




Speech By  
**Bruce Saunders**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS) AND OTHER  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL  
(IMPLEMENTING STAGE 1 OF BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (4.00 pm): I rise to speak on the bills before the House. I take this opportunity to congratulate the new mayor of the Fraser Coast, George Seymour. What a difference it is going to make to have a man of the quality and calibre of George Seymour as mayor of the Fraser Coast. The election result from two Saturdays ago was George Seymour, daylight, daylight and then the next candidate. The people of the Fraser Coast have voted to put the Fraser Coast back on the map. They have voted to make sure that we have seen the last of the disgraceful episode of the past two years. As I said, I congratulate George. Let us hope that, with all of that out of the road, we can proceed with a united council that puts first the residents and ratepayers of the Fraser Coast, not its own personal agendas.

I have been listening to the debate, which has covered donations and property developers. I have no problem with property developers. They are a part of the system. However, I do have a problem when they start influencing the decisions of councils. When we look at the matters of interest that are raised during council elections, it is eye-opening to see, for example, what property developers have donated to various mayors and councillors. It is time that we had a level playing field. Developments should be passed on their merit, rather than through the process of who the developers know.

The opposition will say that councillors can step aside and not vote on or talk about a development. Don't they think the councillors will have discussions in the tearoom or on the telephone? Don't they think they will have discussions down at the pub while having a beer? Don't they think those discussions go on? From the Fraser Coast experience, we know that bullying goes on in councils around this state. I can tell the House now that wafts are starting to head towards William Street from various councils where councillors are being bullied by mayors, CEOs and developers who talk to those mayors and CEOs. We have not yet heard the end of this story.

I commend the minister, who has done a marvellous job with this legislation and also with what happened on the Fraser Coast. I can speak with authority on this. Had these powers been in place when we started to have trouble on the Fraser Coast, it would not have taken so long for the mayor to be dismissed under the act. It could have been done quicker, which would have returned the confidence of business and of the ratepayers of the Fraser Coast. That in itself says to me that this legislation is a must. The minister has stood firm and he has stood tall, in typical Labor fashion, and he has backed this legislation through the House. On the Fraser Coast a lot of people are very grateful that the minister and member for Sandgate is standing up for ratepayers across Queensland.

The complaints process worried me, because with the Fraser Coast council we saw complaints sit on desks for months and months. We had councillors going through the mail of other councillors—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr McArdle): Order! Member for Maryborough, I understand that this may be in part sub judice, in regard to the former mayor. I caution you about the comments that you make in those circumstances.

**Mr SAUNDERS:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I have not mentioned the former mayor. I am talking about the conduct of councillors on the Fraser Coast, specifically from July last year when a councillor went through another councillor's mail, which was in a private tray. It took 12 months to get a decision through the tribunal about that councillor's behaviour. That was outrageous.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, you have raised the issue in relation to the former mayor of the Fraser Coast. I caution you to please be careful as it may well breach the sub judice rule if that is raised again.

**Mr SAUNDERS:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will take your guidance on that. When we see instances such as that, the voters lose faith in the process and they lose faith in their local council. We have to remember that councils are no longer just about roads, rates and rubbish. In my area, the council is the largest employer on the Fraser Coast. There is a lot of development happening, so the council has a lot of control over who gets what, where and when. That is why we need this legislation. We need powers to ensure that the ratepayers are not disadvantaged and that everything is done correctly. We need the ratepayers to have faith in their government.

Since being elected, I have been championing closer scrutiny of candidates for local government. We have heard those opposite say that a lot of their candidates come through the local government process. You can have a great bloke from the local football club, who sells tickets at the pub and so on, who is elected to council. As I said, in my region the council is the largest employer. Suddenly, you have a councillor—and we have experienced this with councillors on the Fraser Coast Regional Council—who thinks they are the god of the region. They pull up workers to tell them what to do and how to do it, but they do not go into governance. That is why we need legislation such as this.

I also believe that we need much more training for candidates for local government positions, to ensure that they understand their responsibilities as a councillor and that they understand the Local Government Act. That is where we do get into trouble with a lot of councils. We need legislation like this to make sure that councillors understand fully the Local Government Act, that they are compliant with it at all times and that they ensure that the ratepayers are looked after at all times. That is why I have been saying that we need better training, although the department is doing a great job. However, I will give the House an example.

Prior to the mayoral election just held, the department put on training nights for candidates and only two of the candidates turned up. That was very disappointing, because we had candidates running in the election who talked about adhering to the Local Government Act and the importance of understanding that act, yet when the department sent officers from Brisbane to run training nights for the mayoral candidates only two people turned up. We have to make sure that into the future councillors are well trained and that they understand the act and their responsibilities for setting policies, which the CEO and the executive of the council implement without interference from any councillor.

If councillors understood the act, we would not have to have legislation such as this. If they knew how to behave as councillors, we would not have to come into this place to debate this legislation. I commend the minister for this legislation, because through it he is cleaning up local government right around Queensland. We know that some people have been unhappy with local government in Queensland. Through legislation such as this, local government will improve immensely throughout the state. I commend the bill to the House.