



Statement by the Queensland Integrity Commissioner, Dr Nikola Stepanov PhD.

Monday, 21 February 2022.

Commission of inquiry

I welcomed the announcement on Friday by the Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier and Minister for the Olympics, that a wide-ranging review of the Queensland Government ethics and integrity framework will be undertaken, with a particular focus on the nature of the interactions between the executive, the public sector, and the State's integrity bodies tasked with ensuring that ethics and integrity standards are upheld.

This was an important first step. However, I note that Professor Peter Coaldrake AO has publicly discussed the limited scope and duration of the review, as well the lack of legal powers and protections that would be afforded by a full Commission of Inquiry. I appreciate this frank assessment of what the review can realistically achieve, given its narrow scope and terms of reference.

In my view, it is in the public interest that a Commission of Inquiry be established to examine the multitude of integrity related issues that have been canvassed in the public space in recent weeks.

Any such inquiry ought not be limited to the issues I have raised as Queensland Integrity Commissioner, given the nature and extent of the issues raised by other independent bodies and individuals who appear to be similarly concerned or affected.

Noting that the fear of legal action and other repercussions are commonly held concerns of whistle-blowers, in my view only a full Commission of Inquiry would be able to afford potential witnesses the necessary legal protections required to overcome these concerns.

Obligation to report

Over recent days, Queensland public service employees have been reminded of their obligations and responsibilities to ensure the Queensland Government integrity system is upheld.

Whilst reminding public service employees of their obligations is appropriate, these statements have also served to highlight the existing concerns of current and former public service employees and statutory officer holders of the difficulties and perils of speaking out.

A significant barrier to people coming forward to report concerns of misconduct that a person may have witnessed, been aware of, or even been a part of (often unwillingly) is the fear of being the 'one' isolated voice.

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In recent weeks, I have been approached by many people expressing their support, and who have shared their own stories about the difficulties and perils of speaking out.

However, in my view, there will never be better to time to be brave and to speak out, so that we can all be a part of a meaningful process of change.

In that regard, I would strongly urge any person with knowledge of misconduct in the public sector to raise their concerns with the Crime and Corruption Commission.

End of statement.