




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Crisafulli LNP Government, Integrity

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (2.40 pm): Today we have asked serious questions—questions not just about due process but about integrity. The Crisafulli LNP government have not only embarked on a dangerous path of potential gerrymanders; they are now attempting to pull the wool over the eyes of Queenslanders. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, the drawing of our electoral boundaries is at the foundation of our democracy.

Just last week we celebrated Queensland Day, the 166th anniversary of our break away from New South Wales—the anniversary of the first electoral boundaries being drawn. There was a time when slicing and dicing of Queensland's electorates was a tool used to retain power. Fitzgerald uncovered just how corrupt that practice was and is—how gerrymandering undermines the foundation of our democracy and trust in the process.

Electoral boundaries determine who wins and who loses, so any influence in this process—or even the perception of influence in the process—is downright dodgy. It is why ensuring appointments are made fairly and with the support of this House is so important.

Director-General John Sosso's appointment calls into question the validity of this process. As was revealed in the *Courier-Mail* today, the appointment may not have been made in accordance with the Electoral Act—an act the Attorney-General today said Mr Sosso helped draft. The *Courier-Mail* revealed that the consultation undertaken by this government was likely just a tick-and-flick exercise, because they were always going to put Mr John Sosso on this committee. The concerns that were genuinely raised were not properly considered. The Attorney did not respond to the feedback raised by the Leader of the Opposition and did not even acknowledge our request for a meeting.

The Attorney-General has said that Mr Sosso's public service is beyond reproach. I am sorry, but that completely misses the mark. This is about fairness in the electoral boundaries so that every vote is equal. When Tony Fitzgerald is sounding the alarm, we should all pay attention. When he said that biased electoral boundaries fundamentally conflict with democracy, they are not words that should be taken lightly or brushed off. They are a call to vigilance, to pay attention at what is at risk here. In this very House, then member of parliament Santo Santoro once spoke passionately about the need for fairness in redistributions.

Mr Power: What did he say?

Ms FENTIMAN: He acknowledged, member for Logan, that while redistributions are necessary to reflect population changes, they must never be manipulated for partisan gain. Santoro emphasised that the process must be—and must be seen to be—independent and impartial to preserve public confidence in our democratic institutions. That is all we are asking for. That is all Queenslanders expect—fairness, decency and confidence in the process.

Today the LNP voted down a motion to table the crown law advice that the Attorney-General is relying on to reaffirm that her government is confident that it fulfilled its legal obligations. What does the Attorney have to hide? The LNP was happy to waive legal professional privilege to table the report into Chow Tai Fook, the co-owner of Queen's Wharf casino, and whether they were suitable to hold a casino licence. But when it comes to making sure they have fulfilled their legal obligations under the Electoral Act, they say, 'Oh, I'm sorry. That is legally professionally privileged.' This government has spoken a lot about how important consultation is on wind farm projects and Gold Coast Light Rail, for example. Yet, when it comes to one of the most important democratic processes, it is like pulling teeth to be actually properly engaged.

The health of our democracy depends not only on the laws we create in this place but also on the integrity of those who apply them. It depends on the courage of this very chamber to call out creeping politicisation when we see it. Democracy is not just about elections; it is about the structures that make those elections fair. If we allow those structures to be compromised, we risk eroding the very foundation of our democracy.