

# Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

**Submission No:** 051

**Submission By:** Teresa Harding

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**City of  
Ipswich**

**Mayor Teresa Harding**

**City of Ipswich  
Queensland, Australia**

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Local Government, Small Business  
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19 December 2025

Dear Chair,

**Submission: Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the proposed *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*. The following submission is made in my own capacity as Mayor Teresa Harding, and not on behalf of Ipswich City Council.

By way of background, I was elected in March 2020 following Ipswich City Council being placed into administration for 20 months. I was re-elected in March 2024 with an increased primary vote of 4.5 per cent. I am the first female Mayor in Ipswich's 165-year history and the first non-Labor aligned Mayor in more than 45 years.

Ipswich City Council was dismissed in August 2018 in response to Operation Windage, an investigation by the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC). While this was a necessary step for the Queensland Parliament given the corruption and incompetence that was uncovered during this investigation, the move to dissolve Council did not prohibit dismissed councillors from being elected in the future.

Currently, a third of Ipswich City Council's elected representatives, three of nine, are previously dismissed councillors. It is this unusual dynamic, in my opinion, that has led to a number of attempts this term to undermine the role of the mayor.

Therefore, I welcome the opportunity to provide my personal experiences and views on the changes proposed in the *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* to protect and respect our democratic system of government. Enhancing and clarifying the responsibilities of democratically and popularly elected mayors in Queensland respects Queensland voters for the betterment of our communities.

Yours sincerely,

**Mayor Teresa Harding**

## Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that Local Government is the level of government closest to its community and most focused on delivering directly for its constituents. However, despite the grassroots nature of the Local Government, it is not immune to politics or the push and pull between the Mayor as the leader of the council and its councillors.

While a certain level of politics is expected, even at the local level, what has occurred at Ipswich City Council since this cohort was elected in March 2024 has arguably exceeded what the community would accept as local politics.

Instead, it has escalated into actions that seek to deliberately undermine the authority, roles and responsibilities of the Mayor, democratically elected by the people of Ipswich. These actions have tested the intention and boundaries of *Local Government Act 2009* leading in part to the introduction of the *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*.

This was most evident during Council's [Post Election Meeting on 11 April 2024](#) where the same five councillors voted to strip me from my previous role as Chair of the Local Disaster Management Group, voted down my motion to represent Council as Local Government Association of Queensland's (LGAQ) Policy Executive representative, as well as my request to sit on Council's Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Similarly in Council's Ordinary Meeting on 28 January 2025, [Councillor Paul Tully moved a motion](#) which sought to amend Council's [Media and Corporate Communications Policy](#) to remove the Mayor as an official media spokesperson on any matter related to a Council agenda item or to a Committee or Committee portfolio, essentially 'gagging' the city's civic leader.

Each of these decisions and actions were lawful under the *Local Government Act 2009*, however they demonstrated a fatal flaw in the existing legislation and regulations. The legislation offered no defence against councillors looking to use these important and perceived roles and responsibilities of a mayor for their own political interests, and not the interests of the Ipswich community.

Therefore, I offer my overall support for the changes proposed in the *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* and other reforms undertaken by the Queensland Government to empower Queensland mayors and ultimately deliver on the expectations of the community for their elected representatives.

## Disaster Management Amendment Regulation 2025

During Council's Post Election Meeting on 11 April 2024, five out of eight councillors voted to remove me from my previously held role of Chair of the Ipswich Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) and appoint a councillor with no prior experience in leading the city through a disaster.

At the time of this vote, I had successfully led the city through multiple disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Halloween hailstorm, and the devastating 2022 floods. The 2022 Ipswich floods impacted almost 600 homes and 300 businesses in February, with another wave that followed in May 2022.

Ipswich experienced no loss of life in this event, received positive feedback from residents through a [flood listening tour and review](#), and Council's disaster response was praised as part of the Inspector-General of Emergency Management's [review into the region-wide disaster](#).

This decision by Council prompted a strong response from the Ipswich community. Hundreds of residents emailed, called and posted [social media messages](#) in response to the decision. A typical Council Meeting might receive around one hundred or so views, this [meeting had more than 2,000](#).

After advocacy from the Ipswich community, key agencies and myself to both the previous and current Queensland Government, the *Disaster Management Amendment Regulation 2025* was made by the Governor in Council on 10 November 2025 and commenced on 1 December 2025.

It is my understanding from the Queensland Government that this regulation change involved consultation with the LGAQ, Queensland Reconstruction Authority and the Queensland Police Service as the administering agency, with all offering their support for the amendment.

While the *Disaster Management Amendment Regulation 2025* is now in effect, it forms part of the commonsense changes proposed as part of this overall package of reforms and provides context for the *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* which seeks to align existing legislation and regulations with the community's expectations.

#### **Clause 49 Amendment of s12 (Responsibilities of councillors)**

In January 2025, Cr Paul Tully proposed a motion to amend Council's Media and Corporate Communications Policy, putting forward the following amendments:

- A. That the following words be added at the end of the fourth paragraph of section 7.2 of the Policy: "and the relevant Committee Chairperson in relation to all media enquiries relating to their committee portfolio".
- B. That the following words be deleted from the second paragraph of Section 7.3.2 of the Policy: "Where a matter has more than one Designated Spokesperson,"
- C. That the following words be added at the start of the first paragraph of section 7.3.3 of the Policy: "Subject to section 7.3.4 of the Policy,"
- D. That the following paragraph be inserted after the first paragraph of 7.3.4 of the Policy: "For the purpose of clarification and notwithstanding anything to the contrary in section 7.3.3 of the Policy (but subject to the other provisions of section 7.3.4 of the Policy) where Council media releases arise from or relate to a Committee or Committee portfolio or to a Council agenda item or other matter or as a result of a media enquiry, the relevant committee chairperson will be the Lead Spokesperson."

These changes, particularly the amendment to Section 7.3.4, represented the removal of the Mayor as the lead spokesperson for Council on any matter related to a Committee or Committee portfolio or to a Council agenda item – effectively every decision of Ipswich City Council.

The motion prompted a strong response from both [media and the community](#) given its attempt to limit the voice of a democratically elected mayor in representing the interests of Council and its constituents. It was this response that forced Cr Tully to lay the matter on the table before significantly amending the motion in a following meeting.

Despite the motion arguably contradicting the intent of the *Local Government Act 2009* and the expectations of the Ipswich community, the council organisation deemed the motion lawful. Without the intervention of local and national media, it would most likely have been resolved on 28 January 2025.

While Cr Tully's motion ultimately did not proceed, it demonstrated a vulnerability in the *Local Government Act 2009* and the need for the fundamental roles and responsibilities of a mayor – such as speaking on behalf of Council to media – to be protected through the strengthening of the relevant legislation.

Similarly, these proposed protections must also extend to the role of the Mayor as the Chairperson of Council Meetings and Committee Meetings of which the Mayor is a member.

While a revision to the [Model Meeting Procedures](#) in July 2024 by the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works has provided an interim safeguard to stop this role being removed from Queensland mayors, enshrining these core responsibilities in legislation will ensure they are not subject to further challenges from politically motivated councillors.

## Further considerations for future Local Government reform

While I am supportive of the amendments proposed in the *Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*, I would argue these reforms do not go far enough in terms of addressing known gaps in the legislation and regulations that govern Local Government.

Therefore, I would also like to take this opportunity to put forward further reforms for the consideration of the Committee and the Queensland Government.

### Eligibility requirements to become a councillor

The quality of candidates that put their hands up to become mayors and councillors across Queensland is closely related to the eligibility requirements for becoming a councillor, or lack thereof. This sets the standard for the decisions and behaviours of mayors and councillors once elected.

Currently, all councillors must meet the following mandatory eligibility requirements as set out in the *Local Government Act 2009*, the *City of Brisbane Act 2010*, and the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*:

- be an adult Australian citizen (including an Australian citizen who holds dual citizenship with another country)
- be enrolled on the Queensland electoral roll and reside in the local government area
- for which they are nominating.
- not be disqualified from being a councillor because of a conviction for any one of the following types of offences:
  - a treason offence
  - an electoral offence
  - a bribery offence
  - an integrity or serious integrity offence
- not subject to other circumstances including:
  - having an undischarged bankruptcy
  - being on probation, in prison, on parole or serving a suspended sentence
  - being a member of a state or federal parliament or a councillor of a local government of another state.

While these criteria offer some basic standards, it falls well short of the vetting undertaken by political parties for State, Federal and Brisbane City Council candidates. As a result, voters must rely on candidates to be upfront and truthful about past criminal offences, domestic violence orders or other transgressions – which is rarely the case based on my personal experience.

Since my election as Mayor, I have witnessed councillors who have not disclosed their guilty verdicts, time served in jail and transgressions or if it has been disclosed in the media, councillors have omitted certain offences or denied they were guilty despite, in one case, where the councillor had pled guilty to the offence.

Learning from the lessons of Investigation Murray, the CCC's investigation into allegations of corrupt conduct by the former Mayor of Townsville, Mr Troy Thompson was [disendorsed as a One Nation candidate](#) in 2020 because he allegedly did not disclose with his legal name and directorship in a supply chain management company that became insolvent. This did not stop him from running for Local Government.

The Investigation Murray report notes:

*"Misinformation (false or inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally) and disinformation (false information deliberately intended to mislead) are corrosive to the democratic process. Misinformation and disinformation can cause voters to doubt the integrity of the electoral system, or to vote based on an understanding of the facts which simply isn't true."*

*Unlike state and federal elections, which are primarily dominated by party-based nominations and usually subject to internal party vetting and nomination processes, local government elections are often dominated by independent candidates. In the case of local governments, the relationship between the voting public and elected officials is particularly strong, due to their closer proximity, making the demands for access to accurate and reliable information much stronger especially given the growing demand for improved transparency.*

*Consequently, voters must undertake their own enquiries and are required to rely upon publicly available information, or representations made by electoral candidates. The regulation of truth in political communication and advertising largely rests with the respective candidates. The assessment of the truth of statements made by political parties and candidates is a responsibility that largely falls to individual voters."*

Other industries use an expanded criteria for the purposes of conducting fit and proper assessments. While this may not be specifically suited to Local Government, it provides a guide for consideration of how better eligibility criteria for council candidates could go a long way in removing this burden from voters by ensuring candidates meet a certain standard before they are eligible to put their hands up to be a mayor or councillor.

As an example, Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) requires the following criteria to be met to demonstrate a person is fit and proper. These could be applied to Local Government candidates:

15. *SPS 520 requires that, under its Fit and Proper Policy, an RSE licensee must consider the nature and extent of a number of matters in conducting fit and proper assessments. Such matters ordinarily include, when relevant:*

- (a) *the person's character, competence and experience relative to the duties involved, including whether the person:*
  - (i) *possesses the necessary skills, knowledge, expertise, diligence and soundness of judgement to undertake and fulfil the particular duties and responsibilities of the role in question; and*
  - (ii) *has demonstrated the appropriate competence and integrity in fulfilling occupational, managerial or professional responsibilities previously and/or in the conduct of their current duties; and*
- (b) *whether the person:*
  - (i) *has demonstrated a lack of willingness to comply with legal obligations, regulatory requirements or professional standards, or been obstructive, misleading or untruthful in dealing with regulatory bodies or a court;*
  - (ii) *has breached a fiduciary obligation;*
  - (iii) *has perpetrated or participated in negligent, deceitful or otherwise discreditable business or professional practices;*
  - (iv) *has been reprimanded, disqualified or removed, by a professional or regulatory body in relation to matters relating to the person's honesty, integrity or business conduct;*
  - (v) *has seriously or persistently failed to manage personal debts or financial affairs satisfactorily in circumstances where such failure caused loss to others;*
  - (vi) *has been substantially involved in the management of a business or company which has failed, where that failure has been occasioned in part by deficiencies in that management;*
  - (vii) *is of bad repute in any business or financial community or any market; or*
  - (viii) *was the subject of civil or criminal proceedings or enforcement action, in relation to the management of an entity, or commercial or professional activities, which were determined adversely to the person (including by the person consenting to an order or direction, or giving an undertaking, not to engage in unlawful or improper conduct) and which reflected adversely on the person's competence, diligence, judgement, honesty or integrity.*

I would recommend to this Committee that any future review of Local Government include candidate disclosures and broadening the list of disqualifying offences. Some suggestions I offer are for candidates to include with their nomination:

- Department of Transport and Main Roads driver's licence history and traffic history outlining if there has been any driving under the influence offence for the last 10 years;
- Queensland Police Service Person History report;
- Australian Tax Office running account balance, to see if there are any outstanding matters;
- Child Support Agency report to see if there are any outstanding matters;
- Evidence of qualifications;
- Australian Defence Force Certificate of Service; and
- Evidence of holding a Blue Card.

Disqualifying offences that could be included to assist voters:

- Domestic Violence Protection Order in the last 10 years; and
- Elements from the APRA fit and proper person assessment.

#### Abstaining from a vote

During meetings, Queensland councils currently apply the following voting procedures:

- voting must be open
- a question is decided by the majority of the votes of the councillors present
- each councillor present has one vote on each question to be decided and, if the votes are equal, the chairperson of the meeting also has a casting vote
- if a councillor is present but fails to vote, the councillor is taken to have voted in the negative.

It is this final point that I believe should be reviewed, due to the unintended consequences of a failure to vote being taken as a negative vote. The intent of a councillor abstaining is by its nature a conscious decision to not cast a vote.

Instead of this being recorded as a true abstention, it is recorded as a negative vote and has a direct impact on the decisions being made by councils across Queensland.

#### Civic, ceremonial, community and business events

Expand the Local Government Act s12(4)(g) "representing the local government at ceremonial or civic functions", to include community and business events.

One of the local government principles is, "democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement".

On many occasions I have had community groups and businesses ask me why I did not attend their event. When I let them know I did not receive an invitation, they tell me they sent one to the divisional councillor and expected that this would be forwarded to the Mayor. It is my experience that in many cases these invitations are not shared with me for political reasons.

ICC's [Representation of the City at Official Functions Policy](#) states:

#### *7. Protocol for Councillor Invitations*

- *The Mayor is the principal representative of Council and all Councillors support the Mayor.*
- *The Deputy Mayor will substitute for the Mayor at a function or event when the Mayor is unable to attend.*

- *Should neither the Mayor or Deputy Mayor be available to attend, the Mayor is responsible for delegating attendance at a function to another Councillor, taking into consideration whether the function is associated with a group or committee to which a Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative.*
- *Councillors may receive invitations directly from community groups or organisations because of their involvement with the group/organisation. It is the responsibility of each Councillor to provide a copy of all invitations, including details of their own attendance, to the Mayoral Administrative Support Pool to ensure that the Mayor is cognisant of all requests for civic involvement in events.*

Despite this policy being in place since September 2019, Ipswich City councillors rarely inform my office of invitations. It is also my assumption that if I were to ask for this policy to be complied with, the most likely outcome would be that councillors would amend the policy to avoid complying with this request.

It is the community's expectation that I would be, at a minimum, informed of these events before they happen, and also to have the invitation shared with my office so perhaps I may attend the event with the divisional councillors in line with local government principles and to the benefit of the Ipswich community.

#### Audit and Risk Management Committee

Consideration should be given to amending the Local Government Regulation, s210 Audit committee composition, to include the mayor as a standing member of the audit committee of a local government, much like the Local Government Act s12(4)(f) where the mayor is a member of each standing committee of the local government.

As stated earlier, at the Post Election meeting on 11 April 2024, I nominated to be on the Council's Audit and Risk Management Committee (ARMC) and this was voted down for political reasons.

The chair of the ARMC has an understandable expectation that the two councillor representatives would therefore inform the mayor of any relevant matters. However, despite requests, this does not currently occur and there is nothing in the current legislation or regulations to compel councillors to do so.

While I am able to attend the ARMC as an observer, I would still be excluded from the members only section of the ARMC. Ipswich City Council has a very recent history of significant corruption, to be blocked from the members only section of the ARMC and for the sitting councillors to not inform me of matters is something that troubles me a great deal.

It is also my assumption that this practice would not be in line with the community's expectations, given it was the Ipswich ratepayers who ultimately paid the price of the failures of the previous administration.