




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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Record of Proceedings, 3 June 2015

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (10.30 pm): It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow committee members: the chair, the member for Mirani, Jim Pearce; the deputy chair, the member for Burleigh, Michael Hart; the member for Keppel, Brittany Lauga; the member for Gladstone, Glenn Butcher; and the member for Dalrymple, Shane Knuth. I would also like to thank our research director Erin Pasley, principal research officers Margaret Telford and Mary Westcott and the executive assistant Dianne Christian.

I support that this parliament pass part 3 of the bill which would defer the commencement of chapter 2, registration of the Heavy Vehicle National Law Act 2012, until 1 July 2018. I support the Australian Trucking Association's calls that operators should be able to register all their vehicles through a single web portal or a service centre. This system would reduce compliance costs for operators and allow the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator and its service provider to undertake roadside enforcement on a more targeted and risk management basis. What is meant by this is that we need the data shared through all states so that transport inspectors can concentrate on the so-called cowboys in the trucking industry, which are a minority, so that they are brought into line and targeted to bring them up to standard; and the good operators, which are the majority of operators, can get on with the business of keeping the wheels turning and are recognised as good operators. It would be essential that the registration portal include all state concessions available to the operator. It would be ridiculous for operators to have to claim back their concessions through a separate process.

If government takes up the NTC's draft heavy vehicle charges determination, the heavy vehicle industry will be overcharged by \$117 million in 2015-16. Until governments can resolve the existing overcharging problem satisfactorily, the Australian Trucking Association cannot see any reason for the industry to have to pay more money for a national registration system. The trucking industry is a major employer in the seat of Gregory. It plays a critical role in our local economy. Just like the previous member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, I am passionate about the trucking industry and its survival. We have some great family owned trucking companies in my electorate of Gregory, including Johnson Brothers, Emerald Carrying Company, Ballards, Nixons, Jason Ross Earthmoving and the list goes on. These are hardworking family operations that employ locals and are an integral part of our local economy, from shifting decks of cattle out of the Channel Country to the meatworks of the Darling Downs and Brisbane or shifting decks of cattle out of Central Queensland to meatworks in Rockhampton, Mackay and Townsville, to hauling grain and cotton right across the Central Highlands, also delivering goods or moving heavy equipment for both the resource and agricultural industry using the Warrego, Landsborough, Bruce, Capricorn and Gregory highways. Trucking companies are big business and essential to our region.

It is a high-cost industry to run and registration is one of the huge costs. In 2015-16, heavy vehicle registration nationwide—that is, the total money raised through the national registration charge—is expected to be about \$1.2 billion. For local operators registration is a big cost.

**Mr Costigan:** Just ask Peter Haylock.

**Mr MILLAR:** Absolutely. I take that interjection from the member for Whitsunday. To give members some idea of registration, a semi-trailer is \$6,678 to register, a B-double \$15,050 and a type 1 road train—that is, a prime mover with two trailers connected by a dolly—costs around about \$17,340. It is a lot of money before you even start to turn a wheel. Of course, the cost of running a trucking business, whether it is trucking cattle, heavy machinery or grain, does not stop there. There are wages, administration costs, maintenance and mechanical costs and, of course, the big cost is diesel.

I would also like to speak on the continuation of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. I support that. I think everyone in this House appreciates and applauds the great effort by the Queensland Reconstruction Authority when a natural disaster occurs in this state. Of course, that was recently seen when Cyclone Marcia crossed the coast at Yeppoon and left a trail of destruction through the Capricorn Coast, Rockhampton, Biloela, Goovigen, Jambin right down to the North Burnett. It should be put on record that the LNP had intended in government to extend the authority's existence past the June 2015 time frame. The Queensland Reconstruction Authority is essential in times of disaster. It brings together all the key agencies to make sure that we maximise our efforts to restore communities and get them back online as quick as possible. Of course when most people think of natural disasters they think of cyclones and floods—an event that happens quickly and leaves a very visible trail of destruction such as power lines down, roofs ripped off, no power and no water. But the western part of my electorate is facing a very different natural disaster—drought. Drought is a slow-creeping natural disaster that has crept over the west in the past three or four years. I believe that the Queensland Reconstruction Authority has a role to play in a drought in coordinating the relief effort, such as coordinating donations, identifying people in need and assisting sporting clubs that need a hand, like the Ilfracombe Rugby League Club which has no playing surface at the moment and players have to leave the Ilfracombe area and play their games everywhere else.

**Mr Costigan:** God bless the Scorpions!

**Mr MILLAR:** Absolutely. People want to help the rugby league club but we need a coordinated approach. I think the Reconstruction Authority may have a role to play in that. They could also have a role helping children participate in local dance and ballet schools which are losing children because families cannot afford the fees. When people donate to drought funds they want to help those kids continue on with their extracurricular activities, whether it is dance school, ballet or tennis. I think we need a coordinated approach. When drought continues, like it has over the past four years, we need a coordinating authority and I believe the Queensland Reconstruction Authority could play that role.

Finally, I will speak on amendments to the Local Government Electoral Act 2011. The amendments to the Local Government Electoral Act mean that a local government CEO may withdraw from being the returning officer by giving the Electoral Commission of Queensland a withdrawal notice before the prescribed notification day. Following an LNP election commitment in 2012, as part of the policy of empowering local government, the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 was amended in 2014 so that the CEO of the local government is the returning officer for local elections unless the CEO gives a withdrawal notice to the ECQ, the CEO is a member of a political party or the Electoral Commission gives the CEO a removal notice. It is important to note that the ECQ still remains responsible for conducting local government elections. As the amendments commenced on 1 January 2015 they had not yet been tested at an election. Local government elections prior to 2008 were run by local governments with the CEO as the returning officer.

My position is to oppose the amendments to the Local Government Electoral Act and maintain the policy of empowering local governments to make decisions to benefit their local communities. Most importantly, we saw no evidence to suggest why we need to amend the act. No evidence was offered during the departmental briefings or public hearings to justify the suggestions in the explanatory notes that the amendments are to remove the perceived bias of having a local government CEO as a returning officer. In the seat of Gregory we have six local governments, the Central Highlands Regional Council, the Barcaldine Regional Council, the Longreach Regional Council, the Blackall-Tambo Regional Council, the Barcoo-Quilpie Regional Council and, of course, the Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council. As members would understand, many of these councils are remote councils. Sometimes they have no choice but to use the CEO as the returning officer. These councils can run their elections very efficiently. While contracting out the returning officer to the ECQ may be affordable for the bigger councils down in the south-east, even though we heard the Logan City Council estimate it could save up to \$400,000 if they use the CEO, bush councils do not have the luxury of a huge rate base to draw funds from to pay a contractor. They have to be prudent. They have to make every dollar count. They are also in the best position to run their local government elections. Thank you.