




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.46 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill and give my support to this bill. The matters that have given rise to this bill are extraordinarily serious and have had the effect of greatly undermining public confidence in the Ipswich City Council. The CCC's investigation has led to 15 people being charged with 86 criminal offences, and seven of the 15 people charged have been either current or former council staff members or councillors.

I commend the Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk, and the Minister for Local Government, Stirling Hinchliffe, for making the decision to introduce this bill proposing to dissolve the Ipswich City Council and appoint an interim administrator. I thank the Economic and Governance Committee for its thorough and thoughtful consideration of the draft bill. It was not a decision that was made lightly, as we heard earlier; it is not about punishing individuals, it is about addressing a systemic failure.

The bill's objective is to restore community confidence in local government after the turmoil Ipswich has endured over the last several months with revelations made public by the CCC investigation. I believe that it is the right decision to take so that stability, certainty and good governance can be restored for the benefit of our economy, Ipswich ratepayers and business owners. The interim administrator will have the responsibilities and powers of the council and the mayor, and they will be assisted by the advisory panel. The interim administrator will have the responsibility of resolving concerns relating to the Ipswich City Council, as well as providing certainty and good governance to the Ipswich community.

Over the past several months, I have been approached by Ipswich ratepayers and business owners who have told me that they have lost faith, trust and confidence in the Ipswich City Council. Ipswich cannot keep going like it is with the ongoing state of crisis it constantly finds itself in, lurching from one scandal to the next. The general mood in Ipswich is one of confusion, frustration and sometimes anger. The volatility and turmoil has caused a great deal of divisiveness in the community and the debate has been emotionally charged. I want to acknowledge that there are some familiar faces from the Ipswich community here in the gallery watching, which is an indication of the importance of this bill.

Failures of governance in the Ipswich City Council have caused the Ipswich CBD redevelopment to virtually come to a standstill, and the uncertainty of when this project will be finished has negatively impacted local CBD businesses resulting in some of those businesses being forced to close. It would be an injustice to the Ipswich people to keep delaying a decision on dismissing the council or for the council to delay dismissal by going to the Supreme Court. It would also be an injustice to the people of Ipswich to not address the multitude of governance shortcomings uncovered by the CCC.

The recently released CCC report found that the Ipswich City Council had a firmly embedded culture riddled with corruption risks resulting from a number of factors—namely, a lack of oversight and accountability for expenditure on public resources; the use of mechanisms such as private email

accounts to avoid scrutiny of actions and requests for information under the Right to Information Act 2009; inappropriate relationships between the council and the private sector, in particular, property developers and contractors; and improper use of power and influence for personal benefit.

I support this bill and the dissolution of the Ipswich City Council because, in the words of Alan MacSporran QC at the public hearing held by the Economics and Governance Committee in Ipswich, 'there has been a collapse of public confidence in that council' and 'they stand or fall, as they must, under the Local Government Act and the Constitution of Queensland as the body, the entity, collectively responsible for the good governance of that community'.

The Ipswich local government area, as I say frequently in this House, has been identified as the fastest growing in Queensland. The Ipswich community wants to be confident that their councillors and mayor will serve in the community's best interests, not their own self-interest. A root-and-branch review of the entire council is necessary in this respect and is firmly in the public interest. Our elected local councillors are collectively accountable to the Ipswich community for ensuring good governance, and that includes upholding transparent and effective processes, making decisions that are in the public interest, the appropriate management of assets and infrastructure, the effective delivery of services, and abiding by principles of ethical and legal behaviour. They are also collectively accountable for calling out unethical and illegal behaviour when they see it.

On 3 May this year the Minister for Local Government asked the Ipswich City Council to show cause as to why they should not be dismissed. From that moment I have been contacted by a number of people—members of the community, business owners and also council staff. I was surprised and saddened to learn from these staff members that not only had a culture of questionable ethical behaviour developed in council but also bullying by one or two of the longer serving councillors, and a distinct culture of fear pervaded as a result. This is unacceptable. I want to reassure council staff that those days are behind them and that their work is appreciated and supported by this government. I want to make very clear that these bullying allegations were directed at only one or two councillors.

I want to extend my sympathy and empathy to some of the councillors. As I said earlier, this is not about punishing individuals even though it may feel that way. It is about righting a systemic wrong. I believe that the people of Ipswich are fighters and will bounce back from this upheaval. However, it is not fair to keep the City of Ipswich in a prolonged state of crisis. We cannot drag this out any longer. The people of Ipswich want a council that they can trust and one that is untarnished by the stain of corruption.

If this bill is passed, the Ipswich City Council will be dissolved and an interim administrator will be appointed until the next quadrennial elections held in 2020, as we have heard from the minister. I commend the minister for introducing legislation that will provide certainty to the Ipswich community. I commend the bill to the House.