




Speech By  
**Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 20 February 2025

**QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION BILL**

 **Ms FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (5.55 pm): Transparency means being open, honest and up-front—no secrets and no hidden agendas. Every single one of us in this place took an oath to serve the people of Queensland with integrity, and that means being transparent about the decisions we make and the policies we put forward. Let's be clear: transparency is not just a word you throw around when it is convenient. It is a principle. It is an obligation. Right now this government is failing Queenslanders on both transparency and accountability. Let's go over another definition: independence. Independence means being free from influence or control. It means standing on your own two feet, making decisions based on evidence and not political convenience. That is exactly what this so-called independent Productivity Commission will not be.

The Premier and Treasurer have talked a big game about setting up a productivity commission to provide fearless and frank advice, but let's not kid ourselves. This is not an independent body. This is an LNP think tank designed to push an agenda that will lead to cuts, job losses and attacks on workers' rights. I want to be very clear: Labor does not oppose the re-establishment of a statutory productivity commission. We completely support the notion of improved productivity and efficiency for our state, and we will not stand in the way of any viable solutions to this issue. However, our support is conditional on the commission being established as independent from government.

As outlined in the statement of reservation to the Governance, Energy and Finance Committee's report on this bill, we know that the Productivity Commission will be controlled entirely by the Treasurer, who will have the power to dictate what it investigates and what research it undertakes and, just as importantly, what it does not. Part 4 of the bill does not allow the commission to independently conduct published research without the approval of the minister and, further, allows the minister to amend the research proposal.

**Mr Power:** He has to approve it.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I take that interjection: he has to approve it.

**Mr Power:** That's not independent.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is not independent. I take that interjection from the member for Logan. Not only can the Treasurer refuse the commission the opportunity to commence research they have formed the view is needed; the Treasurer can amend the research proposal without limits. If the Treasurer does not want something scrutinised, it will not be. If there is an outcome the Treasurer wants, he will get it. That is not independence; that is not transparency.

**Mr Power:** It's an LNP think tank.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I take the interjection from the member for Logan. It is an LNP think tank. The Treasurer has been running around talking about full independent scope but in the same breath admits the commission's research will focus on 'whatever is of interest to the government'. You cannot have it both ways.

Here is the thing. Even stakeholders who generally support the idea of a productivity commission are sounding the alarm on this one. The Australian Institute for Progress has raised concerns that the commission will only take instructions from the Treasurer, warning that it should be able to launch its own inquiries if it is to have any credibility. The Queensland Cane Growers Organisation has also flagged serious transparency concerns given the level of control the Treasurer will have over its research. Business Chamber Queensland stressed the importance of ensuring the commission's independence. We have business groups, we have industry leaders and we have key stakeholders all saying the same thing. This commission as proposed is not independent, it is not transparent and it is not in the best interests of Queenslanders. All of these people are right.

Let us be crystal clear about the real purpose of this commission. It is about stripping away workers' rights and it is about attacking pay and conditions, starting with Queensland's construction industry but spreading far beyond. The LNP have made their priorities clear. Instead of supporting the hardworking people who keep this state moving, they are coming after them. They are setting up a commission without any independence to give them the excuse to cut workers' protections and cut wages. We fought hard to put in place laws that keep workers safe and laws that ensure good wages and conditions. If the commission is hand-picked by the Treasurer, is controlled by the Treasurer and only publishes the findings the Treasurer approves, you can use it to justify anything. This has never been about transparency or accountability; it is about power and it is about control. It is about making it easier for the LNP—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr O'Shea): Order! I ask the House to be quiet so we can hear the member speak please.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** This has never been about transparency or accountability; it is about power and control and making it easier for the LNP to do what they always do—that is, to cut, sack and sell.

The bill has also been found wanting when it comes to accountability. Unlike the federal Productivity Commission, there is no requirement for this body to table reports in parliament—none—and any work the commission initiates on its own can only be published with the Treasurer's approval and there is absolutely no parliamentary oversight. This is a Treasurer who does not want any scrutiny, who does not want any transparency. Let us talk about this Treasurer. It is the same Treasurer who embargoed his own press conference about the budget updates so Queenslanders would not see the details. It is the same Treasurer who has been running around claiming Queensland's economy is in crisis but when pressed for solutions comes up empty-handed.

Queenslanders are still waiting for answers on cost-of-living relief, on the budget and on the LNP's real economic plan, if they even have one. If we asked this Treasurer why he did not model this Productivity Commission on successful versions from around the country, he would probably need a week's notice and two weeks of media training before he could come up with the response. Even then, I doubt we would get a straight answer. The truth is simple. If this commission were truly independent, it would not serve the LNP's agenda and that is why it is being set up this way.

There is an unfortunate reality that Queenslanders must face when we look at the contents of this bill and those who are presenting it. The reality is that Premier David Crisafulli and his government have continued to break the promises they made to Queenslanders during the election campaign. The Premier staked a large part of his campaign on his promise to lead a government of integrity and transparency and labelled himself open and honest, yet this bill and this Productivity Commission are the exact opposite of that. We have already seen that this government are so opposed to transparency that they have failed to release cabinet papers by their deadlines and this Productivity Commission is absolutely set up to be an LNP think tank.

The Labor opposition knows that significant changes are necessary in order to create a functioning, independent Productivity Commission for our state. If the commission is to be truly independent, it needs to stand alone from the Treasurer, who under the current proposed bill would have overreaching powers to command the statutory body. The amendments that have been circulated and that I intend to move in consideration in detail are designed to give the commission true independence, as well as ensuring that any ministerial direction is published in a timely manner.

Amendment 1 to clause 37 removes requirements for the minister to approve research undertaken on the commission's initiative and it removes the minister's ability to amend the proposed research and instead requires the commission to notify the chief executive before publishing the research or analysis. The wording is consistent with the Queensland Productivity Commission Act 2015 that the government committed to 're-establish'. Amendment 2 amends clause 38 to articulate a timeline

for publishing the minister's direction such that the commission must publish the minister's direction on its website before any research or consultation to follow the direction is commenced. I table a copy of those amendments for the benefit of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Productivity Commission Bill 2024, amendments to be moved by Ms Shannon Fentiman MP **125**.

These simple amendments that key stakeholders have advocated for strongly throughout the committee process should be supported by those members opposite so they can go home and speak to their chambers of commerce and the Canegrowers and talk about how they voted to support a truly independent Productivity Commission. They need to demonstrate to their own stakeholders and their community that they are serious about acting with integrity and transparency. If the LNP are serious about establishing a standalone independent Productivity Commission, then they must support Labor's amendments. To do otherwise is to admit that they want to be able to completely control the research agenda of the commission to further their own political agenda and interests.