




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

---

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2017

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL (TRANSPARENCY AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. M FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (4.50 pm): I rise to support the Local Government Electoral (Transparency and Accountability in Local Government) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. The Palaszczuk government was elected on a platform of restoring integrity and accountability. Queenslanders expect transparency and accountability from their local representatives, and this bill delivers on that commitment.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor as local government minister, Deputy Premier Jackie Trad. In the first two years of the Palaszczuk government, the Deputy Premier was instrumental in helping local councils build strong, accountable and sustainable communities across the state of Queensland. Along with the Premier and Attorney-General, she has championed a range of reforms as part of the government's commitment to integrity and accountability. A great example of this is real-time electronic donation disclosure—a signature Palaszczuk Labor government reform. On 23 February 2017, the Premier and the Attorney-General announced that Australia's first real-time electronic donation disclosure system for state government elections had gone live in Queensland. This means that, instead of waiting months to see who is donating to a political party, since 1 March voters have been able to see, within seven business days, who is donating, how much the donations are and who has received the donations.

The bill before the House will ensure that voters also have access to real-time information about donations being made to local government candidates before an election takes place. The Deputy Premier has also outlined how the bill further delivers on the Palaszczuk government's commitment to innovative and fair planning and building legislation through the early commencement of key planning reforms. This will address issues in the relationship between building and planning approvals and further clarify elements of the new planning laws due to commence later this year.

As Minister for Local Government, I will focus my remarks on those amendments related to local government elections. It is important that local government elections are open and transparent. Open and accurate electoral donation disclosure returns a key part of that transparency. The public has a right to know who is donating to candidates so they can make informed decisions. Through these amendments, the government is putting in place legislative changes to electoral donations to local government candidates well in advance of the next local government election scheduled for 2020.

The bill directly addresses recommendations in the Crime and Corruption Commission's report *Transparency and accountability in local government* released in December 2015. Along with other legislative measures, it constitutes the government's response to these recommendations. The report largely concluded that the governance around local government electoral donations was confusing and did not clearly outline how campaign funds and donations should be treated. The amendments in the

bill are robust and evidence based, drawing on expert and stakeholder views from an advisory panel set up to review the CCC report. It included representatives from the Electoral Commission of Queensland, the Local Government Association of Queensland and key state government agencies.

Accordingly, the bill includes amendments to the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 and the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 to provide for the implementation of a real-time online disclosure system for local government electoral donations consistent with the state system; clarify that incorporated associations cannot have a main purpose of receiving or holding electoral campaign funds which are intended to be applied for the benefit of a member of the association or a person nominated by a member, either directly or indirectly; ensure that a candidate's and a group's dedicated account can only be used during the disclosure period for amounts received and paid for the conduct of the election campaign, making it easier to trace campaign expenditure; require unspent campaign donations to be held for campaign purposes at a later point, transferred to a registered charity or, if the candidate was a member of a political party during the disclosure period, paid to the political party; set the candidate and third party election disclosure donation threshold at \$500 to align with a councillor's register of interest gift disclosures threshold; and clarify that the ECQ may continue to recover direct and indirect costs associated with the conduct of local government elections.

In relation to the CCC's concerns about the use of titles such as 'mayor' in the name of an association, amendments were recently made to the Associations Incorporation Regulation 1999. These will ensure that associations receiving or holding campaign funds will not be permitted to use official titles in the fund's name unless the association is a controlled entity subject to auditing by the Queensland Audit Office. Collectively, these changes will ensure that Queenslanders can have confidence in the accountability, transparency and integrity of the donation disclosure requirements for council elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker Stewart, as you know, on 1 December 2016 the Deputy Premier introduced the bill which was referred to the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee for consideration. On 7 March 2017, the committee tabled its report on the bill and made six recommendations, including that the bill be passed. The Deputy Premier has already tabled and outlined the government's response to the committee's report and the submissions in some detail. In short, we have accepted four of the committee's six recommendations, taking into account the views of the committee and stakeholders. We have explained our reasoning to the House in relation to the two recommendations the government is not supporting, and we will be providing further clarification about the two additional matters as requested by the committee.

I join with the Deputy Premier in thanking the committee and secretariat for their consideration of the bill. In particular, I mention the member for Mirani, Jim Pearce. I also thank all stakeholders for their valuable contribution and feedback on the bill. Like many people, I followed the recent CCC Operation Belcarra hearings with great interest. This has helped to clarify some of the practices associated with local council elections and their financial campaign activity. The bill currently before the House will address many of the concerns raised during the CCC's hearings. However, it may be that some new issues have arisen as a result of donations to candidates in these most recent local government elections, so we welcome any additional findings and recommendations that may come from the CCC and the ECQ. If further change is required in response to future recommendations, the government may consider this.

Queenslanders expect and deserve transparency, accountability and integrity from their candidates at every level of government. It has always been Labor that has been the party of electoral reforms in Queensland, going back to the pioneering Goss government. In 2017 it is the Palaszczuk government that has delivered Australia's first real-time electronic donation disclosure system. Through these significant reforms, we are taking another step in ensuring that Queensland has some of the most progressive, open and transparent political donation laws in the country. Again, I commend the Deputy Premier for her carriage of these important Labor reforms. As Minister for Local Government, I look forward to implementing them and moving forward. I commend the bill to the House.