



Gecko Environment Council Assn Inc. ABN 90 689 258 843
Gecko House, 139 Duringan Street, Currumbin QLD 4223
✆ +61 7 5534 1412 ✉ office@gecko.org.au 🌐 gecko.org.au

21 May 2019

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Email: egc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019

Gecko Environment Council (Gecko) is a not-for-profit environment association founded in 1989 and has been active for the past 29 years in protecting the environmental values and ecological sustainability of the Gold Coast, Queensland and, when appropriate, nationally. Its Mission Statement is "To actively promote, conserve and restore the natural environment and improve the sustainability of the built environment of the Gold Coast region in partnership with our member groups and the wider community."

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Bill. We beg the Committee's indulgence to accept our brief comments after the closing time of 12 noon. The writer was unaware that it was not the usual deadline of 4 pm.

We congratulate the government for the course it has followed since the delivery of the Belcarra Report. Gecko has participated fully in the dialogue that has ensued and has offered submissions on proposed legislative changes to bring about a greater degree of honesty, integrity and transparent decision-making to the operations of Queensland's local governments. These issues are of great importance to the community and if this Bill is passed, as a logical next step in the reform process, it will bring about a public greater confidence in the role of elected officials to act in the genuine interests of communities in terms of positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Gecko views the current suite of reforms contained in this Bill to be a further positive step in delivering these outcomes. We believe the measures introduced will go a long way in meeting the policy objectives stated in the Explanatory Notes.

We wish however to raise two further points. The current Bill has two significant omissions:

1. A lack of a clear definition of what is in the public interest

Without a clear understanding by Councillors and Mayors of what "public interest" actually means, it remains a term to be loosely bandied about to further the interests, generally, of purely economic outcomes demanded by the development industry. For example, on the Gold Coast, it has become the norm for the Council to approve very significant deviations from the Desired

Outcomes of the City Plan to meet the demands of the development industry for maximum site coverage, minimum setbacks and significantly reduced public recreational space requirements. The State requirement for these trade-offs to be of meaningful benefit to the community appears to be ignored, with public benefit being couched in terms of extravagant statements about the architectural merits of a building and exaggerated claims about improved amenity. This is presented as an acceptable trade-off to future residents for the reduced liveability of that building or to existing residents subjected to a crowded streetscape and greatly increased traffic issues.

2. Election of Mayors

This Bill allows this costly process to remain in place. It is a method of appointing a Mayor that does not follow the Westminster model of elections that is followed across Australia for State and Federal elections. The current system is open to abuse and favours cashed-up candidates over those who may be more meritorious. Gecko urges the Government to give serious consideration to introducing an alternative, such as that operating in many parts of New South Wales and other States, for elected Councillors to elect a Mayor themselves.

Gecko strongly supports the passing of this legislation and we thank the Committee for consideration of our views.



Rose Adams
Secretary

Authorised to offer this submission on behalf of Gecko Environment Council Asscn Inc.