




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (2.57 pm): I rise this afternoon to make a short contribution on the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill 2018. As a new member in this place I am again amazed at the incompetence of this government. The member for Bundamba, back when she was the police minister, was reporting allegations of corruption within the predominantly Labor Ipswich City Council. It is reported that one of the reasons she was sacked from the position as police minister was because she tried to expose and oust the former Ipswich Labor Party mayor.

The member for Bundamba has said that she raised and reported serious allegations of corruption to the Premier. She said she raised issues of money changing hands and suspicious trips all over Australia and internationally, but she was rebuffed—rebuffed because he was popular and he was also a member of the Australian Labor Party. Now, many years later, we are fast-tracking this urgent legislation to sack the council to eradicate the entrenched culture of corruption. This legislation would not be required and further time wasted in this House if the appropriate action was taken at the time before this conduct became systemic.

The CCC's report released last week into the culture and corruption risks in local government, written off the back of Operation Windage, makes for concerning reading. To date, 15 people have been charged on a total of 86 criminal offences resulting from this operation. The report outlined that the investigation identified significant governance failures and cultural issues that appear to have been occurring over many years and could not have occurred in an environment in which the values of transparency, accountability and good governance were paramount. These cultural issues appear to have been occurring for many years, the CCC report says—cultural and governance issues that they describe as significant and extremely concerning.

If the government took prompt and appropriate action when these allegations were first aired, maybe this culture would not have had time to become entrenched and this unprecedented legislation would not be required. Just a short time ago, during his contribution, the member for Logan posed the question: what would the public think if we did nothing and took no action? I say that we are in this mess because the Palaszczuk government took no action when these allegations were first aired.

The CCC found that one of the most serious failures of the culture and conduct was the lack of oversight and accountability for expenditure and public resources and the improper use of power and influence for personal benefit. When reading about the culture of the Ipswich City Council and the lack of transparency, accountability and good governance, I could not help but draw comparisons. A large section of the CCC report talks in detail about the use of mechanisms to avoid scrutiny, particularly the use of private email accounts.

Operation Windage found that councillors and senior executives were using private email accounts specifically to avoid RTI requests as a way to conceal unfavourable decisions or records of information from the public. The report also found the improper use of influence and power by senior members of the council. An example of improper use of power and influence for personal benefit was

when a councillor inappropriately took VIP tickets for his own use. I cannot help but draw a parallel with a report in a recent *Courier-Mail* article that around \$250,000-odd worth of government allocated Commonwealth Games tickets are still unexplained, as well as ongoing extravagant travel spends by this state government.

It was only in May this year that the government rushed through 40 pages of amendments without going through the proper committee process in an effort to resolve this issue. That gave the minister the power to dissolve the local government if the minister reasonably believed that it was in the public interest to do so. Two show-cause notices were issued and now this new legislation is being rushed through to curtail current Supreme Court action and override the recent amendments. As I understand it, this is unprecedented. Not only is this legislation effectively circumventing a matter currently before the Supreme Court but it also breaches almost every fundamental legal principle we hold dear in this great state—the presumption of innocence, the principles of natural justice, the right of judicial review and appeal—and it breaches the rights and liberties of individuals generally.

In the explanatory notes for this bill, the section outlining the breaches of fundamental legal principles is almost longer than the bill itself, but it does not explain or justify not affording those basic rights. Why is this government shielding itself from judicial review?

As recently noted by the Australian Law Reform Commission, access to the courts to challenge administrative action is an important common law right. The judicial review of administrative action is about setting the boundaries of government power. It is about ensuring government officials obey the law and act within their prescribed powers. In its submission, the Queensland Council of Civil Liberties stated—

If the government believes its decision justifiable, it should be prepared to have it subject to judicial review.

In its written and oral submissions to the committee, the Queensland Law Society raised serious concerns about the legislation and its timing, as has the LGAQ and a large number of other submitters to the committee.

The catalyst for this problem is the Labor Party. For years it turned a blind eye when its local state member for the area, the member for Bundamba, was demanding that this matter be investigated and resolved. What cost are we now paying for years of inaction to try to sweep this under the carpet? Not only is there a massive loss in public confidence; the Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs could give no estimate for the ongoing total cost of the administrator to be appointed to run the council until June 2020.

I understand that later this week we will be debating new business rules to guillotine debate to help the government progress its legislative agenda, but already this year how much time have we wasted in this House in an effort—

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member for Ninderry is straying from the debate on the matter that is before the House. He is seeking to debate a matter that might be before us later this week.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): The member has a point. Please come back to the terms of the long title of the bill.

Mr PURDIE: This year how much time have we already wasted trying to resolve this matter? This is a debacle that the government has overseen and ignored for years. Labor turned a blind eye to the corrupt conduct of its Labor mates and is now scrambling to make the problem disappear. The CCC reported that the culture of corruption was entrenched. Maybe if action had been taken sooner, we would not be in this situation. As clearly articulated by the CCC in its report, the systemic issues within the Ipswich City Council were from a lack of transparency, accountability and good governance. Some might argue that those are the same traits often exhibited by this state government.