




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 12 March 2025

QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (4.15 pm): As we have heard, the bill will re-establish the Queensland Productivity Commission, QPC, as an independent body to undertake inquiries into economic and social issues in Queensland as requested by the government. The QPC previously existed from 2015 to 2021 and I think it has been sorely missed. Both the previous and the new QPC are based on the Commonwealth Productivity Commission, whose predecessor was the Industries Assistance Commission that was established in 1974 to advise the government on tariff levels. It became dominated by economic rationalism and brought that approach when it transformed into the Productivity Commission in 1998, with a broader remit to look into all sorts of public policy issues. It still does so from an economic rationalist perspective but not a dogmatic one, supporting climate change action in a 1991 report and recommending creating the NDIS in a 2017 report.

We assume the QPC will bring a similar viewpoint to its work, which will be valuable to address important issues of public administration where a detailed analytical long-term review is needed and warranted. One identified issue is the development of our electricity sector, where information on what is possible or preferable seems to vary widely. Professional, expert and objective advice is needed in this and many other areas including why costs and timelines keep increasing, adding to our cost-of-living dilemmas.

The first review to be undertaken by the QPC will be into the building industry, which is vital, including the operation of the Best Practice Industry Conditions that have reportedly driven up business costs, making construction even more expensive. That was the very last thing we needed in an ongoing housing crisis. Recent figures released by the Commonwealth Productivity Commission show that just 1,223 social homes were built in the year to June 2024, which is less than half of what is needed annually to achieve the government's goal of 53,400 social and community homes by 2044. However, given that currently nearly 48,000 Queenslanders sit on the housing waitlist, the QPC will need to examine every aspect of how our building and construction industry can move forward. That would include the cost and supply of building materials, finance availability and the training and pipeline of tradies to do the builds, as we need a quicker timeframe than 2044 to deliver homes for Queenslanders. No stone should be left unturned to ensure we can build the housing we need.

Another QPC review is needed into how to increase capacity within and capabilities of the Queensland public sector. As I have previously raised in this chamber, *Fault lines: an independent review into Australia's response to COVID-19* identified several issues, particularly the need for seeking broader advice, collaboration and transparency in the Public Service. The Coaldrake report identified a loss of capacity in the Public Service, compounded with a culture that was unwilling to consider unfashionable points of view and dominated by short-term political thinking. The report targeted creating a cultural shift to openness and a shared focus on identifying and dealing with the challenges Queensland faces. This requires deep thinking and analysis. I appreciate the work the Public Service Commission has already started.

Returning to the bill, stakeholders raised various issues about the exact detail of how the QPC will operate. Workplace lawyers submitted that the QPC may need greater powers to compel evidence, such as a coroner might have. In response, the department said that the QPC will have the power to compel evidence from state and local governments but not from the private sector as the Commonwealth Productivity Commission can do so, which to my knowledge has practically never happened.

The Queensland Council of Unions raised the fact that the power the bill gives to the minister to give QPC ministerial directions may allow the minister to dictate the contents of reports. However, Treasury advised that the clause, as drafted, would not allow directions on report content. A statement of reservation also raised that the QPC will not be independent; however, with it having mostly the same framework as the Commonwealth Productivity Commission it should act independently.

I want to thank the committee members and the secretariat for their work on the inquiry report and all who submitted and took the time to share their views. Moving into the future, it will be essential to have this agency working for the betterment of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.