




Speech by

Hon. David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard Tuesday, 13 November 2012

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. DF CRISAFULLI** (Mundingburra—LNP) (Minister for Local Government) (4.37 pm), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contributions in today's debate. I would like to reinforce the importance of this bill in implementing the government's empowering local government policy and the Partners in Government Agreement between the state and the Local Government Association of Queensland.

This bill fulfils the government's election commitment to empower local government and put mayors and councillors clearly in charge. Importantly, it makes clear the role of mayors and councillors in leading their local governments and ensuring they deliver effective and efficient services to their communities. This bill represents the first stage in removing the red tape and prescription that has plagued local governments for too long. Upcoming regulatory amendments to the local government legislation will further this goal and ensure that local governments are no longer subject to unnecessary state intervention. The government is working to restore the relationship between the state and local governments. The Partners in Government Agreement is a new start and a fresh way forward.

I might take this opportunity to go through some of the contributions today and sincerely thank all members for their efforts, particularly at the committee stage. The member for Warrego, who did a fine job in chairing that committee, spoke about the fact that we have brought this bill forward quickly. We had to because we had to restore faith in the relationship and in the role of the elected people who run their cities and shires. He spoke about the body corporate status. Not only did he speak about the cost to the council, but he was wise enough to speak about the threat to councillors in being sued under those old measures. He also spoke about community involvement in those absurd conflict of interest provisions that, as a former alderman himself, he knows all too well.

The member for Noosa spoke about party houses. He spoke of the real danger not only to the neighbours but also to the occupants themselves from the goings-on. He also mentioned clause 168, offering the deamalgamation, which he has mentioned with me once or twice since the election. The member for Algeester summed up magnificently the role of the mayor in preparing and tabling the budget and also the fact that the two weeks is a safety net for councillors that has never been there before. Indeed, he was quite astute to have picked that up. For the first time it restores the balance. It gives the elected officials and the popularly voted mayor the opportunity to prepare and table the budget, rather than the CEO. It also ensures that councillors have the opportunity to peruse it and move amendments before it goes to council.

The member for Kallangur spoke about how well the committee system worked and, indeed, he is right. He spoke about the old attitude of beating local governments senseless. Indeed, his was a great contribution. He mentioned the 13 people in government who have experience in local government. It would be remiss of me not to mention the other three with experience in local government, that is, the members for Gladstone, Nicklin and Mount Isa. The member for Kallangur made one small error that I should correct. He said that my first meeting was with his council at Moreton Bay. I do know where my bread is buttered and, in fact, my first meeting was with the Townsville City Council. My meeting with the member for Kallangur's council was the first in the south-east that I undertook.

Mr Cripps: In the south-east.

Mr CRISAFULLI: In fact, Hinchinbrook was the second council.

Mr Cripps: That's because you know where your pasta is cooked.

Mr CRISAFULLI: I do indeed. The member for Mermaid Beach and Leader of the House said that the weekend romp is over and he welcomes the changes to the party houses. Indeed, today is an opportunity to place on record that I am told that the Gold Coast City Council is already preparing its local law in expectation of this opportunity. That is evidence of what can happen when councils and the state work together, rather than beating each other up. He also spoke about the open data and the benefits that can provide to our friends in local government. The member for Mount Ommaney spoke of healing the wounds. Indeed, that has been a huge part of this. One of the ways that we will heal those wounds is to ensure that councillors do not have to look over each other's shoulders and report who are bad little boys and girls. The member touched on that quite brilliantly.

To try to sum up in a few words what was said by the member for Springwood would do him a great disservice, because his contribution was magnificent. He spoke about the committee process and the philosophies of this government versus those of the previous government. Indeed, as one who knows local government so well, he summed up the positive changes. He also spoke about the threat that the former government thought came with offering people the opportunity to run for a state seat without having to resign. When I look around the chamber today, it occurs to me that at the next election the great threat may well come from the other side of politics, yet we have stuck with our election promise because it is the right thing to do. We will not attack local government as those opposite did. We believe that people should be entitled to make a contribution at whatever level of government they see fit.

The member for Gregory spoke about the importance of this legislation to the regions. As someone who loves regional Queensland, he has welcomed these changes. He and I have visited a number of the shires in his electorate. We have gone back to visit some parts of the shires that are still reeling from the forced amalgamations. I welcomed his input when we went to both Isisford and Aramac. Finally, the member for Gladstone spoke about my visit to her council. It was great to have her there as a former councillor.

The first speaker in the debate was the member for Mackay. I say with the greatest of respect that today I saw a person who did not truly have his heart in what he said. I question whether or not he had read that speech before he came into this place or simply read what somebody else served up to him. I really do not believe he believed it. The fact that only one member opposite has spoken to this bill shows that his heart was not truly in it. What upset me the most about the member's contribution was him saying that the consultation for this bill was minimal. I truly think that nobody can honestly put their hand on their heart and say that that is the case. We have consulted on this bill at every possible step of the way. We went to an election and outlined the changes that we would be making to the local government and City of Brisbane acts. We visited every council to get their input. We spoke to the Local Government Association. We spoke to the Local Government Managers Australia. To suggest that consultation has not been thorough is truly unfair.

The member for Mackay talked about the fact that the leader of the opposition in the Brisbane City Council was unable to appear before the committee. However, the opportunity to speak to me was always there. In fact, I even went to the Brisbane City Council and it was the only council meeting at which I was jeered for attending. The contrast between Mr Dick and others of similar political leanings could not have been greater. In fact, when I visited councils in which the mayor clearly has different political leanings to me, I was welcomed with open arms as somebody who was there to do the right thing by local government. I think those opposite still do not get that the vast majority of people who front up to a local council chamber are not there to push a political barrow; they are there to do the right thing by their community.

I could go through myriad things raised by the member for Mackay, but I think the greatest opportunity to say whether or not these changes will make a difference should be given to those men and women who represent councils across the state. I will touch on a few of the comments that have come through to us. The Mayor of Bundaberg said—

This act is much-needed and will be a great benefit to elected mayors and councillors in delivering for our communities.

The Mayor of Burdekin said—

The amendments to the act will certainly help our shire to conduct its business more efficiently and effectively and cut down the time previously wasted on complying with state government legislative requirements. I thank your government sincerely.

Don Waugh, the Mayor of the North Burnett Regional Council, said—

The local government now has a real sense of responsibility and commitment and a new vision of the areas that can be more easily attended to.

Paul Pisasale, the Mayor of the Ipswich City Council, said—

Under the old act I couldn't even ask my CEO to do something without keeping a record of the directive.

How much red tape is that? John Brent, the Mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council, said—

The old act placed too big a burden on councils, wasting resources and discouraging simple practical solutions.

Graham Quirk, the Brisbane Lord Mayor, said—

Under the old act, the council chairman was investigated last year and found at fault for moving the council minutes in the wrong order. Council's hands were tied and we had no option but to refer it to the Councillor Conduct Review Panel for an investigation that cost \$5,000.

I think the last comment should be this one—

The local community elect their mayors and councillors, but over the years the power and influence of the elected members have decreased and the power of the council officials and the state government has massively increased. This bill changes that.

That comes from the Mayor of Mount Isa, Tony McGrady.

Mr Nicholls: A good Labor minister.

Mr CRISAFULLI: Indeed. This year I have visited all of the local government areas throughout Queensland. I have seen a group of men and women who want to be part of something bigger. They want to create stronger and more efficient councils, and a stronger and more efficient state. To this end, we have consulted with bodies such as the Local Government Association and the Local Government Managers Australia. I wish to thank them for their contribution to the bill and for their commitment to reforming the way in which local governments are allowed to govern. Finally, I thank my ministerial staff and departmental staff, in particular Ms Bronwyn Blagoev and Mr Logan Timms, for their hard work in bringing this bill to the House. I commend the bill to the House.