




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 22 October 2019

MOTION

Non-Government Members, Resources

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.58 pm): Equity is a word that we often use in debating policies and procedures; however, at times it is missing in our actions and systems. To ensure that equity in representation is achieved for Queenslanders, I ask that you consider our motion for an independent tribunal to be appointed to review the resources allocated for non-government members of parliament.

The role of the opposition in parliament, including crossbench members, is integral to ensuring that diverse viewpoints are heard and that legislation proposed is investigated in depth to ensure any changes are in the best interests of all Queenslanders. These members represent significant constituencies, perspectives and needs. As identified in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, the most impartial and effective methodology for resource allocation is through an independent entity.

I will not go into the current standard for resources for Queensland MPs, as we are very familiar with them and the inequity that exists. Other Australian jurisdictions provide equitable resourcing. New South Wales maintains one of the most established, impartial and transparent systems for the allocation of staff resources for members. According to section 18 of the New South Wales Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013, the number of staff that members are entitled to is determined by the New South Wales Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal. In 2018, in addition to the two staff members employed at each electorate office, the tribunal found it necessary to allocate an additional staff member to each electorate office. The tribunal, having received a submission on the matter, also determined that the additional staff member allocated to crossbenchers should be at a research assistant level.

In Victoria, each member is entitled to 2.5 electorate officers. Following an inquiry in 2018, the Victorian Ombudsman suggested the establishment of an independent entity to regulate the staffing entitlements of members, and in 2019 the Victorian government established the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal. In addition, they established the distribution of parliamentary advisers under the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Bill 2019. Clause 68(2B) of that bill states—

Each person who is an independent elected member of the Parliament of Victoria is entitled to employ the equivalent of one Parliamentary adviser in respect of so much of each financial year that the person is an elected member.

The Victorian system ensures that all members receive these allocations, including minor parties and independents.

In South Australia, the Electoral Services advised that all members of the House of Assembly are allocated two full-time staff members and one trainee. Independent members of the House of Assembly receive an additional part-time research officer. Members of the Legislative Council are offered one full-time officer and one trainee. Independent and minor party members receive an additional full-time-equivalent research officer. As well, additional research officers are provided to independent members in both houses of parliament, as they consider these members to be under-resourced in comparison to major party members.

In 2018 the CCC recommended that the process to decide an appropriate level of resourcing for all members of parliament should be determined by an independent entity of the government of the day. Mr MacSporran further said that this would serve the public interest by assuring an objective and consistent assessment of duties of members of parliament. He then recommended that parliament consider this issue further. In light of precedents set and the recommendations from the Fitzgerald report, the EARC and the CCC, I ask that all members on both sides of the chamber support this motion for a review of the current staffing allocation system and the appointment of an independent entity to do so—not, per se, the CLA as recommended by the Ethics Committee report No. 189. In closing, I want to thank the following people: the Premier and the Deputy Premier for their support of this motion; the member for Traeger and the crossbench; and my intern, Nathan, who worked with me on this as it has been a long journey.