




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (3.10 pm): Today is a very sad day for local government in Queensland. The government is taking an extraordinary step, which I do support, to deal with an extraordinary mess. It is fitting that it is a Labor government that has been forced to dissolve the Labor Ipswich City Council. I believe that if you make the mess then you should clean it up. This mess is 100 per cent owned by the Queensland Labor Party. Ipswich's rotten council—

Government members interjected.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): Member for Logan!

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Ipswich's rotten Labor council is stuffed full of Labor mates and has been for years. Last night we saw pictures of the Labor councillors in Ipswich in tears as they met for the last time. I am quite sure there are not too many ratepayers of Ipswich who are shedding tears to see the back of the Labor council.

Ms Boyd: Maybe you should have read some of the submissions.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to take that interjection. The Crime and Corruption Commission's report talks directly to the corruption of Labor's Ipswich City Council. I take that interjection from a Labor member in this House agreeing that the Labor Ipswich City Council have had to submit. The submissions into the Crime and Corruption Commission make for disastrous reading. I feel for the people of the Ipswich region who have been dragged through the mud by the Labor council for many years.

It is the people of Ipswich whom we in this House should feel sorry for. We have a member of this House who has been standing up for her community and bringing those concerns to the Premier, who is part of the same party and who has not been listened to because of the secrecy and cover-ups that have come into play because of this part-time parliament sitting Premier Palaszczuk.

Ipswich is a proud city and a close community. It has seen its reputation dragged through the mud by this incompetent, rotten council. They have seen two mayors—two Labor mayors—arrested and charged with corruption offences. They have seen a further 13 council officers, including two former chief executives and a chief operating officer, also charged. Ipswich has been through some tough times before, including the devastating floods in 2011, but nothing has ever hurt this proud city's name like this Labor-made scandal. To rub salt into the wound, the Palaszczuk Labor government will force Ipswich taxpayers to foot the full costs of the administrator being imposed upon them. Labor makes a mess, but it is the people who pay for the clean-up. It is the same old story.

What makes this story even more galling is the Palaszczuk Labor government's fingers in it. Unlike the Premier, when the revelations about the extent of misconduct and corruption were publicly revealed back in May, I immediately stood up and called for the council to be sacked. I called for the Palaszczuk government to act decisively, but unfortunately the government just dithered and bungled its response.

What the Palaszczuk government wants to forget is that it was warned time after time about claims of corruption in the Labor Ipswich City Council. They were warned both in parliament—in this House—and elsewhere. Serious questions were repeatedly raised about the integrity of the Labor politicians in Ipswich and time after time the questions were ignored and the doubts brushed aside—even when they came from within Labor’s own ranks. Protecting the reputation of the Queensland Labor Party takes precedence over protecting the public. Labor turned a blind eye to the mess in its own backyard. It was not the Labor mayors of Ipswich who were given the cold shoulder by Labor but instead the state Labor member of parliament who raised the alarm.

Labor’s Ipswich City Council was allowed to roll on undisturbed. Its leaders knew they had nothing to fear from the Palaszczuk government. They knew there would be no awkward questions from the Premier or her ministers. The show only came crashing down once Ipswich’s integrity issues were made public in a dramatic fashion.

Once again, the Palaszczuk Labor government was only compelled to act because of negative headlines. We saw that again today. Labor’s Ipswich connection did certainly come in handy one more time for the Palaszczuk government. Ipswich council’s reckless support for the commercial waste dumps was used to justify the imposition of a new waste tax on the whole of Queensland—not just Ipswich but the whole of Queensland. This tax will hit each and every Queensland household and business in their hip pocket. Labor made sure that Ipswich’s local crisis did not go to waste. Labor moved swiftly to take advantage of Ipswich’s waste problem and levy a new tax.

Their removal of council itself has been simply shambolic. Unfortunately, the minister has shown the same level of professional incompetence that he has demonstrated in his handling of rail fail and Eagle Farm. The minister announced the suspension of mayors under the new laws that were not actually in place at the time. The minister issued two failed show-cause notices to the Ipswich City Council, costing the ratepayers of Ipswich and the taxpayers of Queensland even more money.

This Labor government is now curtailing the Supreme Court to fix a mess that was meant to be fixed back in May with 40 pages of amendments. The dissolution of Labor’s Ipswich council has been a fiasco from start to finish and it sees us in this House debating this bill today. Even now the installation of an administrator is being bungled. It is unacceptable that the appointment of an advisory panel is being left entirely to the administrator. We may never be told who is advising the administrator behind the scenes. The public have a right to know, especially the Ipswich public.

The panel cannot be tainted by an association with the Labor Party. That is clear. It is clear from the people of Ipswich who are speaking to us. They do not want Labor’s fingers in this. They do not need Labor’s fingers in this. The panel cannot be tainted by an association with the Labor Party. Labor politicians have made this scandal and Labor politicians are the ones—except for the one on their side—who have completely ignored the scandal. We had one lone voice from the Labor Party speaking up and we had the opposition in the state parliament speaking up and standing up for the people of Ipswich.

Labor operatives cannot be allowed anywhere near the independent administration of the Ipswich City Council. We are trying to clean up the Ipswich City Council, not mess it up once again. Labor has a sorry record when it comes to local government. It changed the industrial relations laws for all Queensland councils without consultation, costing ratepayers tens of millions of dollars. Who in this chamber could ever, ever, ever forget Labor’s forced council amalgamations? It caused disruption across the state, particularly in regional areas.

Mr Perrett: I went through it.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will take that interjection. The member for Gympie did go through it when he was in the Gympie shire council. No-one can ever forget the pain caused to regional Queensland because of those forced, bungled amalgamations that caused disruption across the state. Today the anger caused by this heavy-handed approach still lingers within many of our communities. I also note that the Taroom shire council was divided up four ways—four ways—bungled by the Labor government.

Ms Simpson: The only shire in Queensland.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It was the only shire in Queensland that was divided that way. They could not even get their rot sorted out so they did not have to split up the important area of Taroom shire council four ways. It was an absolute disgrace.

Mr Krause: It’s about silencing voices.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take that interjection from the member for Scenic Rim. It is about silencing the voices. That is what they have done to the people of Ipswich. They have done it again to the people of Ipswich just like they did it to the member for Bundamba, who was trying to speak up for the community.

Mr Hinchliffe: Are you going to start talking about the precinct of Greater Brisbane being created in 1924 now?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have five more minutes on the clock and I think I should use it after that interjection. The Minister for Local Government is clearly out of touch if he wants to bring up 1924 when we are talking about the forced council amalgamations in 2008. Sadly, Labor's Ipswich scandal has cast a shadow on local government all across Queensland.

I emphasise that only a tiny fraction of our hundreds of mayors and councillors have been accused of any wrongdoing. I would like to congratulate and thank those hardworking councillors and mayors across this great state who have not been accused of any wrongdoing but who have been dragged through the mud because of the Labor Ipswich City Council. I value the incredible work that councils do in serving their communities. Most elected officials care passionately about their communities and have been as appalled by recent events as anyone else.

The LNP has a record of working in partnership with councils and the LGAQ, and that will continue. It will take a long time to restore the confidence of Queenslanders in local government after the scandal that Labor has inflicted on the City of Ipswich. I promise them that the LNP will do all we can to ensure transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of our local councils.