



COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms CP McMillan MP—Chair

Mr SA Bennett MP

Mr MC Berkman MP

Mr JM Krause MP

Ms CL Lui MP

Mr RCJ Skelton MP

Staff present:

Mr K Holden—Committee Secretary

Ms C Furlong—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL BILL 2021

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 24 MAY 2021

Brisbane

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The committee met at 10.30 am.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing for the Community Support and Services Committee's inquiry into the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to eldest past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. I acknowledge the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui MP, who is a First Nations person.

On 22 April 2021 the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021 was referred to this committee for examination, with a reporting date of 11 June 2021. My name is Corrine McMillan. I am the member for Mansfield and chair of the committee. With me here today are: Mr Stephen Bennett MP, the member for Burnett and deputy chair; Mr Michael Berkman MP, the member for Maiwar; Mr Jon Krause MP, the member for Scenic Rim, who is appearing via teleconference; Ms Cynthia Lui MP, the member for Cook; and Mr Robert Skelton MP, the member for Nicklin.

The purpose of today is to hear evidence from stakeholders who made submissions as part of the committee's inquiry. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. These proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and will be subject to the chair's direction at all times. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note it is possible that you may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings by media and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn mobile phones to off or silent mode. The program for today has been published on the committee's webpage and there are hard copies available from committee staff. I remind committee members that departmental officers are here to provide factual or technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left to debate on the floor of the House.

WALDRON, Ms Jennifer, President, Bundaberg District Women Veterans Inc. (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Good morning, Ms Waldron. I invite you to make an opening statement on the bill. After that, committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Waldron: Thank you very much. By way of introducing myself and so you know where I come from, I represent a small group of women veterans in the Bundaberg region. We have 68 servicewomen in our association who range in age from very senior, 99-year-old World War II ladies right through to contemporary women who are still in the services today. We have a very broad range of membership. We are a very small group but we are very active. We have wellbeing activities at least twice a month, we hold monthly meetings and we also conduct the annual war nurses Anzac Day service at the War Nurses Memorial in Bundaberg. We also do any major commemorations we possibly can to promote and educate the community on the role that men and women have played in the defence of Australia throughout history.

Our main concerns with the proposed bill are that it says 'Queensland Veterans' Council Bill' but in fact the whole focus of it appears to us to be on the management and administration of Anzac Square. In a nutshell, Anzac Square is a memorial; veterans are people. We do not think those two necessarily sit easily in the same bill, especially given that the council is only likely to have up to two veteran representatives at the minister's discretion. Therefore, it is not really a veterans council as we see it.

We are very concerned about the future administration of the Anzac Day Trust. Currently there are four veteran representatives, so the council would lose its veteran focus. We believe that the administration of veterans' matters, the veterans reference group, should in fact actually be the Queensland Veterans' Council. Being all veterans, they could administer the Anzac Day Trust. The Anzac Square people have special skills in administering a special state war memorial. They do not, in our view, really sit together with veterans' issues.

From a women veterans' point of view, we know that our voice is very much overshadowed sometimes by the male-dominated membership of the RSL, even though we have strong representation at the RSL. Also, unfortunately, Legacy and the War Widows Guild both seem to get representation at these organisational things and they represent the same cohort of people—the families of veterans, not veterans themselves. We would ask that consideration please be given to more representation of veterans in general on the council, specifically including one female veteran and not necessarily just a widow representation.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Waldron. The committee does appreciate your submission.

Mr BENNETT: Good morning, Jennifer. Congratulations on your submission, and thank Leone for us as well. I have disclosed this morning the work we have done together over the years, so congratulations again. I notice, very disturbingly, the good point you made about consultation. Could you elaborate further for the committee on how you found out about the bill and the fact that it probably left you without much time to review the bill?

Ms Waldron: I am sorry, I am having a built of trouble hearing you, Stephen. I think you said something about consultation; is that correct?

Mr BENNETT: Yes, if you could just give the committee an update on how you found out about the bill and the fact that you have been part of the Anzac Day Trust for over a decade and were not consulted on the bill.

Ms Waldron: We have been part of the Anzac Day Trust for probably decades, as long as it has been going, and of course we have a secretary who has been in the position for 30 years as well as serving on the RSL board here at Bundaberg, so she has a great knowledge of how the Anzac Day Trust has been run over many decades. It has been run very successfully so far. How we found out about this bill was: just by chance we got an email from a Navy association in Brisbane with whom we are in contact regularly—as you do with other like-minded associations—and she alerted us to what was happening with the make-up of the Anzac Day Trust in particular. Then we did research and found out what the bill was about. I read the bill and I gave it to my deputy president and secretary. They both read it and we independently all came to much the same conclusion: it really did not appear to us to be a veteran focused bill. Veterans' matters seem to be No. 3 in the list of priorities in the bill. In our view, they should be No. 1.

In with veterans' matters can sit Anzac Day Trust funding, which supports all of the little associations like us. Particularly out in the regions we do not have big state organisations like the RSL, Legacy or war widows to support each little branch. We have to do it all ourselves. We provide a valuable first-line support service to all women veterans. Bear in mind that men come on our activities as well, particularly our bus trips, because we are all veterans, we are all people, and we welcome anyone.

We just found out by chance. We grabbed the chance to have our say because I think it is important. You cannot complain about something unless you say something about it or have something constructive to say, so hopefully we have said something constructive. We are just worried about the lack of representation of veterans and the actual focus of the bill not being, in our view, in the right place, which is veterans' matters.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Waldron, for your feedback.

Ms LUI: Good morning, Jennifer. Thank you for your time this morning. Your submission states that you believe the requirement in the bill to include two veterans on the Queensland Veterans' Council is inappropriate. Can you briefly explain to the committee why you hold this view?

Ms Waldron: Our main view is: if there are two veterans on that council, it is not a veterans council. Veterans would not have a strong voice on that council. Otherwise, it is just a civilian organisation. In fact, as most of them are state or council employees, the voices of veterans will not be heard. That is the same with the veterans reference group, which is great, but if they have to report back to the council and there are only two veterans on that council of 10 or eight—whatever it is—whatever they say in the reference council may not even get up. The council may just say, 'We don't care. Majority rules,' and veterans' voices are lost again.

We think it is a bit unbalanced. There is a strong view to say they should all be veterans on that council and the management of Anzac Square should be either a separate bill entirely or just a separate grouping under the Veterans' Council, because that requires specialist historians, builders and council workers as well as a bit of military history input. It does not really sit with dealing with suicide prevention for veterans and the day-to-day issues that veterans in our community face.

Mr BERKMAN: I really do appreciate you taking the time to be with us, Jennifer. I am interested in the part of the bill that leaves the minister with a discretion as to whether the reference group even forms or not. That part of the bill says that the minister may establish a reference group. Given your concern about the shortfall of veterans representation on the council, in your view would it be preferable for it to be compulsory that a reference group of all veterans be established?

Ms Waldron: Exactly. That is our main concern. There are quite a few 'mays'. The minister 'may' appoint or 'may' invite up to two veterans organisations to be part of the council and the reference group. The reference group is a must if the government really wants to hear the important voices of veterans. There is a huge veterans group out in the community, all with diverse views. If they all come through the reference group, the government will get a good, balanced and interesting point of view on veterans' matters. In our view, the reference group is the real nuts and bolts of the bill. That should be front and centre. It should be a must, and it must be all veterans. That way the minister will be getting veterans' advice, and that must be a 'must' rather than a 'maybe.'

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Waldron. The time allocated for the session has now expired. We thank you again for your time.

O'KEARNEY, Mr Daniel, Private capacity (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Good morning, Mr O'Kearney. I invite you to make an opening statement on the bill. After that, committee members will have some questions for you.

Mr O'Kearney: Thank you, Chair. Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you, to answer questions and to expand on my submission. I am sorry that I cannot be with you this morning. I have the builders coming in today to start renovations on my home.

I am Danny O'Kearney. From 2014 until last year I was the chair of the Queensland government's Veterans' Advisory Council, and prior to that I was chair of the Queensland Forum of Ex-Service Organisations. I was appointed by the previous Newman government, and that appointment continued under the Palaszczuk government. From 2014 to 2019 I was also a member of various Anzac committees. Over that time I have worked with politicians, bureaucrats and the ex-service community to provide holistic advice to the government on veterans' issues. That is not as simple as it sounds. The veterans community is a diverse one, having many organisations and opinions on a range of issues.

Some ex-service organisations provide assistance for only veterans while others expand that service into the wider veterans community. Some have a single focus, while others are very broad in nature. Some are strapped for cash, while others are able to provide funds for a range of issues. Some are staffed totally by volunteers, while others have paid employees. Some organisations, of course, have been around for over 100 years, and some have only been formed in the last two decades. When advice is presented to government on issues that affect the veterans community, the government must be assured that the advice presented has full and frank interrogation by that community.

As you can see by my submission, I believe that the bill has a number of issues that reduce the quality of advice to government and the input from the veterans community. As I see it, there are four main issues: make-up and membership of the council; the statement 'the minister may'; the way the members are selected—only two coming from two organisations and one of them has to be politically selected, that is, the RSL; and it removes a 100-year-old faith in the veterans community to manage the funds of the Anzac Day Trust. It mixes bricks and mortar with the welfare of people.

As I see it, the bill is a mixture of two acts from Victoria: the Veterans Act 2005 and the Shrine of Remembrance Act 1978. You cannot mix these two acts together and still get a good outcome. I have no agenda here. I am not lobbying for a position on the council or membership of any committee. I do not belong to any organisation that has made a submission. I make my submission based on my previous experience as the chair of QVAC and of QFE. I ask that you not only read the submissions, although I am sure you have, but also listen to those submissions and to the voices of Mrs Jenny Gregory from the Australian War Widows' Guild, Ms Jennifer Waldron from Bundaberg District Women Veterans Association and others who have made submissions. They are only asking that their voice be heard. I am happy to expand on my remarks or answer any questions you may have on my submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr O'Kearney. The committee certainly very much appreciates your submission and your passionate suggestions.

Mr BENNETT: Good morning. Thank you very much for your submission. I take a lot of interest in the historical context that you have provided to the committee. I am very interested to hear your comments about the administration of the Anzac Day Trust Fund.

Mr O'Kearney: The Anzac Day Trust at present is administered by four people, at least three of whom come from the veterans community. The fund itself provides welfare support to a variety of organisations throughout Queensland. They could provide \$1,500 for morning tea to an RSL in Biloela and at the same time maybe \$100,000 to Legacy Brisbane to expand its services, but each of those submissions goes through a rigorous criteria by those veterans. They look at those things from the point of view that the morning tea out at Biloela is important to someone out there. If that were submitted into a normal grants type program and people did not understand the community, you might find that those types of submissions and those types of funding requests just would not happen and would not be accepted. To me, the bill can still incorporate the Anzac Day Trust. I do not see any reason the trustees still cannot do their job while the council oversees that trust but does not take control of that trust.

The other thing that worries me about that is the fact that people who have no understanding of the veterans community will now be making decisions on where that trust money goes. For instance, on the council will be a member of the Queensland Public Service and a representative Brisbane

from Brisbane City Council. I would argue that the poor old guy from Brisbane City Council really would not have any understanding of why Biloela needs \$1,200 or \$1,500 to fund some morning teas. In terms of the rest of the break-up, if there are only two veterans they will have to really push their voice forward to be heard if the remainder of that council are not veterans, especially when it comes to the Anzac Day Trust.

Mr SKELTON: In your submission you reiterate that all six council positions should be veterans. Would that not preclude someone like Jenny Gregory, who is the widow of a veteran, from membership? Do you see an issue with that?

Mr O'Kearney: Yes, I understand what you mean. Maybe my submission, the way I have written it, is incorrect in that. It should be possibly 'the veterans community'. We have been talking about the veterans community now for well over 30 years. It has not just been veterans. Certainly since probably the 1990s, veterans organisations, not just across Queensland but across Australia, became more focused on the total community rather than just the single entity. For instance, as I said before, there are organisations that look after veterans and there are organisations that look after the next of kin of veterans, such as Legacy. All of the organisations that I know of talk about the veterans community. One of the organisations I belong to certainly looks at it that way. When a veteran passes on, their wife or husband is still part of that organisation and the organisation still provides welfare services for that person. If the bill had 'veterans community' in it, I think that would solve the problem in relation to veterans.

Mr SKELTON: You have expanded it somewhat to suggest all veterans groups. There are something like 3,000 at the minute, and you pointed out that different groups are pushing different issues. What do you suggest we establish as a threshold for relevant experience in the veterans community?

Mr O'Kearney: Of all the positions on the council, if you made it more than 50 per cent veterans, they would all have to put in an expression of interest in relation to being accepted on that council, because it does quite important work, just like other boards and services. You would have to look through. I presume one of the ways to establish a criteria would be for the assistant ministers to sit down with a number of organisations and talk out what qualities they want in the people who sit on the Veterans' Council. The biggest problem with what this bill calls a veterans council is that it really is trying to run together two acts—about Anzac Square, to look after a static thing which has different requirements, and about looking after people's welfare. That is where I think the whole confusion has come about.

I understand what was trying to be done here, because I was the one who first suggested it when I came to QVAC, but the problem is that it has really made the council more Anzac Square aligned than veterans aligned. If you have people who just are not sure of those things, you will not get right advice. You do not really need a veterans reference committee if you have that. I believe that the bill states that the council has to liaise with and have consultation with the community. If that is the case, that is what they actually should be doing. That is what people like Jenny Gregory and Ms Waldron want. They want their voice heard in there; they do not just want the single voice of a couple of organisations constantly heard in there. Most of the time we are all in agreement, but there are some times when we do not think of the impact of a decision on a small community. I say that we should get together with people from the community and set out criteria for the veterans we want on there. Expressions of interest need to be asked for and people can apply. If politically you have to have RSL Queensland and maybe Legacy, you could still have four others who come from the community in general.

Mr BERKMAN: Effectively, the bill's answer to dealing with these questions around the composition of the council is the establishment of the veterans reference group that is exclusively composed of members of the veterans community. Do you believe that the formation of that reference group should be compulsory rather than at the minister's discretion?

Mr O'Kearney: In my experience as the chair of QVAC over the last nearly seven years and having been on other Anzac committees, I find as chair of an advisory group that you can only go forward with your cap in hand. You get listened to occasionally and you maybe get asked for an opinion occasionally as a group, but you really cannot direct anything or maybe help move things in the right direction. Sometimes you find that decisions being made by government come out of the blue. I know that sometimes they are political, but they come out of the blue and do not really benefit the veterans community realistically and holistically. They only benefit a certain number of people or a certain section of the community.

My opinion is that realistically they should have a trusteeship or managementship of Anzac Square and that manages Anzac Square like it should be for the next 100 years. It is then not left like it was so that the government has to spend \$21 million on it. Most of the \$21 million was fixing things that had just been left—maintenance. It is my belief that the trusteeship, board or whatever you want to call it would then be made up of people such as those proposed to be the council—someone from heritage and someone from marketing if you want to try to establish some way of Anzac Square producing funds to put back into Anzac Square.

I think that act should be kept separate, as they have done in Victoria. The Shrine of Remembrance has a separate act and has its own trustees. The mayor of Melbourne is part of that. As for the Veterans' Council, if you had a majority of veterans on that council, like you do for Indigenous boards or the various women's boards in the Queensland government—certainly the majority of people on Indigenous boards are Indigenous—you have your reference group.

If they are forced by the legislation to consult with the community then you are going to get the best balance. We can have another group as a reference group that can recommend things, can do things, can say they want to do whatever, but then when it goes to the council if there is not a majority of veterans on the council they could be overruled. It would not function.

CHAIR: Mr O'Kearney, I am very sorry to interrupt, but the time allocated for this session has expired. The committee very much appreciates your assistance today. We thank you sincerely for your submission.

CRAIG, Mr Andrew, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Craig: In doing that I will, if I may, sketch out what I perceive to be two levels of issues that have come to me from the bill. There are the primary issues and there are what I perceive to be secondary or consequential issues. First amongst the primary issues is that the bill attempts to conflate three elements, all of which require different skills and methods of operation. The implied order of priority in clause 3 of the bill is governance and operation of Anzac Square—and heaven knows that is vitally important—the Anzac Day Trust Fund and the provision of advice on veterans matters. Given that we are now calling this the Queensland Veterans' Council, I think the optics would be much better served, and indeed the practice, if the provision of advice on veterans matters was at the top of the pile rather than No. 3.

The second issue I see is the composition of the council. Frankly, I find it hard to see how the Veterans' Council can have credibility when it may well be that there are only two veterans representatives on the council. It certainly will not have credibility in the eye of the veterans community if that percentage is as low as that. You can talk about the desirable composition of the council, but fundamentally I believe the chairman should be a veteran, in addition to those who are appointed.

My third point is around the budget, which is probably not a big issue when it comes to the bill. From the discussions your committee had on 30 April, it would seem that the budget for all activities under this act, including the Office for Veterans, will be taken from the allocated \$2.4 million per annum. This appears to be supported in the explanatory notes. I just cannot see that working. I do not know what the cost of the Office for Veterans will be. As a rough ballpark figure, let us say it is a \$1 million or \$1.2 million or of that order and the cost of maintaining the parklands in the square, from the figures provided to the Anzac Square steering committee by the Brisbane City Council, was something like \$750,000 a year. If you take \$1.2 million and \$750,000 away from the figure of \$2.4 million, there really is no money left for any Anzac Square staff worth a damn, much less the money required to manage, maintain, preserve and develop the square. A proper budget cannot be struck without a proper concept of operations, a strategy to achieve that concept and a business plan to support the strategy.

My fourth point is around the veterans reference group. As things stand, there can be no guarantee that it will be appointed. The intention may certainly be there, but I believe the wording in the bill has to be changed to 'the minister will appoint'. In the absence of that sort of direction, it could be that a minister in five years time or whatever has a view of the world and decides simply not to appoint a veterans reference group, and this would deprive the council of a great deal of knowledgeable advice.

My secondary or consequential problems—there are four of those as well—are that the bill attempts to create a governance structure for Anzac Square. I grant this is desperately needed, but because there is no concept of operations for the square, much less a strategy, the proposed board is what I would call generic rather than specific to the unique situation and challenges of Anzac Square.

My second point is that it rather begs the question: who will actually manage and operate Anzac Square? I do not believe the Office for Veterans is set up to do that and there is no staff or management structure in place for the square itself. Thus, the council could be presiding over Anzac Square but without the capacity to ensure that its purposes—to manage, maintain, preserve and develop Anzac Square—can be met.

My third secondary point is that with only two veterans on the council—and I understand that it is within the minister's capacity to appoint others, but it could be that the council does indeed only have two veterans on it—if there was a pressing issue which those two veterans may see fit to raise, they do not have the numbers in the council to actually cause the council to have a meeting to address that particular issue. It requires three council members to do that.

Finally—and this is, I suppose, an observation as much as anything else—the position of the Brisbane City Council on the council is ambivalent given that it has no interest in veterans matters nor indeed in the Anzac Day Trust Fund. Neither will it have any responsibility for Anzac Square once this bill is enacted. Given the importance of the square to Brisbane, I do understand that the city council may feel entitled to a position on the council—and indeed that position flowed from the consideration of the Anzac Square steering committee. The fact that the city council had a position on that committee was one of the fundamental reasons they agreed to a statutory body as the governance structure.

I believe we now have a unique chance to get the governance of Anzac Square right and ensure that it will be a military memorial of national significance, which it is not at the moment, of which Queensland and Australia can be proud. The bill also provides, most importantly, an opportunity to ensure that veterans affairs in Queensland get the level of government attention they deserve. That loops back to my original comments about the purpose of the council. All three elements are important, but I feel that refinements are needed to ensure that the council's operation is effective in these three disparate areas.

CHAIR: It is the government's intention for Anzac Square to be something that Queenslanders are proud of and Australians are proud of. A tremendous investment is being made. You mentioned your concern around having two veterans on the council. If it were not two, how many would you recommend or what would be the composition?

Mr Craig: If a prime purpose of the council is to provide advice to the minister on veterans matters—you can debate the actual number because the council has many other responsibilities which require different skills—I think anything less than 50 per cent—that is, four veterans—would be difficult. If you had four veterans on the council and the chair was appointed—and I believe that he or she should indeed be a veteran—then you would probably have five. I believe the veterans community would see that as a satisfactory number.

Ms LUI: Could you explain to the committee the issues you have identified in relation to the preparation of a conservation management plan for Anzac Square?

Mr Craig: The importance of Anzac Square being what it is, we unquestionably need a conservation management plan. The establishment, in my experience, of conservation management plans is no trivial task. They can take a good deal of time and require a good deal of expertise. There are many dimensions to Anzac Square that have to be considered in producing a satisfactory conservation management plan. Somewhere in the early establishment of the governance of the square, a major task will be to set in place an organisation and a capacity to develop that plan. I note that the bill has given a time frame for that. That is important, but it will be a large task and it will need a lot of support, for whatever the structure is that manages Anzac Square, in order to achieve it.

Mr SKELTON: You have already detailed your concerns in relation to the composition of the membership. I asked this question of another submitter. What vetting process do you propose so that it does have a balance between veterans and people who are representative of that community?

Mr Craig: Let me backtrack a little to put it in context. There are something like 3,500 ex-service organisations in Australia and pretty much all of those are represented in Queensland, so the pool from which to draw potential veteran members of the council is huge. A good number—but it is not a huge number—of the 3,500 organisations have been around for a long time and have established management practices and structures and have a deal of experience in coping with veterans affairs.

A good number of those organisations, possibly the majority, have not been around for a long time, do not have an awful lot of people and tend to be single-issue focused. Thus, I think we will have to craft an arrangement where those who know the veterans community can recommend to the minister organisations that would add to the council both the skills and the knowledge that are required. One mechanism for doing it could be the veterans review group. If that was appointed carefully, it would have a good view of which veterans organisations might be best placed to provide the sort of advice and support we are talking of and could make that recommendation to the minister. That loops back to if the veterans review group is not appointed then we are really flying blind.

Mr BENNETT: Good morning, Mr Craig. Thank you very much for your detailed submission. I guess with the time remaining I will probably just make a statement and agree with you on the issues about the cost and about the future and the budget that has been outlined. I have been on the public record about that already. Would you like to briefly provide some more detail of your concerns about the organisations and the funding that has been allocated? It certainly has been raised a number of times in submissions.

Mr Craig: Obviously there is provision in the bill for the Veterans' Council to provide a budget for Anzac Square, but I think we want to be careful about putting carts before horses. Square one seems to me that we have to establish a concept of operations for Anzac Square. For example, is it to be supported wholly from the public purse? Will it have the capacity to receive donations from the public, as happened when it was built in the first place? We need the concept of operations, we need to develop a strategy to achieve that concept and then ultimately we need a business plan which will define both staff needed and a budget against achievements for probably a five-year rolling program. We do not have that structure in place at the moment. To try to establish a budget without it is, to be honest, something of a pluck.

CHAIR: The time for this session has expired. I appreciate, as does the committee, your time in making the submission but also in coming to meet with us.

CAMERON, Mr Stewart, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good morning, Mr Cameron. I welcome you and invite you to make an opening statement on the bill. After that, committee members, I am sure, will have some questions.

Mr Cameron: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. By way of background, I have been supporting the veteran community in Queensland for over 15 years. I have very much a personal interest in Anzac Square and I have some concerns that over time we have forgotten that the square is actually Queensland's state war memorial. We cannot be Brisbane-centric on this. I am pleased to see that action is being taken to bring some clarity to the management of Anzac Square. The people of Queensland deserve no less. The bill, however—I think you have heard it from a number of speakers—confuses a number of issues. I believe that the management and conservation and significant historical aspects of Anzac Square need to be treated as a separate entity.

You have heard that there are many voices in the veteran community across Queensland. I think we would all be surprised to know that there are over half a million people directly associated with the veteran community in Queensland and they all have an interest. These people are spread all over Queensland. Since being notified that I was coming here, I have had the opportunity to talk to a number of friends, from Weipa all the way down the coast, and they all expressed the same concern: once government becomes involved they will lose control. That is not to say that they have control at the moment, but perhaps there is a belief amongst them that they do.

You have heard from other speakers—and my submission makes the same point—that it is the composition of the council; it is the funding of the council. I also believe that there is a potential impact on the Queensland based ESOs into the future in so much as if the council is established then the government of the day could turn around and say, 'We don't need to engage the ESO community. We have our own council for advice.' I think that would be dangerous.

I think we need to be cautious around the politicisation of Anzac Day and the veteran affairs element. I am not suggesting that that would be the case, but, again looking into the future, we just do not know. Whatever legislation the government comes up with must ensure it is balanced and we must ensure a bipartisan approach to the management of Anzac Square and, more importantly, to the management of veterans issues in Queensland. I am happy to take questions. I reiterate my support for bringing some clarity around Anzac Square. Whatever we do, whatever comes of this, I think we must ensure that the people of Queensland understand that when they enter that area they are entering a war memorial. It is not a park. Thank you.

Mr BENNETT: Good morning, Mr Cameron, and congratulations on a very detailed submission to the committee. It has been very useful. I will not re-prosecute everything that has been said, because I do not think repeating the same things over and over again is healthy. I am really interested in your insights about Anzac Square and some of the issues. I believe there are some issues that have been raised around some statues and other things that still may be or should be part of the future of Anzac Square. I am interested in, and I think the committee would be happy to have some insights into, your knowledge of Anzac Square and how the renovations et cetera have progressed.

Mr Cameron: I actually was involved in the committee that looked at the renovations. I actually have an interest in the shrine itself. I guess the main point is that when they walk into Anzac Square a lot of people become confused. There are a number of statues that sit in the parkland, but they are not part of the commemorative element of Anzac Square. That is the shrine and the eternal flame. That is where veterans and the community should gather or gather around to commemorate the sacrifice of Queenslanders, not just in the First World War but in every war and engagement since.

I know there was conversation around the placement of the statues during the renovation in so much as they were removed, and there was a voice amongst us saying that they should not go back there and perhaps should go somewhere else—Roma Street Parkland, for example. We must ensure we do not do anything in Anzac Square that will cause or may cause division into the future. By concentrating on the shrine and the eternal flame, we are actually giving effect to the men who designed it in the first place. That is something that I think we need to be very conscious of.

The square itself in many aspects has not changed since the thirties. The only thing that has really changed is the incorporation of a number of statues. Again, people are confused about them. They think they are statues to nurses or to other groups. They are not. They are actually statues to campaigns—Papua New Guinea, for example. We need to be cautious about what we do in a legislative sense in ensuring purity of the square, because I think the ones who actually should have a voice in this and do not are the men and women who never came back. We need to ensure their memory is kept sacred.

Ms LUI: Thank you for your time here this morning. You mentioned in your statement your concerns around government involvement in setting up the Queensland Veterans' Council. Would you be able to expand on your concerns?

Mr Cameron: I think the draft bill is actually attempting to do a number of things. I think the draft bill should concentrate on one thing and do it well. Perhaps that one thing centres around Anzac Square. If we want to look at the veteran community as another issue then I think it is going to take considerable time to actually get any legislation in a format that will be acceptable to the majority of veterans. As I said, when people think of veterans in Queensland they think in small numbers. That is not the truth. The truth is—and this is from a previous life of mine in the RSL—that there are over half a million people in Queensland who have a direct impact into the veteran community and, as I say, they all have a voice. We need to ensure that voice does not become loud. We need to ensure that voice is supportive of what the government is wanting to do in support of veterans, if that makes sense.

Mr BERKMAN: I really appreciate your time here, Mr Cameron. You have been pretty explicit in your submission that the discretion around the formation of the reference group should be removed and that it should be a requirement under the act. Do you see any other changes that would need to be made around the function of that reference group or would that change in and of itself better facilitate the views of the veterans community being heard?

Mr Cameron: As I have said in my submission, I actually think the name is a misnomer. Two of eight does not give voice to the veteran community in Queensland. You have heard from other speakers this morning that the reference group really can offer advice and opinion but that is the extent of it. It will come down to a decision amongst the eight, two of whom are veterans. I know how the veteran community is feeling about that at the moment because I have spoken to them. I think the real change would be in the composition of the council. If it is to be called a veterans council then the majority of members must be veterans.

Mr SKELTON: Thank you for your time, Mr Cameron. Your submission details your views on the funding and financial implications of the QVC Bill. Could you briefly outline these to the committee?

Mr Cameron: My concern—and I will be quite open—is that no government will ever have enough money to do everything it needs to do. That has to be accepted as a fact. Therefore, it becomes a question of what is achievable. Again you have two issues in play: you have the veteran community on one side and you have Anzac Square on the other. We know that Anzac Square does not just exist by itself. Funds must be appropriated to manage Anzac Square. If we do the raw maths around the Anzac Day Trust at the moment and the current cost of looking after Anzac Square, I think over a five-year period the veteran community through the Anzac Day Trust will be poorer to the tune of about \$5 million. Funding is not a critical issue inasmuch as funding can always be resolved, but the way it is explained at the moment would give effect to the belief that this is more about a bureaucratic approach to solve the problem of Anzac Square as opposed to the veteran community. You have heard from other speakers that the order of placement of the priorities needs to be reconsidered. The one thing the veteran community will not like is believing that they are third fiddle. Again I come back to my point: my focus certainly is on the veteran community, but I absolutely want to maintain a view that Anzac Square is seen for what it is: a sacred site to the veteran community. Indeed, it should be a sacred site to all Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Thank you sincerely for your insight and your advice to the committee.

LOWIS, Mr John, Lt Col. (Rtd), President, Defence Force Welfare Association (Queensland Incorporated)

CHAIR: I now welcome Mr John Lewis, president of the Defence Force Welfare Association Queensland Incorporated. Thank you for coming along this morning, Mr Lewis. I now invite you to make an opening statement on the bill, after which committee members will have some very important questions for you.

Mr Lewis: I have to agree with a lot of what Mr Cameron said earlier on, particularly about the importance of Anzac Square. My submission did not focus on that particular aspect, but it is highly important. We are on the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee—the 105-year-old committee that started it all off—which runs the dawn service.

While we provide some veteran services at an individual level, our main focus is advocacy: making submissions at the political level and to the bureaucracy. A key role for us is keeping the veteran community informed and current. We are on DVA working groups looking at legislation changes now initiated by the Productivity Commission. Along with Legacy, we were on the DVA working group that was involved with getting the Veterans' Covenant at the national level. We work directly with the bureaucracy and we are also on ministerial consultative forums. We also give evidence regularly at Senate committee hearings. We have had two this year. As a result, we have early notice and input into veteran and serving ADF initiatives related to the wellbeing of many of those living in Queensland and the possible interactions of those activities with state provided services. Our advice to Canberra ministers and departments is timely and unfiltered; veteran advice to the Queensland government should be the same.

The Anzac Day Trust Grant Program has worked pretty well as it is at the moment. I do not know the reason for changing the system. There has been a big expansion in the number of veteran organisations which has largely occurred from 20 years of war that the ADF has been involved in. There is a different demographic. The new veteran demographic has not been comfortable with some older ESOs, so this has created a plethora of organisations with some new problems and organisations. Some are single-issue ones—so is Legacy—but most are not.

There are reasons within this turmoil why the organisation known as the Alliance of Defence Services Organisations, which we lead, was formed. Now is not the time to reduce the breadth of veteran representation as this act does. The financial support of smaller ESOs such as Bundaberg District Women Veterans is actually put at risk. They are a unique voice. They are a voice not only of women veterans—that is not widows; it is women veterans—but they are also a voice for remote veterans. The broader veteran community must be heard. There must be a balance in representation between the established and rich ESOs to the newer and less well-off. Four veterans nominated by the veteran community is a minimum for that.

Our final point is that Anzac Square was a construction site for 18 months for the 100th anniversary. That was not a really good thing. Obviously governance issues need to be addressed. New South Wales and Victoria do have statutory bodies to undertake responsibility for those things, and we definitely support using those models, but those states do not use the same statutory body for memorials and providing veteran advice or managing grants. They are chalk and cheese. Victoria has a separate veterans' advisory council as do some other states, and we support following a proven model. On the grants side of things it has not been too bad, actually. I would like you to take note of the common view of the veteran community. I believe there is a way ahead to address the needs and issues raised and common sense has to prevail. It would be good to demonstrate a bit of trust in the veteran community by giving them a recognised and guaranteed voice.

Mr BENNETT: Mr Lewis, I am very interested in some parts of your submission—which is very well written, by the way. Can you outline for the committee some of the issues around consultation on this particular bill? Your organisation and others have alluded to the fact that 18 months did not provide sufficient time for consultation.

Mr Lewis: Yes, we did get early notice of this—I think it was August, some time ago—and we participated in an initial discussion which looked at the concept. The focus was largely on Anzac Square, which obviously needs action. I do not know if the trust was mentioned, but that was not the focus of those discussions. When this came up we were a little bit surprised—greatly surprised—and we consulted as many people as we could in the time. But we are a voluntary organisation and that is a lot of phone calls. Phone calls do not just take five minutes: you have to go through the whole rigmarole of explaining what the situation is and all of that. Without any exception the veteran community was totally against the actual decrease of representation and the way that veteran appointments are chosen. What worked for the Anzac Day trust I think worked well. I think we should

build on QVAC and the representation there and use that to feed in to identify the people who give a cross-section representation to provide advice and to make assessments of veteran needs for the trust as well.

I contacted the ADSO nationally and had full endorsement from them to speak with one mind, if you like, from the cross-section. As you are aware, their focus has largely been at the national level, but when there are activities going on that affect states the state group starts liaising very quickly and does take action. We have done that before with wage increases and things like that.

CHAIR: Mr Lewis, thank you for that. It is important our committee understands that consultation at the national level.

Ms LUI: Thank you, Mr Lewis. Your submission notes that the DFWA supports the concept of a Queensland Veterans' Council. Can you outline to the committee the reasons for this?

Mr Lewis: Yes. The QVAC has been there but it has not met for quite some time. We sense that there is a feeling amongst the state bureaucracy that veteran issues are a federal matter and 'it's not our business.' There are quite a few veterans here. We have the largest population of ADF members in this state. The only operational Army unit actually on operations is based here in Queensland. The 51st Far North Queensland Regiment does border patrols and it is the only one. It affects the breadth of the community. That voice must be heard and it must be given a little bit more 'oomph' to get the advice in. I did write earlier, on that.

Veterans were being looked after by an office set up for the centenary. When the centenary died they started to fade away, and what was going to keep providing the support for QVAC—and there was lip-service paid to it. We saw government departments putting piles of people on in various areas throughout that, but there was not enough to keep half a dozen to look after veterans.

Yesterday on Facebook I saw an interview with the Minister for Veterans in Victoria wherein he stated what they were intending to do, including their submission to the royal commission on suicide and a whole raft of stuff. Victoria has a third of the number of veterans, veteran related or ADF people—we have more and there is not a skerrick coming from the Queensland government. I believe the act is a start to get a little bit more oomph—and formal oomph—behind the veteran thing.

Mr BERKMAN: I have no questions other than to say thank you very much for a really comprehensive and helpful submission.

Mr SKELTON: Mr Lewis, can you briefly outline for the committee how you think the proposal for the QVC could be more representative of Queensland veterans, given there are so many different and disparate groups?

Mr Lewis: You are from the veteran community and you have come up with a lot of diverse opinions about the way to go forward, but I have to agree with Stewart Cameron that Anzac Square deserves focus by itself. It has clear boundaries and clear bricks and mortar responsibilities, but that is purely an enabler for the commemorative events and the educational role that is there, and that is where the veteran advice comes in there. I would see a balance, preferably fifty-fifty, and possibly some of the non-veteran appointments being open to veterans. There are veterans who have curatorial capabilities who could just focus on the state memorial.

The other side, advice and the allocation of funds to meet veteran needs, I believe there should be a separate entity. Having listened to other people's submissions and having talked to people a lot since, they are separate things. There needs to be a relationship with the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee because that has an educational role as well. That has veteran organisations on it plus a cross-section of the community. In fact, there is a good model there because the annual general meeting is this week. As the Premier is the chair and the Leader of the Opposition is the deputy chair, it gives the feeling of a united bipartisan approach, which would be good.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, Mr Lewis, I thank you sincerely for your time and your submission.

JENYNS, Ms Margaret, Head of Veterans Services Support, RSL Queensland (via teleconference)

CHAIR: The committee now welcomes Ms Margaret Jenyns, the head of Veterans Services Support, via teleconference. Good morning, Ms Jenyns. I ask that you make an opening statement to the committee.

Ms Jenyns: RSL Queensland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. We say upfront that we support the actions by the Queensland state government to establish this statutory body, which aims to draw together the veterans' issues that come under the responsibility of the Queensland government. RSL Queensland is pleased to note that the legislative framework for veterans' matters has been modernised by providing for the development and maintenance of Anzac Square, the formalisation of the responsibility of the Anzac Day Trust Fund and an enhanced ability to monitor and report on general matters affecting veterans via the proposed veterans reference group.

The main points we have raised in our submission are as follows: RSL Queensland is firmly of the view that the proposed membership of the council as detailed in clause 13 of the bill should be reconsidered. It is important that the members of the council clearly understand veterans' issues and the views of veterans. Having two veterans in a membership of eight does not allow for this. I will refer back to what John Lewis said with his eloquent details on why this is so.

RSL Queensland has proposed that the membership should include three veterans selected from ex-service organisations as identified by the minister and possibly should also include two former members of the ADF who are engaged in civilian employment and who have the appropriate skills and qualifications. This suggestion will allow for ongoing involvement by the ex-service organisations, but will also encourage participation by members of the ADF who have transitioned into civilian employment and wish to maintain a connection with veterans' issues. RSL Queensland supports having a former member of the ADF, either ESO or civilian employee, as chair for the Queensland Veterans' Council meetings.

Secondly, we have requested clarification of the funding arrangements for the Queensland Veterans' Council to undertake the important work it does in relation to the maintenance and development of Anzac Square. The identified funding does not appear to anticipate any development or major maintenance of a memorial nor is it clear how the routine maintenance of this historic and spectacular memorial will be funded and carried out, what arrangements will be required with the Brisbane City Council and what are the projected costs. We need to be reassured that Anzac Square will continue to be that special site for our veterans, residents and visitors alike.

Thirdly, RSL Queensland supports an approach that gives credible interested ESOs an opportunity to have an involvement in the council. We hold the view that the ex-service members of both the Queensland Veterans' Council and the veterans reference group should be selected via a transparent process, thereby opening up the council and the reference group to a wider range of ESO members who have the required skills. We certainly support the veterans reference group but are seeking to have a more transparent process for ensuring there is a good cross-section of membership.

Our fourth point is in relation to the administrative support that is referred to in the bill and that is provided to both the council and the reference group to ensure the successful delivery of the agreed initiatives. The next point, which I did not raise in my submission, is in relation to the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, which is a volunteer group that looks towards making sure that the Anzac Day ceremonies progress successfully. We wonder if that should also be considered to come under this umbrella. That is the crux of our submission. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Ms Jenyns, on behalf of the committee I thank you sincerely for the time that you have taken to make the submission. I will turn to the member for Burnett and Deputy Chair, Mr Bennett, to ask a question.

Mr BENNETT: Good morning, Ms Jenyns, and thank you for all the work that you do with our veterans in the community. We know that you provide an amazing support service. I have a question around the consultation that RSL had engaged with prior to the drafting of the bill and whether the committee can have any insights into some of the conversations that may have helped put this bill into perspective.

Ms Jenyns: I am sorry, I did not catch all of the question.

Mr BENNETT: That is fine. I am always happy to repeat. I am asking for your understanding of the consultation that was undertaken with RSL Queensland in the drafting of the bill.

Ms Jenyns: I was not aware of a lot of consultation, I am afraid, in actually drafting the bill. I think there was some work done with the QVAC, which we are a member of, but not of any specific consultation in drafting the bill. It may have happened at a higher level than me.

Ms LUI: Ms Jenyns, your submission includes a number of queries about the funding arrangements and budget allocation of the Queensland Veterans' Council. We have heard previously from other speakers on their views around what that would look like. Can you outline to the committee your concerns in relation to the budget allocation and do you agree or not agree with the budget allocation?

Ms Jenyns: I was referring to some figures there where I was not clear just what the budget allocation was because it seemed to give a figure and then it gave two figures—I am just looking for the actual words: \$2,700 and \$2,400, I think, per annum. I was then thinking that that seems like a fairly basic amount because there is the suggestion that the members of the Queensland Veterans' Council will be paid for their time and there are various other administrative supports, but I am not sure what budget that would come out of. It did not seem to leave a lot of money, from my calculations, to actually do the necessary work, going back to what John Lowis said in relation to making sure there is education facilities and there is development of the memorial, the museum and all that sort of thing. I was concerned that that budget would be used up on the basic ongoing issues and there would not be anything left for any major initiatives and things like that that could improve the whole site and improve the great educational facility that it is. That was one concern.

The other concern was in relation to the Brisbane City Council. I think the state government is taking over the maintenance role, but exactly what does that mean in relation to who is going to mow the lawn, pick up the rubbish and all that sort of thing and has that been budgeted for? It is the day-to-day tasks. This is my not understanding just what the state government has a facility for, but most of those things would normally, I would think, be undertaken by the Brisbane City Council.

Mr KRAUSE: Good morning, Ms Jenyns, and thank you for your submission to the committee. Are you by chance the Ms Jenyns from Tamborine Mountain?

Ms Jenyns: I am, yes.

Mr KRAUSE: It is lovely to speak to you in this committee hearing as your local member. It is like talk-back radio here at the moment. Thank you very much for your submission. I want to ask you about your suggestion around clause 14 about providing for an impartial recruitment process for the nominated positions. Could you tell the committee a little more about that and how you would see it working in practice?

Ms Jenyns: It was said that the minister had the capacity to be able to identify which ex-service organisations could be involved. I would see it working by the minister identifying those ESOs. Let's say they say to RSL Queensland, ADSO and various others, 'We would like you to submit names of people to be involved in this committee or council.' Then there should be a process whereby those people could be selected via an actual selection process. There would be an invitation. It would be the major ex-service organisations or the ones that are of key interest to be involved in the council. Then it would be the government's role to go through that selection process and select the ones. To me that would ensure that across the whole range of people within that council you were getting all the required skills and experience that you needed to run a successful council and also a successful reference group.

Mr KRAUSE: Further to that, in terms of having organisations put a name or number of names forward, would you see that as being just one route towards being nominated? Would you also say that people could also be chosen from the community at large, including the veterans community at large, or only through the nomination process?

Ms Jenyns: What we put in the submission was it would be reliant on the names of the people the ex-service organisations had put forward. Then you would consider who the most appropriate ones were for what you wanted. I suggested that on the council you also have two veterans or former veterans who are actually in civilian employment, so they are not necessarily acting on behalf of the ESO. You could go out more widely and advertise to say, 'Who is interested in this?' You might get someone who is working in town planning or something like that who says, 'Yes, I'm interested. I'm an ex-serviceman. I am currently working wherever and I would be interested in taking on this role.' Then you would also look at them and see how many applicants you got and pick the best ones.

Mr BERKMAN: Thanks for joining us, Ms Jenyns. Your submission suggests changes to the composition of the veterans reference group. I note that a number of other submissions have suggested that that group should be compulsory. At the moment it is at the discretion of the minister whether that reference group does actually exist. Would you agree that at the very least it should be a requirement of the act that the reference group be brought into existence?

Ms Jenyns: I absolutely totally agree. It should be an absolute requirement that there be a veterans reference group because they are working more at the ground level as to what are the actual issues on the ground with veterans and what needs to be done, whereas the council is sort of functioning at a higher more planning level. I think it is absolutely essential that the state government get feedback into the system, into the process, of what the issues on the ground are for veterans. What you would be looking for in that reference group are the ones who are actually working with advocacy issues, the provision of care issues, aged care or whatever the case may be, where they can provide various insights into what is going on from their own experience.

I fully support that. I would like to see—and I know this is not consistent with all the other submissions—that there is a clear line of communication between the Veterans' Council and the veterans reference group so that the Veterans' Council can go to the reference group and say, 'What do you think about this and what is your recommendation from the experience and the knowledge that you have?'

CHAIR: Ms Jenyns, I thank you sincerely for your submission and for making the time today. The committee also very much appreciates the great service and the support that you give to our veterans community. Thank you. The time having expired for this session, we thank you sincerely.

Ms Jenyns: Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

COX, Mr Brendan, Chief Executive Officer, Legacy Club of Brisbane (via teleconference)

CHAIR: The committee now welcomes Mr Brendan Cox, Chief Executive Officer of the Legacy Club of Brisbane. I invite you to make an opening statement as it relates to the draft bill.

Mr Cox: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Community Support and Services Committee in regard to the Queensland Veterans' Council Bill 2021. I offer my sincere apologies for not being there in person. I am currently at the Enoggera Barracks doing my Army medical review board which I could not get out of.

My submission is on behalf of Legacy Club of Brisbane, an organisation that has served the Queensland community for almost 100 years. On a personal level, prior to becoming CEO of Legacy Brisbane, I served in the Royal Australian Infantry for 26 years and have seen the need of Legacy services to mates' families. Other organisations have addressed different aspects of the bill. My focus and concern is on the composition of the Veterans' Advisory Council. This has been raised by RSL, John Lewis and Andrew Craig. I do not think it would be any great surprise for your committee.

Currently, of the eight members of the council, only two are likely to be veterans. For an organisation that aims to be able to advise the minister about veterans' matters, this certainly seems inadequate to Legacy. I understand the difficulty for those outside the ex-service community here in Queensland as to how you select the appropriate candidates, as you have already had the discussions with the RSL. I certainly wish you well in those endeavours. However, by including as a minimum four on the council, you ensure that you have a broader representation than if it were simply constrained to two.

My concern, if the bill goes through unamended and does not reflect a minimum of four veterans, is that it may be seen at best ceremonial and at worst irrelevant to the veteran community here in Queensland. I think by demonstrating a strong commitment to hear the veterans' voices within the council is a demonstration of the state government's intent to represent veterans' issues throughout the state.

The second issue from a Legacy Brisbane perspective, as has been touched on before, is that there is no obligation for the minister to establish a veterans reference group. I see this as critical. I see the advisory council's focus of providing good timely advice to the minister here in Queensland. I see the veterans reference group grounding some of the advice in the reality of what is happening here in Queensland at any point in time.

I did make a recommendation in my submission about what that structure of four may look like. I did note that RSL Queensland and Legacy from Queensland—and that is not just Legacy Brisbane—would be appropriate as two permanent sitting positions and, equally, a modern veteran or a young veteran if I can term it that way—with Middle Eastern operations experience onwards—and also a female veteran, representing a broad cross-section of contemporary issues but also service delivery issues here within Queensland. That outlines my concerns with the bill. I am happy to take any questions.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you, Mr Cox, for your tireless work in our community. In the drafting of the bill, I am curious about whether the Legacy Club of Brisbane or Legacy broadly were consulted and what input you may have had in the drafting of the bill.

Mr Cox: There was no direct consultation with Legacy Brisbane. I am unaware of any consultation with the other six clubs of Legacy here in Queensland. We had advised them of the bill once we became aware of it. They seemed interested in what its content was. I can only assume that the other six clubs of Legacy here in Queensland were not consulted either.

Mr BENNETT: Have you had any involvement with the advisory committee over a period of time?

Mr Cox: No. Because Legacy is partner and children and not veteran specific, we may be overlooked at times which is a disappointing perspective mainly because Legacy is dealing with very much contemporary issues of the modern families who are exiting the Australian Defence Force. In particular, we serve incapacitated veterans. When an incapacitated veteran comes out of service or transitions back into the civil community, it is the whole family that goes through a new experience. It is the whole family that must support the veteran in his or her future life, and it is intended to keep the family as best as possible in a safe environment and close together. Whilst I understand that people may not see Legacy as a veteran organisation, the fact is that we support veterans through their families, assisting them through very difficult times.

Mr SKELTON: You have noted in your submission that nominations from veterans' organisations should not prevent the appointment to the QVC of suitable veterans who are not members of a veterans' organisation. Can you tell the committee more about this?

Mr Cox: If I am hearing correctly, the question is about the element of the submission saying that those members going to the council do not necessarily have to be from a recognised service organisation?

Mr SKELTON: Yes.

Mr Cox: It goes to what RSL Queensland was talking about. This is where the balance needs to be about understanding individual issues but very contemporary issues of those transitioning out of the Defence Force who then gain employment within the community who equally have the skills that the council is after. They may not be a member of the RSL. They may not be a member of Legacy, and that is a personal choice. Certainly their voices should not be silenced based on their membership to an organisation.

We need to celebrate those who are willing to step forward and be part of better service delivery, better integration and better collaboration from very much a personal perspective as well as an organisational perspective. At the end of the day, once the council membership is articulated and known and the skill sets are established, we should not be blinkered by what membership they have in the ex-service community.

Ms LUI: Mr Cox, we have heard from previous speakers about good representation on the Queensland Veterans' Council. I note your submission recommends that two of the veteran positions on the QVC should be occupied by a young veteran and a female veteran. Can you briefly outline the reasons behind your recommendation to the committee?

Mr Cox: My intent there was to expand the knowledge of the council by its membership. RSL Queensland has a very broad demographic that it serves. The vast majority of its demographic are in the aged environment, similar to Legacy. We have 10,000 families from a Legacy Queensland perspective in our care. The vast majority of dependents are aged ladies of the World War II vintage. By ensuring that we have younger representation on the council we do not get overly focused on what the current problems and service delivery issues are within the well-structured traditional organisations that we have here in Queensland—by that I mean the RSL and Legacy.

Whilst we have young families coming into our care constantly—and of course there are younger veterans going through the RSL—it does not exclude RSL and Legacy representing younger issues, but this would bring to the forefront of the council's consideration what the most contemporary issues are. It could be from a social media perspective. How do we communicate better across the whole demographic of the veteran community here in Queensland, not just the majority and not just a minority? How do we get it across as best we can to the whole state?

CHAIR: Mr Cox, thank you sincerely for all the work you do in our communities. On behalf of our committee, we thank you for the great work of Legacy. Thank you, Mr Cox. I appreciate your submission.

MAGILL, Ms Kirrily, Executive Director, Office for Veterans, Department of the Premier and Cabinet

MOLOMBY, Ms Kate, Director, Appointments and Constitutional Services, Department of the Premier and Cabinet

MORGAN, Ms Filly, Deputy Director-General, Corporate and Government Services, Department of the Premier and Cabinet

CHAIR: I now welcome to the table representatives from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for being here today. I ask that one of you make an opening statement on the draft bill, after which I am sure that committee members will have questions.

Ms Morgan: First, I thank the committee for the opportunity to attend today to assist in its consideration of the bill. The department will be providing a written response to issues raised in the written submissions to the committee. We are also happy to address any of the additional issues raised today. I would like to make some comments in relation to the two key themes that came up in the written submissions as well as today: firstly, funding available for Anzac Square and the Anzac Day Trust Fund, and then representation on the Queensland Veterans' Council.

In relation to the funding, the \$2.4 million per annum budget allocation referenced in the explanatory notes includes the cost of the Office for Veterans, the costs for the Queensland Veterans' Council, the maintenance and operation of the Anzac Square parklands, and the operation, including the curation, of the Anzac Square memorial galleries. As the committee is aware, currently Anzac Square is under the control of the Brisbane City Council. The current budget was developed based on information received from the Brisbane City Council.

Subject to the passage of the bill, once the Queensland Veterans' Council is established any other costs associated with the operation of Anzac Square will be confirmed; for example, costs that may be associated with depreciation and ongoing asset maintenance of the heritage structures. The department will work with the Queensland Veterans' Council to determine these costs. If any further funding is required in the future, this would be considered as part of the usual government budget process. The Queensland Veterans' Council will receive administrative support through the Office for Veterans in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The Anzac Day Trust Fund will continue to provide annual grants to institutions, organisations or associations that support the welfare of veterans and their dependants. The amount of funding allocated to the Anzac Day Trust Fund will not be amended by the bill in any way. The formula for funding to the Anzac Day Trust Fund will remain as prescribed in the Anzac Day Act 1995. In addition, the funding allocated to the Anzac Day Trust Fund cannot be used for any other purposes than the purposes currently provided for under the Anzac Day Act. The funding for the Anzac Day Trust Fund cannot be used to support Anzac Square, nor the Queensland Veterans' Council. Funding for these initiatives is provided from a separate budget allocation.

Various submitters have raised concerns that the bill limits the representation of veterans on the Queensland Veterans' Council. The bill provides for the membership of the council to include two ex officio members, two members nominated by veterans' organisations and four other appointed members with the necessary skills and experience to support the council in the performance of its functions as a statutory body. In relation to the four other appointed members, the bill provides the minister with the discretion to consider a broad range of skills or experience that the minister considers relevant or necessary for the Queensland Veterans' Council to perform its functions. There is no limit on the number of veterans who can occupy the position of appointed members. The membership of the council as outlined in the bill provides a contemporary governance structure. The veterans group will support the council in its advisory role to the minister on veterans' matters. In addition, the council is able to form other committees to advise on specific matters. Thank you to the committee for your time. We would be pleased to take any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Morgan. We thank the department for its leadership.

Mr BENNETT: I acknowledge your comments about the make-up of the board being two members, ex officios and at the discretion of the minister. It is important to note that, without mandated representation from the veteran community, the real risk is the politicisation or weaponisation of this organisation with ministerial discretion on appointments. That really needs to be highlighted. We need to be respectful of all the submissions that now have been quite consistent in that space. In terms of the \$2.4 million annually now to run these three distinct entities, you mentioned that you had spoken to the city council. I am really concerned by the cost of ongoing maintenance in terms of rubbish and Brisbane

statues at this important, historic facility. Was that not factored in as well? At our last hearing I think I asked you Ms Morgan about the costs and raised our deep concerns about that amount of money. Can you provide more explanation around how we came to that budget figure?

Ms Morgan: Sure. In relation to maintenance, we discussed with the Brisbane City Council how much it costs them to maintain the parklands, for example. The maintenance and the operation of the parklands was factored in. In the curated gallery area, we have an agreement in place already with the State Library of Queensland which runs the memorial gallery component and the staff for that. That is factored in as well. What is not factored in is, for example, depreciation or ongoing maintenance in terms of the heritage structures. That piece of work will need to happen if the bill is passed. Once the Veterans' Council is established, that certainly will need to be further considered at that point in time. But that is based on the figures we have been provided with in relation to what it costs presently to maintain the parklands.

Mr BENNETT: Madam Chair, if I may ask a quick supplementary? That was my concern. Today I fleshed out with Mr Stewart Cameron that there are other important theatres of war that are still to be part of capital works in terms of more statutes to be implemented. None of those are captured in this funding model. You are saying that we have to go away and find out how much this might cost. It is the capital works and the capital upgrade. We have just had a huge capital upgrade of some significant millions, but the rest will have to happen in another 10 or 20 years time. It is forward planning, I guess, for the budget. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. My question is to the Deputy Director-General, Ms Morgan. We have heard a lot today about the process of consultation. Can you please outline what information was discussed with stakeholders during consultation and the broad aspect of the consultation process?

Ms Morgan: I might ask Kate to go through the detail of that consultation as Kate and Kirrily undertook that consultation in August last year as well as early this year. We can talk through what was canvassed in that consultation. If the committee requires, we do have the slides that were talked through as part of the consultation process. I might pass to Kate who can provide the details of that.

CHAIR: Sure. Further to that, if you are making reference to those slides, you are more than welcome to table those slides upon completion.

Ms Morgan: Okay. We will do that.

Ms Molomby: Thank you for the question. As I mentioned when we briefed the committee on 30 April, when we were identifying particular or potential stakeholders for consultation we aimed to go as broad as possible. We used the ex-service organisation mapping project to help us identify and ensure that we had covered a broad range of ex-service organisations in Queensland. That particular mapping project aimed to identify all of the ex-service organisations in Queensland. There is a quite substantial number of ex-service organisations. I am sure you can appreciate that it is difficult to capture them all. We then contacted a whole range of ex-service organisations and asked them to express an interest in whether they wanted to participate in the consultation. We received responses back from some but not all of the organisations that we contacted.

We also went out through the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council and its networks as well to seek people who would be interested in being involved in that consultation. As Filly mentioned, we do have the slide pack here. We talked about how the government approved the preparation of a new statutory body, about the background to that and about how as a statutory body there were specific obligations imposed on statutory bodies in Queensland, obligations under the Financial Accountability Act and other such pieces of legislation. We also talked about the three main areas that the QVC would be responsible for—Anzac Square, the Anzac Day Trust Fund and providing advice to government on veterans' matters. We talked about the role of the QVC in relation to Anzac Square. We talked about the changes that would happen to the Anzac Day Trust Fund under the proposed new model.

We also spoke to them about the advisory function, about how that would operate through the QVC and about how the veterans reference group was to be established to support the advisory function. We also spoke about the proposed membership structure, outlining that there would be two ex officio members and six members appointed by the Governor-in-Council, outlining that two of those members would be nominated by veterans organisations and four on the recommendation of the minister as having appropriate skills to support that governance function that applies to a statutory body. We then outlined what were some of the next steps. We outlined that legislation would be required in order to establish the QVC as a statutory body and that the timing for those things is really a matter for government. Broadly, that is on what we consulted. I can table for the committee's reference that bunch of slides.

CHAIR: Thank you. Can I ask you to check that there are no public servants' names and numbers represented there and that you are happy for that to be tabled? Can I just clarify Ms Molomby that the people and the entities that made the submissions were consulted?

Ms Molomby: The people and organisations that participated in the consultation were: the RSL Queensland branch; the Legacy Club of Brisbane; Australian War Widows Inc; the Defence Force Welfare Association; the Veterans of Australia Association, Hervey Bay branch; Mates4Mates; and the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanent Incapacitated Ex Servicemen and Women (Queensland Branch) Inc. We also consulted with the former chair of the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council, Mr Daniel O'Kearney. We consulted with an Indigenous veteran. There is no specific Indigenous ex-service organisation. We consulted with Colonel Christopher Austin. We consulted with the board of trustees of the Anzac Day Trust.

CHAIR: We thank you, Ms Molomby. I do need to seek leave that the document be tabled. Is leave granted? Leave is granted. Did you also want to table the consultation list?

Ms Morgan: The organisations consulted were in the explanatory notes. We can provide additional information if you wish in our written submission if that is helpful.

CHAIR: Yes, that would be great.

Mr KRAUSE: I have a question for Ms Molomby or whomever would like to answer. Some of us are scratching our head here wondering how the consultation has potentially gone so wrong. I have been listening to all of the submissions this morning and a significant number of them, including the ones that were specifically mentioned as having been consulted, raised concerns about the structure of the bill. How many people who were consulted actually agreed with the structure? Have their opinions just been disregarded, or have they changed their mind? Which is it?

Ms Morgan: I might ask Kate to comment on that. My understanding is that no issues of concern were raised during that consultation.

Ms Molomby: Yes, that is correct. Consultation occurred through Teams, so they could see the PowerPoint presentation that I have just tabled. None of the people who participated raised concerns about the potential structures and the responsibilities and functions of the QVC.

Ms LUI: We have heard from previous speakers about the composition of membership. For the benefit of the committee today and just to be clear, how and why did the department determine the proposed membership of the QVC?

Ms Molomby: The membership of the QVC is aimed at it being a governance body. Because of the responsibilities that the QVC will have in relation to being a statutory body, the financial reporting obligations, the responsibilities for managing the accounts and things like that, it is a governance structure that has been adopted rather than a representational structure. The representational structure comes through with the veterans reference group. There is a focus on skills and experience and what you can bring to that governance structure.

Mr BERKMAN: I very briefly want to touch on part of the answer where you talked about the importance of that representational body through the reference group that sits in the bill. At the earlier briefing we discussed that the provision in the bill for this reference group to be established at the minister's discretion is a policy decision, and that is not something we can ask you to speak to here. It has come up in a lot of submissions though. I am interested to know whether from a drafting or from a practical implementation perspective there is any impediment to changing that from a 'may', from a discretionary formation in the bill, to a requirement?

Ms Morgan: Obviously that is a matter for government—

CHAIR: I was just about to suggest that. By all means, Ms Morgan, if you would like to try to respond to the question, but essentially I think the question is a policy question and is one for government.

Mr BERKMAN: Can I recast that because I tried to be very careful to steer away from policy questions?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr BERKMAN: From a practical implementation perspective or from a drafting perspective is there any functional impediment to removing that discretion and making it a requirement?

Ms Morgan: No.

Mr SKELTON: We have heard a lot of talk about sorting out numbers on veterans. Has the chair of the Anzac Day Trust always been a veteran?

Ms Morgan: It is my understanding that most chairpersons of the Anzac Day Trust have been veterans. However, there was a period of several years where the chairperson was a civilian and not a representative of any ex-service organisation. I think that was around 2007 for a period of five or six years. I would have to get the exact dates, but it is my understanding that the person was not a representative from an ex-service organisation. I have it here: 2007 to 2013. We can provide more information on that if you wish.

Ms Molomby: Just to add to that, the Anzac Day Act is also silent on whether or not the chairperson needs to be a veteran.

Mr SKELTON: You have probably answered my last question, which is: does the current legislation require the chair of the Anzac Day Trust to be a veteran?

Ms Morgan: No, it does not.

Mr BENNETT: Considering the submissions that we have received and the issues around other jurisdictions in Australia clearly having a definitive separation between their memorials and the governance, can you tell the committee when and why a review of the governance arrangements were carried out and what triggered that conversation? If I can clarify, I think you mentioned to me at the last hearing that the Brisbane City Council were quite keen to see a different governance structure. Can you clarify that for us?

Ms Morgan: There was a range of stakeholders that had indicated that a new model would be useful. In relation to Anzac Square, the Anzac Square steering committee was of the view that we needed a new governance model for the management of Anzac Square. There were also views about how we could improve the collaboration and coordination of veterans' issues across government—the Anzac Day Trust was in a different portfolio—and how we could modernise that and put those together. Those discussions had been happening over a couple of years around how we could modernise that and put all those veterans' matters together to make it more of a coordinated approach. That is how this came about.

Mr BENNETT: The trust and how it operates has also been raised with me and in some of the submissions a number of times, and you have been quite clear that there have been no changes to the monetary allocation. There are concerns about the way that people apply for or get access to those grants within the trust and concerns have been raised by some of the submitters today. In relation to the trust are you able to comment about how that governance and that process would continue in the new arrangement?

Ms Morgan: I think I mentioned earlier that in terms of what the funds are allocated for, none of that changes; the process around that I would not see changing. There is a whole formula and process in the Anzac Day Act that will not change. I do not believe there would be many changes to the way that happens now. There may be some improvements we can make or that the council can make to that process. I do not see that that would be considerably changed with the establishment of this new body.

CHAIR: I want to ask a follow-on question from the member for Burnett's earlier question. Can you outline for the committee how the administrative support to the QVC will work in practice and how it will be funded by the department?

Ms Morgan: The Office for Veterans, which is a unit within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, will provide the administrative support for the QVC. We certainly already have someone allocated within that team to support the Anzac Day Trust. It is currently supported by the Office for Veterans. There will be people allocated to support the work of the council.

CHAIR: The last part of that question was: how will it be funded by the department?

Ms Morgan: The Office for Veterans is already funded.

Mr BERKMAN: A few submissions made the point that this bill seeks to create a body to perform quite separate functions: those around Anzac Square and those relating to provision of advice on veterans' matters. That was particularly noted in comparison to other jurisdictions where there are discrete bodies that perform those different functions. Can you describe for the committee any particular changes that have been made or features of this bill and the proposed structures that ensure that the QVC can fully and properly perform those disparate functions?

Ms Molomby: You have mentioned those three functions, and I think it is important to note that the way it has been drafted in the bill there is no one function that is more important than the other. I think some of the submitters have mentioned the order. The order in which they appear in the bill does not alter which one is more important.

There are three key functions. The QVC itself will provide that governance overlay. The advice function is intended to be supported by the veterans reference group. There are also provisions in the bill that allow the minister to make a statement of expectations—and the introductory speech referred to this—and that statement can also set out things like how the minister intends consultation with the sector to work. That particular statement could outline what is expected in terms of consultation with the veterans organisation and how that consultation response is to be fed back to provide the minister with that advice.

Ms Morgan: Can I add there is also—and I think I mentioned this in my opening statement—the power to establish an advisory committee, so the council could establish an advisory committee to advise on a particular matter. That is another way that you can have experts or input across a broad range of stakeholders.

Ms LUI: We have heard from submitters that the proposed veterans reference group may not adequately ensure that certain veterans interest groups are represented. I make note of your comments about the advisory group and how the council will work across issues to ensure that people are well represented. I am wanting to get more clarity around how the department and/or the minister will ensure adequate and diverse veteran representation on the veterans reference group.

Ms Morgan: Is this around the appointment process? Can I clarify that?

Ms LUI: Not specifically. It is about the veterans reference group in particular, so not necessarily around appointments. It was more so to do with representation because we have heard from submitters previously that they were concerned that the proposed veterans reference group may not adequately support the broader view.

Ms Morgan: If you bear with me, I am looking at one provision in the legislation. Under section 36 the representation is decided by the minister and the minister may choose whatever means they wish to ensure that the group has that representation. The minister may go through a process or the department may go through a process of advertising the roles or potentially seeking input or nominees from veterans organisations. There would not be any sort of limit as to how they would do that. There could be an expression of interest. It just depends on what the proposal is that is put forward to the minister and endorsed by the minister. I would not see there would be any limit put on advertising that broadly. Also government policy currently is to ensure there is diversity and equity on boards. It is a requirement under government policy in the cabinet handbook that all significant appointments include consideration of diversity of membership on boards.

CHAIR: Thank you sincerely. It being now 12.45 pm—

Mr BENNETT: Can I quickly jump in?

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr BENNETT: The service mapping project was mentioned and there was the complexity around consultation that has been somewhat ambiguous. Would you feel comfortable if we ask the department to consider sharing some of that info at a later date, please?

CHAIR: In your response to some of the issues raised, if you would not mind providing some information around that mapping exercise, particularly for the member for Burnett but also for the committee and also to put at ease the minds of our submitters? It being 12.46 pm, I now wish to thank you for your time today. I know you as public servants are very busy. The committee certainly appreciates the time that you have taken to listen to the submitters but also the time taken to answer our questions. We thank you and we acknowledge your work and appreciate you contributing to the process and addressing some of the concerns of the submitters in your response.

That concludes our hearing this morning. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all of the witnesses and stakeholders who have participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's parliamentary webpage in due course. I now declare the public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 12.47 pm.