



Cr Paul Bishop

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14 December 2021

Committee Secretary,
State Development & Regional Industries Committee
Parliament House, George Street
Brisbane, Queensland, 4000
SDRIC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the functions of the Independent Assessor and performance of those functions

As an elected representative of Redland City Council 2012-2016; 2016-2020; 2020-2024, I am generally supportive of the role, function and performance of the Office of Independent Assessor.

I believe there is an ongoing need for oversight and review of decisions by elected representatives in order to maintain public trust in the function of local government.

There were a suite of changes made to Local Government Legislation in the year 2012 that I believe have significantly changed the social contract with our communities. Some have subliminally impacted public confidence in elected representatives. Eg:

- * Extra powers were given to mayors to direct executives (SPOLA 2012)- without clear recording and reporting requirements relating to this change, it represented a potential for overreach regarding the 'separation of powers', raising concerns.
- * Statutory changes removed the requirement for councils to create Community Plans. Departments of Communities have since been removed from LGAQ. I believe some council's focus has shifted away from LG Principle 3: 'Democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement'. (Redland City Council was an exemplar in strategic public policy co-design with community, prior to changes.)
- * In my opinion, focus on fiscal stimulus outcomes in the Economic Development Act 2012 promoted single bottom line outcomes, while 2012 political promises to 'cut red tape' and 'cut green tape' also undermined social, environmental and cultural values. Some PDA's removed normal regulatory planning provisions, which reduced former safeguards of benefit to all stakeholders. There are some associated legacy issues with ongoing concerns about confidential public/private partnerships, which may have eroded public confidence in LG Principle 1: 'Transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest'.

I suggest two things could help to re-focus our core commitment to Local Government sector reforms in support of the public interest:

1. Overall, I believe we need clear strategic policy review of procedural governance processes from state government, to ensure civic, commercial and community actors co-design council legislation *with* communities, to uphold all Principles within the Local Government Act and to deliver on the 'purpose' of the state Planning Act, which is to ensure 'ecological sustainability' (This is an issue of increasing importance to citizens and I believe we need more clarity from state and councils on how this purpose is to be measured, mapped and achieved).
2. We need the Officer of the Independent Assessor to continue to oversee and scrutinise any apparently concerning choices, decisions and actions by elected representatives that may not be seen to be upholding the public interest.

I believe that implementation of the Belcara Recommendations from OIA have addressed some concerns re: 'powers to mayors'; and other changes have improved the process of ethical behaviour generally. I believe the 'separation of powers' need to remain sacrosanct within Local Government and be better understood by all parties to support future civic, commercial and community cohesion in the common interest.

While I acknowledge there are some anomalies around 'declarations of interests' that need to be managed to improve efficiencies and avoid confusion, I support the work of the OIA. I believe all investigations need to remain neutral and unbiased.

As a final point and note:

I could find no clear definition in state government legislation to describe what the state considers to be the 'public interest'.

I suggest addressing that definition may be a useful starting point for LG review, IOA function and councillor conduct.

Kind regards,

Cr Paul Bishop

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Redland City Council

