




Speech By
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QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (3.48 pm): Before I start speaking about the Queensland Productivity Commission Bill, I want to send out my best wishes to Mel McMahon, the member for Macalister, and take this opportunity to give a shout-out to two wonderful organisations in my electorate: the Salisbury Tzu Chi Brisbane Community Centre, the Buddhist compassion centre, which was open to receive people during our most recent weather event; and the Construction Training Centre in Salisbury which provided parking for people at Rocklea. I also acknowledge first responders such as Energex and Ergon who have been working around the clock to restore power to my community.

I turn now to the Queensland Productivity Commission Bill. I support the amendments that are going to be moved by the shadow treasurer during consideration in detail. I often wonder who listens to the House when bills are introduced. Whilst I do have some appreciation and understanding that speeches often contain political spin, I am not convinced that the Treasurer of the state should be so flippant with his language when introducing legislation. The Treasurer, in his very first paragraph of the introduction to this bill, said—

The challenge for Queensland in the 21st century is clear. We cannot hope to maintain our high standard of living without turning around our declining productivity.

The question I had was: is Queensland productivity declining? I did an internet search, and guess what I found on the Queensland Treasury website? On 12 December 2023 it said that the Queensland economy grew 2.3 per cent in 2022-23 and that growth is forecast to strengthen to three per cent in both 2023-24 and 2024-25. My next question was: what is the economic forecast for Queensland? On 9 November the same site said that the answer was a strong position and that the 2024-25 state budget forecast Queensland's economic growth to strengthen to three per cent again in both 2023-24 and 2024-25 after rising 2.3 per cent in the previous year. My question to the Treasurer is: what has happened since 26 October 2024 for him to be talking down the Queensland economy?

I was further surprised while reading the *Weekend Australian* on 8 February to come across a headline that caught my eye: 'Treasurer accused of "juicing" the books'. It was a story about S&P Global, the ratings agency, accusing the Queensland government of exaggerating the state's position for political pointscoring. The global analyst said that the eye-opening figure was likely too high, with the agency still trying to establish the actual figure beyond the political narrative. The analyst went on to say that 'we don't think that Queensland will deliver' the figures that the government has outlined. Maybe that is what has happened since 26 October 2024: the Treasurer has juiced the figures.

After reading the Queensland Productivity Commission Bill, I have grave concerns about the independence and transparency of this Productivity Commission. Independence means being in control of what you do and how you do it. Transparency is the quality of being open to public scrutiny. It is very clear that the LNP government does not want the Productivity Commission to have either. The bill clearly shows that the government wants complete control of the Queensland Productivity Commission, with the Treasurer having to not only approve all research but also decide if the research can be

published. There is also nothing in this bill that will require the reports produced by the Productivity Commission to be tabled in parliament. It appears to be a statutory body established to provide centralised policy and advice on any government business and inquire into any matter the LNP government may determine. This is not an organisation that is open to public scrutiny. There is no transparency in the bill. It is clearly being used by the LNP government, but the question is what for? My concern is that it will use the Queensland Productivity Commission to give it the answers it wants and then use that information to cut jobs and cut workers' rights, as the Newman government did in 2012.

This is not what the people of Queensland voted for. The Premier said that he would have an open and transparent government based on integrity. However, the actions of those opposite in rushing through bills without proper levels of consultation—like the mess they made of the youth crime bill—show that the last thing they want is transparency. And where was their integrity? The previous commission carried out inquiries like the 2019 inquiry into imprisonment and recidivism. This is what the Queensland Productivity Commission should be undertaking. The previous Labor government put in place laws that kept workers safe and ensured they had appropriate wages and conditions. Already we have seen some of those rights stripped away such as entry provisions for unions to come onsite to investigate safety issues, allowing employers to hide any issues before the union can get onsite to investigate.

I turn to some of the submissions that were made during consultation on the bill. The Business Chamber Queensland said that to achieve the objectives that bring about genuine reform it is critical that the Queensland Productivity Commission has independent insight into the Queensland business environment and economy to drive genuine independent research and advice. On behalf of its members the Canegrowers Cairns Region said that it would welcome the establishment of an independent review panel. The Institute of Public Affairs warned that the effectiveness of the Queensland Productivity Commission is potentially undermined by broad and vague drafting in the provisions outlining its main purpose and functions. This is what stakeholders want and expect from the Queensland Productivity Commission. Unfortunately, the Queensland Productivity Commission proposed by the LNP government is an organisation that is being established to provide centralised policy and legislative advice on any government business and to inquire into any matter the minister may determine and has very little to do with independence or evidence-based research.