




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (6.13 pm): I have spoken with constituents in my electorate about this bill and it is clear that there is support for a productivity commission. Many public servants in Cooper remember the former Queensland Productivity Commission, the QPC, which operated from 2015 to 2021. They recall the valuable and rigorous inquiries it conducted—work that made a real difference in shaping policy for Queensland. There were inquiries like the electricity pricing inquiry, which examined the drivers of electricity prices, including the impact of limited competition; the manufacturing inquiry, which provided crucial recommendations to help the sector keep pace with evolving technology and address skills shortages; and the 2019 inquiry into imprisonment and recidivism, one of the most important pieces of work, I think, the QPC undertook. It revealed that while crime rates in Queensland were falling imprisonment rates were rising, and it made a series of evidence-based recommendations to break the cycle of reoffending and reform the justice system.

The former QPC was able to deliver this kind of high-quality, independent research because it was truly independent—independent of government, independent of ministers and independent of political influence. If this bill were simply re-establishing that kind of productivity commission the opposition would not be resistant to it, but that is not what this bill does. This bill takes a fundamentally different approach, weakening the independence and transparency that made the former QPC so valuable. It is why the opposition will be moving amendments to strengthen those provisions.

One of the clearest contrasts between the former commission and what is proposed in this bill is found in their respective objectives. The 2015 act explicitly states that the commission was required to perform its functions with independence, rigour, responsiveness, transparency, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. Independence, rigour and transparency—these were not just ideals; they were enshrined in legislation. However, the Crisafulli LNP government's bill before us today states that the Productivity Commission must perform its functions in a 'proper, effective, and efficient way'. Gone is any mention of transparency. Gone is any guarantee of independence. Gone is any explicit requirement for evidence-based, rigorous research.

These omissions have been noticed. Submissions from key stakeholders have raised serious concerns about the bill as drafted. The Institute of Public Affairs warned—

The effectiveness of the QPC is potentially undermined by broad and vague drafting in the provisions outlining its main purpose and functions.

Mr Nate Tosh from the Queensland Council of Unions pointed out that even the word 'productivity' is barely mentioned in any meaningful way. He noted that 'productivity' appears in the bill 69 times, and only one of those is not the name of the Productivity Commissioner. The only meaningful reference to productivity in the bill is as a matter the commission must 'have particular regard to'; it does not even say they must prioritise it. As currently drafted, the inquiries and research do not even need to relate to productivity at all. How can we have confidence in a productivity commission when productivity itself is not even a core function of the body being established?

One of the most concerning elements of this bill is the level of ministerial control over the commission's work. Part 4 of the bill explicitly prevents the commission from conducting and publishing independent research without the approval of the minister. Even more concerning, it allows the minister to amend research undertaken before publication. This is completely at odds with what Queenslanders expect from an independent productivity commission. Compare this to the Commonwealth Productivity Commission, which was established under a Labor government and operates with full autonomy to initiate and publish its own research. Compare this to the former Queensland Productivity Commission, which had the authority to initiate and publish research without interference from the responsible minister. The question must be asked: what is the government afraid of?

In 2021, the government transferred the former QPC into Treasury as the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. In recent weeks, the government has spoken a lot about the ability for Queensland Treasury to undertake independent modelling and research. If independent modelling can be done within Treasury right now, why does the productivity function now need to be pulled out of Treasury and repackaged into an entirely new commission? This is bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake. We are using parliamentary time, stretching Public Service resources, and standing up an entirely new commission that, as drafted, will have essentially the same functions and constraints as the existing office within Treasury. What is the difference? It is more ministerial control, less transparency and no meaningful mandate for productivity.

The opposition will be moving amendments to restore the independence of the commission, specifically moving to remove the Treasurer's ability to interfere in the commission's self-initiated research, to remove the requirement for the responsible minister to approve or amend the approved research, and to require that, in the case of minister directed research, the minister's direction must be published before any research or consultation begins. These amendments are reasonable and the government has no legitimate excuse to oppose them.

The need for an independent productivity commission is not just something the opposition is calling for—it is something that Queensland businesses, unions and industry leaders all support. The Queensland Renewable Energy Council told the committee—

... we are really supportive of balanced reform, evidence-based reform and policy, and research through an independent body at arm's length from government.

The Business Chamber of Queensland said—

The commission's independence and advisory role will be key to producing credible, high-quality recommendations ...

The Institute of Public Affairs noted that the bill's current drafting leaves the commission vulnerable to ministerial direction that is 'inconsistent with the very reason the QPC is being established'. The government must answer: why are they afraid of an independent productivity commission? This government promised Queenslanders an independent commission, yet the bill before us tells an entirely different story. Will the government keep its word—keep their promise to Queenslanders and strengthen this bill—or will they continue down the path of saying one thing before the election and doing something completely different when in government?

We all recognise the opportunities that a renewed Queensland Productivity Commission could bring but for it to be truly effective it must have: a clear and ambitious charter; the resources to conduct meaningful research; and the authority to make frank and fearless recommendations to government. This bill, as it stands, is a disappointing and impotent attempt to deliver on those outcomes. Queenslanders deserve a productivity commission that delivers real results—not one that exists only to rubberstamp ministerial priorities. The opposition urges the government to accept these amendments and to restore the independence and integrity of this vital institution.