



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF  
PARLIAMENT GROUP  
(Queensland Chapter)***

**100 YEARS OF THE BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL:  
HISTORIES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 19 MAY 2025

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### Committee met at 12.00 am

**Ms McCLUSKEY:** Good evening. Thank you so much for coming out on this slightly cool, going into winter, night. As it gets cooler I think people decide whether they are really going to make the effort so I really appreciate that you came out tonight to be here. I would like to welcome you all to this event '100 Years of the Brisbane City Council: Histories and Opportunities'. What an intriguing title. I am very much looking forward to what happens tonight. Tonight is jointly hosted by the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, the Brisbane City Council and the Local Government Association of Queensland. My name is Diana McCluskey. I am the chair of the ASPG, Queensland Chapter.

Before I start, I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet tonight. I would like to pay respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

We are very lucky tonight to have a fantastic panel to deep dive into 100 years of the Brisbane City Council: Dr Denver Beanland, a former deputy lord mayor and Queensland attorney-general; Craig Buckley, President of the Brisbane Labour History Association; Maureen Hayes, former deputy lord mayor; and Dr Andrea Wallace from the Centre of Local Government, University of New England. We have a wonderful panel and I thank them all so much for coming tonight. I had to declare to Dr Beanland that I knew him from a long time ago when I helped him win an election.

On a couple of housekeeping points, tonight's panel discussion will be recorded by Hansard and a transcript will be available on the ASPG website in due course. Panellists will have the opportunity to review the transcript before publication. If you have a mobile phone would you please put it on silent at this point so we do not disrupt proceedings. In the unlikely event of an emergency please follow the directions over the loudspeaker as to where we go—no doubt the staff will assist us as well. If you require the rest rooms they are through those doors at the back. I would now like to welcome and introduce Councillor Vicki Howard to introduce the evening. Thank you.

**Ms HOWARD:** Thank you very much. It is very good to stand up here and look out and see very many familiar faces in the audience. I am absolutely delighted to be here tonight representing the Lord Mayor and to introduce this very interesting evening. It is an honour to be here tonight on behalf of Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner and to reflect on a remarkable milestone for our city—100 years since the formation of the Brisbane City Council. Thank you to the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, Queensland Chapter, for the kind invitation this evening. It is wonderful to see such a diverse group here—former councillors, academics, political commentators and community leaders; each of you bringing a unique perspective to this centenary conversation.

Brisbane City Council was born in 1925. The first election for the municipality of Brisbane was held 13 October 1859, where 37 candidates contested nine council positions. There are a few more of us there now. John Petrie, a builder and stonemason, was elected as the first Brisbane mayor—not the lord mayor, as Denver will remind you. As part of this creation process, the Brisbane City Council amalgamated 27 local authorities to become what it is today. It was a bold, forward-thinking move at the time and one that laid the foundation for what would become Australia's largest local government.

That in itself is extraordinary. What is even more important is how we have grown not only in size but also in ambition, service delivery and innovation. Over the past century we have evolved from a big country town to a thriving metropolitan capital that now punches well above its weight globally. Our transformation has been driven not only by the community but also by those in public office who have had the courage to think big, collaborate deeply and govern with purpose. This evening offers us a valuable opportunity to reflect on what we have learned, to hear the stories and experiences of those who have served before, and to explore what lies ahead.

We are at another turning point. Like the leaders of 1925, today's council must respond to our own city-wide challenges, including cost-of-living pressures, housing shortages and a growing population, to name a few. We are building from a strong legacy. We are investing in public and active transport, creating more to see and do, and delivering city-shaping infrastructure that will leave a lasting impact not just for today's residents but also for the generations to come. We also recognise that governance itself must evolve. That is why events like this, where elected representatives engage with academics and policy thinkers, are so important. They are essential. As we look to the future, let us remember the past—the lessons, the legacies, the triumphs and even the missteps—because in understanding our history we shape better opportunities not only for Brisbane but also for how local government can lead with vision and integrity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be part of this special event. I look forward to learning from the conversations tonight and continuing the journey toward an even better Brisbane.

**Ms McCLUSKEY:** Thank you so much, Councillor Howard. That was a very insightful introduction. Thank you for being here tonight. It is a privilege to have your support and to continue the relationship between the ASPG, the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly.

The format for the evening is for each participant to speak briefly for 10 minutes and offer their perspective on Brisbane City Council and the challenges and opportunities of local government. After all of the participants have spoken, we will have questions from the audience. I would ask the audience to restrain themselves and leave their questions until the end. I will now introduce our moderator for the evening, Jen Williams from the Committee for Brisbane.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Good evening, everyone. I have a pretty straightforward job. I am going to be introducing each of the panellists one by one and then, as Diana said, afterwards we will have time for some questions from the floor. To begin we might start with you, Dr Denver Beanland AM.

Denver was born in Kilcoy and grew up on a dairy farm between Kilcoy and Woodford—not a Brisbane, I would note. He is a former Queensland politician. From 1976 to 1986 Dr Beanland was an alderman of the Brisbane City Council, including a period as deputy lord mayor. He was the member for Toowong, later Indooroopilly, in the Queensland state parliament from 1986 to 2001 with a period as attorney-general. He was leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party. He is the author of several books about family and Queensland history. Dr Beanland has been a chair of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council, he is immediate past president of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland and Brisbane City Council's Heritage Advisory Committee. In 2020 he was appointed Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to the people, the Parliament of Queensland and archival and historical organisations. I am sure he will have a lot to contribute to the conversation this evening. Please join me in welcoming Dr Beanland.

**Dr BEANLAND:** Thanks very much, Jen. There is one small matter: I was never the deputy lord mayor; I was the vice-mayor. As some people know, I dislike the term deputy mayor. Maureen Hayes knows that. My job is to put into 10 minutes the history of the council. That is what this book was for. That is why I brought the book. I thought: never miss an opportunity to promote your publication. You can borrow it from council libraries. They have plenty of them. I was commissioned to do the last update of Brisbane City Council before 2013 and it was published in 2016. It is titled *Brisbane: Australia's New World City—a History of the old Town Hall, the City Hall, and the Brisbane City Council from 1985-2013*. I mention the old town hall because not too many of you know much about it.

This year we celebrate not only the centenary of the Greater Brisbane City Council but also the 200th anniversary of the first settlement in Brisbane, which is quite significant. The Royal Historical Society of Queensland just had a conference on Saturday in relation to that matter. That is when the first settlement moved from Redcliffe, where it was established on 14 September 1824, up to what is now Queen Street, North Quay and William Street back in May 1825. It moved there, hence Brisbane started to move ahead. Brisbane, of course, had a municipal council, which was established on 7 September 1859 under the New South Wales legislation. The colony of Queensland did not exist in September 1859, so the Brisbane Municipal Council is three months older than the colony or the state of Queensland.

There was great opposition to the formation of the municipal council because some people thought, 'Why should the ratepayers of Brisbane'—once you had a council they would be ratepayers—'pay for costs that the colonial government in New South Wales should pay?' That included things like a new water supply

for Brisbane, which is something we do not really think about too much today unless there is a drought. There was a dam established on the old creek bank where the Supreme Court is today, and the water supply was becoming contaminated and was no longer suitable for human consumption.

Councils in Australia—Adelaide 1842, then Sydney and Melbourne a little later in that year—all followed the development of councils in Britain. Greater Brisbane Council was established 1 October 1925; however, the legislation came into effect for the City of Brisbane Act in 1924. It came into force 30 October 1924, setting out timelines for the scheme. Greater Brisbane was proposed because of the failure of contiguous local governments to adequately administer city improvements. That included such things as roads and a whole range of other things such as drainage, parks and so on for the development of the metropolitan area. Local governments were splintered so widely. There were some 18 councils in all: two city councils, Brisbane and South Brisbane; a number of town councils—I will not go through them all as it would take half an hour; shire councils; and two parts of councils. These were established into the Greater Brisbane City Council. Some initially believed that South Brisbane Municipal Council should become part of Greater Brisbane to start with because it had separated from Brisbane Municipal Council back in 1888.

In 1896, the matter was further canvassed at hearings of the royal commission into local government, which recommended that greater attention be given to the wishes of local government councils. There was great controversy then: how far it would extend from the city centre, what aspects would be included and what powers it would have. Agitation continued to the year 1900, when the then mayor of Brisbane, James Robinson, held a meeting to discuss the formation of Greater Brisbane, but still nothing much occurred. It was not until 1915 that the matter came to a head. Both the Liberal premier Digby Denham and the leader of the opposition, the Australian Labor Party's Thomas Ryan, supported the Greater Brisbane concept. Both sides of parliament supported it. It was then only a matter of time before it came in. In December 1917 a massive bill of some 520 pages was introduced. That did not go anywhere. It just sat in the parliament and died a natural death. It was not until a little later—in fact, 1921—that further action was taken.

On the third occasion the bill was returned to parliament, the Greater Brisbane City Council was created. The new city council was composed of a mayor elected directly by the people and 20 other aldermen, one elected for each of the 20 wards. On Saturday, 21 February 1925 Charles Chuter, who played a major part in drafting the legislation, was appointed returning officer. He declared the results in March 1925. William Jolly was elected mayor. He stood for the United Party, which won 24 aldermanic wards to the Australian Labor Party's six. This was a major surprise, because prior to that the Australian Labor Party had held the mayoralty of both South Brisbane and Brisbane municipal councils. It was quite a shock. It had been expected that Labor would easily win the first election, but Jolly did. A second election was held in February 1928. Again his team had an easy victory. The council in that year began building the Grey Street Bridge, one of the city's first major pieces of infrastructure. Of course, it was later named the William Jolly Bridge, for those of you who are much younger and do not recognise the name 'Grey Street'.

It was not until 1930 that the term lord mayor came about. It was March 1930, in fact, when the mayor of Brisbane joined the mayors of other capital cities in Australia and received the royal patent, so he became the lord mayor of Brisbane. That applies to the lord mayor; it did not apply to the vice-mayor in my time. In 1930 the classical revival style building called the 'Million Pound Town Hall', to give it its title then, now the City Hall, was officially opened by the governor of the day in the presence of both the premier, the leader of the opposition and of course other leading Queensland dignitaries.

The relationship between the Brisbane City Council and the state government, like all of the relationships between governments, changes. Sometimes they are very cosy; sometimes they are very divisive. It does not have much to do with political parties in many cases because sometimes the lord mayor gets on very well with the person who is the premier, who is often from a different political party, or the mayor gets on very well with the treasurer, as the mayor did in the 1960s, which enabled Brisbane to get a lot more finance from the Loan Council and elsewhere through the state government to do the sewerage in Brisbane. That was particularly done with Gordon Chalk, who was very friendly with Clem Jones and assisted greatly in all this happening. It does not matter too much who is in the state House or who is on the council; it has a lot to do with other matters, particularly personalities. There was one lord mayor I will not mention whom I can remember quite distinctly from the same side as the premier of this state, and they did not get on well at all. They were at fisticuffs. Maureen knows to whom I am referring. These things do not always appear as they should, politics aside.

I want to mention a couple of more things. I have one minute to go; Jen is keeping tabs on me here. There were a number of changes to the City of Brisbane Act 1924. In 2010 a new City of Brisbane Act came into force. That changed a few things around. It gave more power to the Establishment and Coordination Committee, which became really much like state cabinet. It colloquially is now called the Civic Cabinet because the aldermen on the Establishment and Coordination Committee, which is the lord mayor, the vice-mayor and the chair of the various standing committees, are now collectively responsible to council in the same way that cabinet is responsible. If we hear of a unanimous view—every decision that is made is a unanimous view of state cabinet—it is a unanimous view of the Civic Cabinet, regardless of how people feel. That is how life travels.

In 1986, for example, additional powers were given to the lord mayor when Sallyanne Atkinson became the lord mayor. It gained additional powers from the town clerk. These things have moved around. Of course, in those days the town clerk had enormous power. That changed in lord mayor Soorley's time to general manager, and a year or so later legislation went through the state House whereby aldermen became councillors throughout South-East Queensland and there were mayors instead of chairmen. In that period, the town clerk became the CEO. That is how it finished up. Today we have the chief executive officer and no clerk. The position continued for over a decade because there were some minor roles that had to be fulfilled by the town clerk. Over the next decade or so, these all changed and it all worked out quite fine.

Thank you very much indeed. That is hardly giving us a run-down but it does get you started to think about a few questions, which Jen loves to answer. Do not forget the publication; it is most important.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you so much. You have to love the plug for the book! Our next speaker is Craig Buckley. Craig was quite humble when I asked for a bio. He said, 'There's not much to it.' He gave me a couple of lines, but they were pretty impressive. Craig Buckley has been president of the Brisbane Labour History Association for the last two years after serving as the secretary of the association for the 10 years prior to that. The Labour History Association publishes a journal, the *Queensland Journal of Labor History*, two issues a year. For the last 20 years he has also been an industrial officer with the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union. That is a very strong history in this area and I am sure he will add warmly to the conversation. Please join me in welcoming Craig.

**Mr BUCKLEY:** Good evening. I have been invited to talk to you and I have decided I will talk about some aspects of the labour movement's involvement in activities around the time of the formation of the Greater Brisbane council in 1925. To give some background, in the early decades of the 20th century one of the stronger currents in the labour movement, politics was focused on the idea of government intervention in the economy to curtail what it saw as exploitation or the excesses of unregulated capitalism. That program was not just a question of regulation, though. The labour movement also emphasised public ownership and the creation of public utilities and enterprises that would provide services and infrastructure but also provide an important source of employment for working people with good working conditions that set a standard for public sector employers to emulate and compete with. That emphasis on government intervention and state enterprise is, of course, evident in the policies pursued by the state Labor governments from 1915 onwards in Queensland—Ryan, Theodore, Gillies and McCormack.

By 1915, as Denver told us, both sides of politics were advocating for the establishment of a Greater Brisbane council. There was broad appeal to the idea of amalgamating smaller councils, pooling resources to fund public works and achieve the efficiencies that you get with avoiding duplication and with economies of scale. The Labor Party and the union movement also saw this as an opportunity to further their policies around public ownership and employment at the municipal level.

From a labour movement perspective, pursuing those goals also required measures to democratise local government. State government reform saw the extension of the franchise in local authority elections. Previously there had been a property franchise. Only ratepayers could vote and ratepayers were entitled to one, two or three votes depending on the value of their property. In those circumstances it might be unsurprising that there were not a lot of Labor representatives on council. There were some. In 1920 the franchise was extended to all adult residents of a local authority area if they were on the state government roll, a measure which the *Brisbane Courier* at one time denounced as drastic and inequitable.

In March 1924 there were local authority elections for the various Brisbane councils. Those elections saw a significant increase in Labor representation. As Denver said, Labor won the mayoral positions in Brisbane and South Brisbane. They had sizeable majorities on both those councils. Every ward in Ithaca

returned a Labor candidate. They steeped and scraped for a majority in Coorparoo as well. From that point, the trade unions were actively lobbying the city councils, particularly Brisbane and South Brisbane, to start implementing measures that would have anticipated, if you like, the establishment of the Greater Brisbane council a year later. The Australian Workers' Union approached the Brisbane Municipal Council and asked for improved conditions. In 1922 the arbitration court had reduced award wages almost across the board by five shillings a week and unions were keen to see that reversed. In June 1924 the Brisbane City Council—this is the smaller council before the amalgamated council—agreed to institute union preference for council employees. It brought in a 44-hour working week and it increased wages for council employees to five shillings above the award.

The Southern Queensland branch of the meatworkers union wrote to the Brisbane council and urged it to prioritise the establishment of a public abattoir in metropolitan Brisbane. That had been a demand of the labour movement for some time, but support for that idea certainly was not confined to the labour movement. Brisbane had had issues with consistency in the quality of meat—and milk, too, for that matter—for some time and a public abattoir was seen as a way of ensuring meat of acceptable and consistent quality would be available to urban residents. It seems to have been an important issue to the Brisbane council and certainly featured in campaigning for the elections, and it began to investigate the feasibility of establishing a council owned abattoir. It commissioned experts and sent them to go and inspect public abattoirs in Sydney and Melbourne and to look at potential locations. Alongside that were proposals to investigate the municipalisation of the milk supply as well as things like taking over the city's electricity supply. The state government had already taken over the tramway system back in 1922 and transferred it to the tramways trust, on which all of the various Brisbane councils that had trams were represented.

In October 1924 the Brisbane council approached the state government and asked them to amend the City of Brisbane Act to make changes that would help them bring in this abattoir plan. They were disappointed because then premier Theodore refused and told them, 'This is something you should leave to the new Greater Brisbane council to worry about.' The meatworkers union passed a resolution saying some very nasty things about the premier, but the councillors on the Brisbane council were quite determined to proceed with the plan. They said they were going to go ahead anyway—or as far as they could, at any rate.

In February 1925 there were the elections for the Greater Brisbane council. As we have heard, the United Party won the election. They had a commanding majority and this ended up frustrating many of the issues that the labour movement saw as priorities. The elections were in February but the new council did not take over until 1 October and the old various councils in Brisbane were still in office until then. The Brisbane council, the metropolitan council, and the unions tried to persist with their plans for the abattoir. Just after the election they went and saw the new premier—Gillies was the premier at this stage—and tried to convince him to give them money to start building the abattoir. Like Theodore, he turned them down as well.

The other thing the unions and the council did was try to protect the above-award wages that had been established for the council employees. In June 1925 the Brisbane City Council registered an industrial agreement with the arbitration court and 17 unions covering all of the city council employees and they preserved those higher rates of pay. On 1 October the Greater Brisbane council formally commenced, and one of the very first acts they undertook was to make an application to the arbitration court asking it to rescind that agreement. It went before the arbitration court and the new Greater Brisbane council argued that the industrial agreement was illegal because it paid workers too much; the benefits it conferred were excessive. It also said that this was an attempt, as it almost certainly was, of the old council to make an agreement in its dying days to try to bind the new council.

The arbitration court said there was no basis for rescinding the agreement; they rejected those arguments. However, they said, 'Both parties have come to this court and assumed that this agreement is still in force under the new council. We don't think it is, but we're not going to decide that because none of you bothered to ask us.' Of course, the next thing the council did was immediately make another application to the arbitration court asking for a declaration that the industrial agreement did not apply anymore, using the argument that the board had raised, and this time they were successful. In February 1926 there was a declaration that that agreement for the above-award rates was unenforceable against the council.

While that was going on, because the unions were concerned about this, the AWU made its own application to the commission to try to increase award wages. They asked for an eight-shilling-a-week increase. They went before the arbitration court. The board of arbitration and trade, as it was by then,

agreed to make a separate award for city council employees and it agreed to give union preference, but the union's hopes for wage increases were disappointed. It did allow a small increase, but it only increased award wages for city council employees by two shillings a week for men or one shilling a week for women.

The new Greater Brisbane council shelved the idea of municipal control of milk supply fairly quickly. They did take further steps to investigate the public abattoir, but they decided it was going to cost too much and it just was not a priority for them. Brisbane, of course, did ultimately get a publicly owned abattoir at Colmslie/Cannon Hill, but that would ultimately be under the auspices of the state government, not under council control. Of course, they did proceed with taking over the electricity supply. The new council decided to build the powerhouse at New Farm because the City Electric Light Company was demanding an excessive price for the purchase of their assets, so they said, 'Forget it. We will build our own.'

To sum up, I will quickly say that, even though the state Labor government obviously played an important part in giving some shape to the new Brisbane council, for the broader labour movement its more ambitious plans for municipal enterprises and the Greater Brisbane council met with some immediate disappointment.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thanks, Craig. It is great to have different perspectives on that critical period. Our third speaker this evening is Maureen Hayes, who was a Brisbane City councillor for 15 years until she retired following a redistribution of her ward. During her first 12 months she was the chairperson of council, she was later elected to the position of chairperson of transport and traffic projects and she was deputy mayor of Brisbane from May 2003 until March 2004. As the chairperson of the transport and major projects committee, Ms Hayes oversaw the development of the public transport system. Initiatives included gas buses, CityCats and bikes on buses. She also oversaw construction of the Inner City Bypass, a major upgrade of the S1 sewer and large road projects such as Waterworks Road and Coronation Drive, and she was a champion for what I believe is the first green bridge in Brisbane. Please welcome Ms Hayes to the stage.

**Ms HAYES:** As you can see, I am a much more practical speaker than the others. I am just going to talk about what it was like being in the city council and whether or not it worked as it was supposed to work. I can only say that I think it did. When I got elected, I had been a schoolteacher for a long time, which means what I knew about transport was zilch, absolutely nothing, but that is how democracy works. People get in, they represent what they do and they learn. The big advantage of the Brisbane City Council is that you are working closely with the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy has a terrible name now, but all it meant was that you had experts in the field to be there; otherwise what would I have been doing.

Every time something came up, we would meet with the bureaucracy—we had lots of meetings—and talk about what we needed to do. For example, when the CityCats came up, the people who had been running the ferries in Expo had been in terrible trouble because they kept eroding the Brisbane River bank. They came to me one day—I used to know them from way back—and said, 'There's been a technology invented which stops the wave that erodes the bank.' It sounded too good to be true, so we met together with the bureaucracy so we could see what to do. We got an expert who came in and went all over the world and they said, 'Yes, they've invented that.'

As head of that department, I went to the civic cabinet. That is a small civic cabinet; it is not like the big cabinet in the state where they are all arguing and so on. There were only six of us and the lord mayor. They said, 'That sounds good,' and then it all came together and we put them on the river. I can still remember standing there on that sunny day. They stopped all the traffic on the river and the four CityCats that we had built went along the river. What a thing to be able to do. It was just amazing. I loved that. So size is important.

Not only that, you are a large council and therefore you have a fair amount of money. That is absolutely important. If you think of the smaller councils, what could you do in Brisbane if there were all these little councils and people arguing? One thing I learnt over and over is that people can argue about anything; they can be against anything. I remember going through saying, 'We're going to send these river cats up and down and it will be lovely,' but there were complaints everywhere.

One woman—and she was what I might call an influential woman—kept complaining. She lived on the riverbank in a large house so I said to her, 'I'll come out and see what the problem is.' The council officer and I knocked on her door and she came to the door and said, 'If you go around the side, I'll meet you down the back.' So she went in through the house and we went around the side and when we got to this riverbank she said, 'There you are, Councillor Hayes. That is the sand that we have introduced onto our bit of the

riverbank to have a beach. I believe that will be washed away.' I said, 'Yes, it will, but that will not stop the CityCats being built.' Everyone just thinks of themselves. That is why you have a big council; they are able to ignore that a bit. With the budget, you have an amount of money that you can do that with, which is excellent.

When we did the Inner City Bypass, you would have no idea the number of complaints about that. I went to four million meetings, and every time at every meeting there would be a thousand people who were passionate and whingeing: 'This cannot happen.' I went to one in particular at Hamilton—and I hope there is no-one here from Hamilton—and they all said, 'It's terrible. You're going to introduce traffic onto the riverbank,' and we were; that was a part of it. They went on and on. In the end you just have to say, 'Yes, that's true.'

I remember one particular meeting I went to. You always think you make a good decision. When we were doing the buses, there were a couple of buses that used to go around Redcliffe and the patronage was dismal. There were only eight or nine people on them, so in your office with a bureaucrat you say, 'We'll take those off and save money on that.' Then someone told us to go to a meeting in Redcliffe at the bowls club. I turned up that night and I saw all of these people in cars and I thought, 'They must have some sort of event on at the bowls club. I hope the few who are coming to the meeting have places to park.' Well, they were all there for the meeting. There was a hall as big as this filled with people.

I had the chief bureaucrat come along because I thought, 'Why shouldn't he put up with it if I have to?' It was sad, because person after person got up and said, 'I've got to go to the doctor every second Wednesday and I use that bus to do it.' Of course the patronage was small because they were just going one at a time around to the various places in Redcliffe. When I finally staggered out of the hall with the bureaucrat, he just lent over to me and said, 'We'll put it back.' I said, 'Yes, we will.'

There is the size of council, there is the budget of council, and the politicisation is an interesting one. I found that, when you made a decision, there was a cohesion. You have seen those little councils; they are arguing all the time and that is what happens. If you are going to make Waterworks Road bigger, for example, there are thousands of complainants. I went to one or two particular ones and you can always talk reasonably to them, particularly to older people, as I have discovered as I am so old now. You get more reasonable as you get older; that is what I think. You say, 'I'm terribly sorry,' but we are taking their front garden and of course they have a right to say something. I would say, 'I understand, but it's for the good of the people. It's for the good of Brisbane.' That is the one big thing that the Brisbane City Council had—that is, a vision for Brisbane.

When I worked, it was with Jim Soorley, as Denver cleverly mentioned, who had some fights with the then premier Peter Beattie. He protected us from any political stuff. He would just say, 'No, that's what we're doing,' and that is why he got into all the trouble. It allowed the council to do things that would not normally be done. We introduced character housing—which was not a popular thing—but everyone was just knocking down Brisbane's timber houses. We introduced a policy where they could not do that. Luckily, the Brisbane City Council had an aerial photograph of every house that was existent in 1949. When anyone came into the office, they would say, 'No, we can knock that down,' and we would be able to look at the map and know exactly if that was the case. What has happened now is that Brisbane's housing has been saved. Whenever I have visitors, I make sure I take them around and they cannot believe the timber and tin beauty of some of the streets that we have. Otherwise, you all end up like Seattle or somewhere like that. This is Brisbane; it is a very particular thing.

The other thing I want to say is that, because it is big, it does not mean that you do not think about all of the people all of the time. That is where the political wing comes in. You are anchored by whether you are going to get elected or not. You cannot always think of that but you have to as a council say, 'We have to take some account of that.' That means we had meetings, meetings, meetings, and public consultation that people start to sneer at. We had it all the time so that if something was going to be done in your area you went out and met with the people. It was an enlightening experience, I can only say. It was just amazing. Again, with the Inner City Bypass or something like that, there are too many people there where there is a downward value of their place. All of those things are important.

Let us say that in the broad spectrum of things nothing could be better for a capital city of this size than to have its own council. When I was in the council, it just filled my mind. It was just everything that we could do to try to make it better—not so political, because we kept away from that. There were plenty of fights in the Brisbane City Council, I can tell you. I was the chairman there. My father was in the council and



he was the chairman of the council. Then about 20 years later I came along and I was the chairman of council. That was that long ago that being a woman was a disadvantage because they thought you were a bit soft on things. It has changed a lot. In the sphere of public transport, which was my particular interest, I would like to pay tribute to the current council, particularly Adrian Schinner, for the emphasis they have on transport, and they can do that because of the council's size and budget.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you, Maureen. I think my favourite quote of the night was, 'You can ignore them a bit.' It is my pleasure to introduce our final speaker, Dr Andrea Wallace. Dr Wallace is a lecturer in management and a member of the Centre of Local Government at the University of New England. Her principal research interests and publications are focused on local government, particularly regional local government policy, structure and reform. Her other research interests include public policy, political economy and history, and organisational communication. Please join me in welcoming Dr Wallace.

**Dr WALLACE:** Thanks for having me tonight. It is quite exciting to have a captive audience to talk about local government to. It does not often happen when I am lecturing students. I got asked to come and have a chat tonight and I thought, 'I don't really know that much about Brisbane City Council. I should hang my head in shame.' I had a good look and thought that it is quite the anomaly compared to every other local government system in Australia. It operates under its own legislation. It covers the size of something like 33 or 34 Sydney LGAs and something like 31 Melbourne LGAs. People ask why nobody else has followed suit. I thought to myself maybe I should actually explain the whole thing about local government amalgamations, because I have a captive audience.

I was thinking about whether I should look at it from the policy perspective or from the people's perspective. I thought I would explain why policymakers impose amalgamations, because every so often there is this big round of local government amalgamations and lots of people get very cranky. There are lots of public consultations which bureaucrats probably walk away from saying, 'I'm so happy I don't actually have to listen to that. We're just going to do it anyway.' When we look at the entire local government system, local government is the third level of the trinity of government in Australia, but it has no constitutional recognition; it is simply the handmaiden, if you will, of its respective state government.

There are 537 local governments. In 2020 there were 532, but five have been deamalgamated. It is growing again, which might be a good thing for some people. Some people might not approve. Fifty-five per cent of those local government systems are actually in rural, regional or remote Australia. Queensland has these huge local government systems. They cover 130,000 or 140,000 square kilometres. There are really tiny ones in WA that are about 1.3 square kilometres, such as Peppermint Grove Shire Council. Local governments are a significant part of our economy in Australia. They actually employ approximately 200,000 people in around 400 different kinds of occupations, whether it is an engineer, a town-planner or somebody who answers telephones and actually listens to the community.

When we think of local government and what it actually manages, it has assets of around \$500 billion. It is not an insignificant part of our economy. It also manages 657,000 kilometres of road network. It is really a huge part of the economy. When you are talking to people about local government they say, 'That's roads, rates and rubbish.' They get really excited about it! When the rubbish does not get picked up, though, they get really excited about it.

Local government is incredibly limited in its powers to raise revenue. There are all of these different kinds of impositions from state government, such as rate capping. Local government is often expected to fill the gaps in lots of different areas that state or federal government cannot fill, but a lot of the time it cannot afford to. Brisbane City Council is really lucky—its operating budget is just under half of the Tasmanian government's operating budget. That is an anomaly. How come other councils have not followed suit? The Auckland City Council in New Zealand has, but no other Australian councils have.

Councils generally are amalgamated based on lots of theory. Anybody who has studied economics or looked at a few economics books looks at all of these models and goes, 'Mmm,' but policymakers love models because they are really tidy. They take out the humanity of everything. A lot of the time they ground their reasons for amalgamation in economic theory. Economic theory often will look for an answer to two questions: is something efficient, which means 'Are we getting value for money?'; or is it equitable, which means 'Is everybody having a fair go?' Policymakers often ignore the question about equity because it is far too difficult: 'We can't squish that into a model so let's look at money.' Councils generally worldwide face these huge problems of financial constraints, so policymakers will think, 'If we squish up five or six different

councils, merge them into one and rebrand it, we will not duplicate all of the administration or the management that is often quite expensive in any council.' It is this whole notion of economies of scale that comes from Adam Smith. Often it does not quite work that way, but policymakers run all their models like this.

Then there is infrastructure. Providing 657,000 kilometres of roads is not cheap; it is really expensive. Most of the time, the theory is that a stronger or bigger council has a much stronger financial capacity than does a smaller one; thus, they can maintain this infrastructure and they can build and complete new projects. There is also the professional capacity. I think Brisbane City Council employs about 8,000 people. It is massive. That is the anomaly. You have smaller councils that might employ 20 because, at the end of the day, it is serving a community of maybe 1,200, but it is still a huge part of its community and it is still a major economic player. The problem for any of these little councils is that they simply cannot attract qualified and specialised staff, particularly if you are looking for an engineer or a town-planner. A large council can theoretically employ more specialised and better qualified people. It provides career paths for people. In this day and age, when everything is far more complex, there are so many boxes to tick and there are lots of regulatory requirements, smaller councils sometimes really struggle with that.

Sometimes—perhaps it has not occurred with the Brisbane City Council—state governments do not really want to have too many councils around. It is easier when there are fewer critics of the state government. Reducing the number of councils is often really good optics for a state government. They can say to people, 'Look! We are ever so prudent. We are not spending your money on things like bureaucrats.'

There are lots of reasons policymakers will always insist that councils get amalgamated, but, as we all know, there is this massive gap between theory and reality. There is a massive chasm. Unless you have population density, financial savings generally do not occur when you amalgamate two or three councils. If you have one council that cannot afford anything, what is the point in merging three councils that cannot afford anything? The result is one really big council that cannot afford anything.

In 2016 in New South Wales, Mike Baird forcibly merged a whole heap of local governments. He merged a lot of rural and regional councils to make single councils. In the end, they ended up responsible for about three to four times the road network. They could not afford to maintain one road network so then they just merged the next one. Several of those councils have now been deamalgamated, and that actually cost far more than had they not been amalgamated initially.

Probably the worst thing for a lot of smaller councils is the lack of community cohesion and reciprocity that does result from forced local government amalgamations. Most of the time it is the biggest employer in the town. It is quite strange—is it not?—when you are coming from a big place like Brisbane, going out to a one-horse town in the middle of nowhere, but that is the reality. Local government, particularly in these smaller areas, is a lot more responsive to a community's needs. When councils are forcibly amalgamated it sometimes can be lost. It is not easy to replace when it is lost. I did not have a PowerPoint presentation so I could not go through things in great detail, but then I would not have had a captive audience. Thank you.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Ladies and gentlemen, we have heard four very different perspectives on the history and opportunities of Brisbane City Council. Now it is your chance to ask some questions.

**QUESTIONER:** Good evening, fellow global citizens. My question is to Dr Wallace, but also to all of the panel. From your discussion tonight, are you saying that Brisbane is more efficient than Sydney or Melbourne because we are a larger council?

**Dr WALLACE:** I know that there have been studies on the Brisbane City Council that found they still have significant infrastructure backlogs and they do not raise all of their own revenue. I think something like 60 per cent still comes from state government grants. Given that a lot of other smaller councils still obtain basically the same amount from state government grants, it is questionable. However, it does provide a great level of unity and cohesion when it comes to planning. If you are running a business or you are trying to get something done in a city like Brisbane, it is so much easier because you are only dealing with a single organisation compared to five or 10. You might cross the road and go into another jurisdiction and that becomes inefficient for you. You are able to maintain and retain really good staff. When it comes to efficiency, it is sort of half-half, really.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Maureen, you were talking before about really great major projects that Brisbane City Council achieved in your years and since. For other local governments those projects would ordinarily be a state government responsibility, but in Brisbane they are the local government's responsibility. Do you think too much is starting to be asked of Brisbane as a local government that would fall in the state's remit or do you think they are big enough and should be taking on projects of scale?

**Ms HAYES:** I think that sometimes happens, but you can sort that out, really. The Brisbane City Council is able, because of its structure, to do those projects and to do them very well. Because of the size of the Brisbane City Council, they are organised and we have, as Andrea says, some of the best experts because they love working for the Brisbane City Council because we do big, important projects. It is very important that we keep that. One of the projects I was involved with, and I always did not like it, was the A1 sewer. When I used to say at meetings that I was in charge of sewers, I always felt a bit soiled about it. People came from all over Australia to see what was happening and participate in it. I think the state government is too unwieldy and too everything to be good in your own city. You need someone for the city and that is the city council.

**QUESTIONER:** Nick here from Shanghai. I am a student at UQ studying politics and one of my subjects is about autonomy. I want to know what kind of autonomy the Brisbane City Council has from the federal and state level of government, especially about the urban housing and development policies?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** How much autonomy does Brisbane City Council have in terms of urban housing and policy in terms of federal and state government—any takers at the table?

**Dr BEANLAND:** The Brisbane City Council is not recognised in the Australian Constitution and dealings with the city council or local governments go through the state governments. The state governments have the power; they are sovereign states. They have sovereignty when it comes to the powers of council. They legislate for council. State governments do generally try to get additional funds for local government. This is something that we have seen happen on many occasions—just not here in Brisbane and Queensland but in other states as well. It is not recognised in the constitution.

It is the third level of government, but it should also be remembered that councils, particularly Brisbane—we have discussed this role, Dr Wallace mentioned this role—brought together a lot of local governments all with the same central interests in Queen Street, Brisbane because it is Brisbane City's heart, with the General Post Office and everything. Go out to many of country areas and the issue is totally different. Some small towns that have a council. Last time there were major amalgamations the council in those local areas—even though they were just surviving—kept the economy alive in those small towns and places around Queensland. Now the council moved out because they amalgamated.

Toowoomba town council is a good one, or Toowoomba Regional Council as it is called now. Go out to Millmerran—kilometres away—and it is still the Toowoomba Regional Council. I always ask myself: what would the Toowoomba Regional Council really care about what happens in Millmerran, or even where it is on the map? Outside of Canberra, Toowoomba is the largest inland city in the nation so it is a major town. There are a range of issues, but the local government is very significant. The federal government recognises that, as does the state, but it operates under state legislation. The state has the power and the sovereignty in regard to this. Those powers were never transferred and, I shall say, never will be transferred to the federal government.

**QUESTIONER:** Denver's answer segues into my question. Just one observation about country councils. I can remember when we had the amalgamation under the Beattie government that towns like Muttaborra would have a bank and they would have a bank there because the council would put their money, so when that amalgamation happened with Barcaldine businesses were lost in the town of Muttaborra. Those mergers in the bush towns certainly have a major adverse impact. I would be interested in the panellist's view of the benefit to local government of having constitutional recognition. It is something that we have had two referenda on before. I think there is some real economic value in doing that and I would be interested in what the panel's views are about the value of having constitutional recognition.

**Dr WALLACE:** It might make it a lot clearer and delineate what local government can do and what state government can force upon them. I certainly know in New South Wales there is a lot of cost shifting onto local government which does cause a lot of problems insofar as local government simply cannot afford to keep doing things that the state government does not do or perhaps does not want to do. In a lot of the smaller towns—perhaps it is different in Brisbane—state government is not visible in a lot of places therefore they ask local government if they can do programs. A lot of the time they do not offer funds to do

these programs so a cost shifting and devolution of powers might potentially assist with who does what. We have section 51 in the Constitution which says what the federal government and state governments are responsible for. Perhaps we actually do need something in it, I am not sure; do you have some ideas?

**QUESTIONER:** Thank you. I personally support recognition in the Commonwealth Constitution, but, of course, there will always be strong resistance from state governments around the nation because they want to retain their control of local governments, as Dr Wallace mentioned. It is easy to shovel things off down the line. Local government would be to blame for this, that or something else if it was not done and cost shifting is always on the go. The feds do it to the states. The states do it more to the feds than the other way round these days because that is where the currency is. The revenue stream goes to the federal government not so much to the state and, of course, there is less revenue stream to the local government apart from rates but they end up, in many cases, the burden of a lot of these things. Unfortunately, I cannot see it happening. We have had these referendums because there is always strong opposition to it, but I would like to see it. The real downside is then there will be arguments, unless you carefully word the section in the Constitution about who will do what—whether it is the fed's responsibility or the state's, who will pay for it—and on it goes. It is much cleaner now to just push it all down to the local government. Thank you.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** We have time for one or two more questions from the audience. I had one and it is probably again for the doctors in the room. The Brisbane City Council has a presidentially elected lord mayor. I am wondering when—maybe you know, Denver—this came about? We elect the lord mayor separately to our local councillors, which does not tend to happen in other local governments.

**Dr BEANLAND:** In relation to other local governments, when the Brisbane municipal council was formed in 1859, the mayors were elected for one year, in fact, by the alderman. That continued up until 1921-22 when the situation changed and the mayor was elected by the people for Brisbane and South Brisbane town councils. Then when Greater Brisbane came in, that was then a direct election by the people at large and then the aldermen were elected separately for each of the 20 wards. Something similar followed in other local governments. They were generally elected to local government and then they elected the mayor or the shire chairman and the shire chairman was directly elected and on it went.

Of course, I should mention there was a lot of unhappiness in country areas when shire chairmen became mayors. A lot of them were very unhappy indeed. They liked the old term. If you used the term 'town clerk, you knew who you were talking about. If you talk about CEOs then they are a dime a dozen. Everywhere I go there is a CEO these days. It does not have the same effect at all, but look, it has varied over time. In 1973 the legislation changed and the then mayor who had been elected by the people prior to that was elected by the aldermen. Clem Jones was the first to go through that process. Then for the 1985 election, Sally-Anne Atkinson was the first to be directly elected because the legislation was changed. Alderman Harvey was elected for a ward and then elected the mayor and so the situation changed. This is where the state government changed the legislation for a variety of reasons which we will not go to, but it is in my publication, obviously. A bit of juice for you all!

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you so much.

**Ms HOWARD:** I was there when that very bad position happened where there was a majority Labor council where the councillors had 17 of the 26. It was quite a big majority and the popularly elected mayor was from the Liberal Party, Campbell Newman. I was there to witness that four years of terrible stress. It just did not work. No matter what went on, it just did not work. That is always the danger in a big council like the Brisbane City Council—that you get that dichotomy which is no good.

**Dr BEANLAND:** That is the famous split of 2004 when the mayor was elected from a different party to where the majority of aldermen—or councillors in those days—were.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** There is a desperate question at the back.

**QUESTIONER:** I was wondering, is there any information on the people who were in the councils who merged to become (inaudible) because there must have been a lot of them. Is there any information on Balmoral or Hamilton—any of those people?

**Dr BEANLAND:** You are talking about the elected representatives, I take it?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Of the former councils.

**Dr BEANLAND:** Generally, some of them stood for election and some did not. For example, Russell, who became the vice mayor of Greater Brisbane, was an alderman on the Toombul Shire Council. Jolly, of course, was from Windsor. He had been the mayor of Windsor. He became the lord mayor of Brisbane. I  
Brisbane

cannot go through them all quickly offhand but they are two who come immediately to mind. Where do you find it? Some of it is in my publication obviously but I do not have it all. The council archives has all of that information. If you give them a ring, they have lists of these things.

As Councillor Vicki Howard just mentioned, the council archives have the minutes for all those early meetings of the Brisbane municipal council. They do not have them for all the local town councils or shire councils though because the records for many of those have been lost. They were what is called these days 'tossed out' so we do not have a lot of those records. We do have some. We have newspapers, of course. You can get those through Trove at the National Library.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** We are up against time so ladies and gentlemen, please join me in thanking our speakers for this evening. I invite Diana back to the stage to close it out and tell us where we are going next.

**Ms McCLUSKEY:** What an incredibly informative evening. I am not a Brisbane born and bred person so it is always wonderful for me to come and listen to the history of this beautiful city. What a distinguished panel. It was marvellous to hear so many different points of view and so many different perspectives of Brisbane and what we can think about, because there is a lot to think about. Please join me in again thanking our panel Maureen Hayes, Dr Beanland, Dr Wallace and Craig Buckley for coming this evening. I also thank Jen Williams for managing the role of moderator. It is a difficult job sometimes, but I think tonight it was done beautifully. Thank you so much for being with us tonight. Thank you to Councillor Howard for coming along to join us as well.

Thank you very much for coming this evening. It was a fantastic discussion. I think we are all better informed of the history of the council. This marks the end of the evening. I would like to invite you all to join us for refreshments on the green deck which is on level 7 of the Annexe. I understand that we will be escorted by two parliamentary staff members here, so if you would like to join us, please follow these ladies. Before I finish, Vanja, our treasurer, is waiting patiently in the audience. She will stand up now so you can see who she is. If you would like to join our organisation, the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, you are very welcome to join as a member. Vanja has a magic machine that can relieve you of some funds and then you can come along to more events like this in the evenings. Thank you so much and take care.