the functions of the Queensland Productivity Commission, like the member for Ipswich I looked more widely, especially at the roles and functions of the existing national Productivity Commission, and what is evident is that nationally there is at least some clear guidance from government. The Albanese federal government provided a statement of expectations to the commission in November 2023, the first time that this has been done in the national commission's 25-year history. The statement outlines the government's expectations of how the commission will renew and refocus its objectives by: taking into account the government's policy priorities, being

responsive to changing economic environments, enhancing its relationships with all governments, bolstering external engagement and communication methods, and strengthening internal culture and capabilities and organisational governance arrangements.

There is also a statement of intent which is the national Productivity Commission's response to the government's statement of expectations and, importantly, both of these documents are public, they are published on the NPC's website, and they are detailed. At this point in time, the only thing we know about the Queensland Productivity Commission's role is that they will undertake one review into the construction and building industry and deliver an intergenerational equity report.

Interestingly, the national Productivity Commission released a research paper only last month in relation to housing construction productivity, and there are a couple of key points in this which I hope the government is paying close attention to as it seeks its own review. I wish to quote directly from that report. It said—

We note that the BPIC was suspended in November 2024, and that the Queensland Productivity Commission will undertake a review of the construction sector, including industrial relations policies, which may shed more light on this issue.

The PC has not investigated this issue further in this review. However, to the extent that there are barriers to productivity from certain work practices in enterprise bargaining agreements, this should only directly affect a relatively small proportion of the residential construction sector, since usually only multistorey apartment complexes are unionised building sites (approximately one quarter of full-time equivalent employment in the residential building construction industry is in higher-density housing)...

They use estimates from the ABS for that information. It goes on—

... and of those only some work on multistorey developments.

One of the key things the national Productivity Commission identified as the solution to productivity in the construction industry is streamlining the operation of the entire planning system, something the Productivity Commission previously identified as a priority reform. It specifically references Queensland state facilitated development as a welcome development and the type of body designed to address some of the coordination and timeframe issues that the Productivity Commission had identified in this review. This is the same state facilitated development that the Deputy Premier and Minister for Planning just railed against in question time today. It also references QBuild's Modern Methods of Construction program, with its previous aim under our government to see 600 modular homes built, something the LNP has said previously was too much. So, there is certainly plenty there for the new Productivity Commission to explore.

How independent will this review be? I am not sure what the LNP think 'independent' means, but it is clear the Queensland Productivity Commission will have no real independence.

The explanatory notes go into more detail on the role of the proposed commission: undertaking inquiries into economic and social issues, regulatory matters or legislation, as directed by the minister; undertake research into all of the above—again, as directed or approved by the minister; administer, monitor and review regulatory matters, as directed by the minister; and provide advice to the minister, as requested. Even when there is a reference to the commission undertaking self-initiated research, it must first seek the minister's approval, the minister may approve, amend or refuse the research proposal, and the only way the public will ever see this research, even if it is allowed to happen, is if the minister approves its publication. The minister is also able to get into the weeds and direct the type of public consultation the commission is able to undertake in its work.

The opposition rightly has grave concerns about the commission's ability to be independent, accountable and transparent. The work of the commission will literally be at the behest of one minister, and that is deeply concerning. The LNP government cannot create this commission as its own LNP think tank. They already have the Institute of Public Affairs and Sky News for that.

I support the shadow treasurer's amendments which are reasonable and which would greatly assist the Queensland Productivity Commission to actually be considered a credible institution in our state. Without the ability of the commission to undertake self-directed, independent research, all we will have is a lame-duck commission, and that is concerning, not only for them and for their ongoing reputation and work, but if this bill is allowed to proceed as written it could be the beginning of the end for other independent government entities becoming the plaything of this LNP government.