




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (8.16 pm): I too rise to contribute to this debate on the Industrial Relations Bill 2016. I do so particularly in my capacity as the shadow minister for local government. As others have said, there are some 40,000 Queenslanders currently employed by local governments. These council staff, like their state public servant cousins, are employed through an industrial relations system overseen by the state government. The vast majority of non-government employees fall under Commonwealth industrial relations laws.

If we are going to make significant changes to that system we would want to have the local governments and their chief advocacy body, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the LGAQ, on side. No, they are not on side. They do not even appear to be in complete opposition to what is being proposed. It is far more than that. The words coming from the LGAQ when this bill was tabled, as the member for Kawana said earlier, were that it was a betrayal, a mockery and a retrograde step.

I refer to the comments in the *Courier-Mail* article, mentioned by the member for Kawana, in which Mr Greg Hallam of the LGAQ said—

The Minister and not the QIRC has determined how many awards will apply in our sphere of government.

The Minister has sidelined the QIRC from any deliberative role on the content of new awards, bypassing them in favour of the Industrial Registrar. The Queensland IR system is entirely political and devoid of any sense of impartiality.

In the ABC article posted online, Mr Hallam stated—

“We have the Minister dictating how many awards there should be and the content of the awards,” ...

“Why have an independent umpire in the form of the Industrial Relations Commission when the Government herself is going to make those determinations? It's completely wrong and it takes away any faith that the system is independent, impartial or fair.”

...

“This is a cost that will be borne by the ratepayers of Queensland,” ...

Let me repeat that—

“This is a cost that will be borne by the ratepayers of Queensland,” ...

He continued—

“This is a cost that means we have a much more cumbersome industrial relations system, many more awards, much more complexity, a much more costly system to administer.”

Ms Grace: Rubbish!

Mr POWELL: I take that interjection from the minister who refers to Mr Hallam's comments as 'rubbish'.

Ms Grace: Absolutely.

Mr POWELL: 'Absolute rubbish' I understand is the subsequent interjection. I am sure Mr Hallam, local government mayors and councillors around the state will be impressed to hear that that is what the minister thinks of their concerns.

The end result is that the local governments of Queensland and the LGAQ want this bill opposed. The LGAQ in their submission to the parliamentary committee said—

The current government regularly cites as justification for their actions the alleged extreme industrial relations changes made by the former Newman Government, all of which have subsequently been eliminated, amended or restored with earlier legislation. Under this Bill, the Government promises just as extreme, if not more extreme, changes to the industrial system, albeit these changes promote the cause of trade unions, undermine freedom of association, impose additional costs on Councils and their communities, threatens productivity of councils, and further erodes the independence and decision-making capacity of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

It is considered that the new industrial relations framework proposed by this Bill, on top of the recent industrial forays by the state into direct management of the industrial relations regulatory environment of local government will:

- Lead to further job losses within the local government sector;
- At the very least stifle job creation activities within the sector;

Ms Grace: Why?

Mr POWELL: Again, I take those interjections.

Ms Grace: Why? Explain why.

Mr POWELL: Are you saying 'why' or 'lie'?

Ms Grace: Why? Explain why.

Mr POWELL: Why? You explain it, Minister, to the LGAQ. Tell the LGAQ because they are convinced that what you are proposing in this bill will lead to further job losses and will stifle job creation, and they continue—

- Impede productivity within the local government sector;
- Increase the risk of additional costs to the community, particularly for rate-payers.

If the minister does not want to take the word of the mayors, the councillors and the LGAQ on a bill that explicitly changes the industrial relations system for local government, then I find that completely and utterly appalling. The LGAQ continue—

Councils are concerned that unions are increasingly less willing to pursue industrial relations outcomes through the regulated industrial relations system in favour of seeking political intervention of a sympathetic government willing to utilise its legislative powers and considerable resources to achieve desired outcomes of unions.

Again, they state—

The LGAQ on behalf of its 77 constituent councils strongly **recommends this Bill be set aside altogether** or at the very least **be amended** to provide a fair and modern industrial relations system that:

- Appropriately balances both the short and long-term interests of council employers and workers;
- Is contemporary and relevant for a modern local government industry;
- Recognises and respects the rights and roles of workers and employer and employee associations;
- Provides for a resourced, capable and genuinely independent Industrial Relations tribunal.

While there are many specific aspects of the legislation which the LGAQ and councils find offensive to various degrees, this submission focusses on the most serious and significant issues of concern.

That is why the LNP will be opposing this bill and, if unsuccessful in defeating it, will be moving amendments. I commend the shadow minister, the member for Kawana, for his commitment to move amendments that will restore the existing provisions in the act in relation to the local government modern award process, restoring the independence of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission in that process as well. I implore all members to vote against this bill. If members do not have the courage to do that, then stand up and vote for the shadow minister's amendments.

Before I close, I do want to take this opportunity to recognise the work of Greg Hoffman, who is retiring from his advocacy role at the LGAQ. Many members in this place know Greg and know how effective a voice he has been for local governments in Queensland. Since 1982, Greg has been standing up for local governments. He has the respect of mayors and councillors, and federal and state MPs of all political persuasions. He has my respect. I always enjoyed meeting Greg in my capacity first as the shadow minister and then subsequently as the minister for environment and heritage protection. It is fair to say, and Greg would agree, that we did not always see eye to eye, but he was always such a gentleman, so well researched, so congenial, and the meetings were always very profitable—and I hope for both of us.

Greg made it his task to build up the LGA's capability, to build its credibility and to make it more relevant as the united peak body of the local government authorities that it has become today. The late Doug Tucker, the former senior lecturer in public administration at the University of Queensland, was so impressed with the LGAQ's turnaround under Greg that he dubbed the 1982 to 1992 period the 'Hoffman decade'. The reason local government issues get placed prominently on the desks of decision-makers in this place is largely due to Greg's tireless efforts. Greg steps down from his role as General Manager—Advocacy this month, having clocked up 50 years in local government, 29 of which have been with the LGAQ. I thank Greg for his tireless dedication over so many years and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Again, in returning to this bill, I implore all members to vote against it. If they do not have the courage to do so then stand up and vote for the shadow minister's amendments.