




Speech By  
**Kim Richards**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

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

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (4.27 pm): Today is a really sad day. I think it is fair to say that we have seen some of the darkest days in local government in recent times. The CCC validates that through the work that it has done, as has the Integrity Commissioner. Today, we have in front of us an extraordinary bill to pass through this House. It is an unfortunate but necessary bill that has arisen because the underpinning principle and purpose of the Local Government Act has been broken. The Local Government Act states clearly—

A local government is an elected body that is responsible for the good rule and local government of a part of Queensland.

It is responsible as a collective to deliver for its community. During the inquiry process, we heard about the systemic corruption rife within the council and the existence of a longstanding collective culture of fear and cover-up. In its submission to the committee, the CCC referred to 'significant and extremely concerning governance failures and cultural issues within the council', including an improper use of power and influence for personal benefit; a lack of oversight and accountability for expenditure and public resources; inappropriate relationships between the council and the private sector—in particular, property developers and contractors; the use of mechanisms that allowed avoidance of scrutiny of actions and decision-making; an inability or unwillingness of council officers to stand up to inappropriate instructions or behaviour from the former mayor; failures to report suspicions of corruption, including by successive chief executive officers; instructions to council officers to breach policy and procedures and falsify records; and abusive attitudes towards council officers.

Today, I am really disappointed by the contributions made by those opposite. They were largely flights of fancy. I want to reflect particularly on the contribution of the member for Broadwater. Let me be very clear: the mess that the Labor Party is here today cleaning up is a mess that was exacerbated by the LNP—that is right, those on other side of the House. They have very short memories.

This is a dirty mess created by the LNP and the then member for Mundingburra, the LNP's local government minister. He was the architect, he was the designer, of changes to legislation that has enabled this type of integrity and transparency issue to occur within the governance frameworks of council—the train wreck that allowed maladministration, as the member for Maroochydore put it. I would like to table two media releases by the then local government minister, the member for Broadwater.

*Tabled paper:* Media release, dated 6 September 2012, by the former minister for local government, community recovery and resilience, Mr David Crisafulli MP, titled 'Mayors unite to push for Local Government Act changes' [\[1151\]](#).

*Tabled paper:* Media release, dated 14 November 2012, by the former minister for local government, community recovery and resilience, Mr David Crisafulli MP, titled 'Ipswich Mayor backs Council reform' [\[1152\]](#).

One media release is dated 14 November 2012 and is titled 'Ipswich mayor backs council reform'. It goes on to say—

The biggest reform of Local Government in a generation will become law after changes to the Act were passed in Parliament late last night, with the support of Ipswich City Council Mayor Paul Pisasale.

Local Government Minister David Crisafulli said amendments to the Local Government and City of Brisbane Acts will change the way councils do business.

'I've met with Queensland's 73 Councils, and they wanted change,' Mr Crisafulli said.

'The Mayors and councillors are united on this, regardless of political leanings, the size of their Council, or their location.

If we want to change the economy, we need to change the things that were holding Queensland back.'

Mayor Pisasale thanked the Minister for the changes.

'Under the old legislation, I couldn't ask my CEO to do something without keeping a record of the directive. How much red tape is that? Mayor Pisasale said.

Can you believe that, member for Nanango and member for Broadwater? 'How much red tape is that?' This red tape is the checks and balances. It is what represents transparency in the governance and framework of our local councils. When the member for Glass House in his contribution spoke of festering, let us again be clear: this change in legislation was the moment where the LNP opened the wound wide allowing the festering rot to set in.

During the inquiry process we went out to Ipswich to hear directly from councillors who will be impacted by this bill. Both Councillor Tully and Councillor Bromage raised concerns with changes made to section 170 of the Local Government Act in 2012 which amended the provision that allows mayors to give a direction to the CEO or senior executive employees so that there was no requirement for the request to be recorded—an apparent move to reduce red tape and to empower local government bodies. Councillor Tully advised—

Every councillor, including the mayor, previously was prevented from directing staff and it was an offence for them to give such direction. Section 170 was amended in 2012 to provide that the mayor may give a direction to the chief executive officer or senior executive employees.

Councillor Tully went on to say—

The legislation says that we do not get involved in day-to-day operational issues. There are good reasons for that. Councillors under the act set the policy direction of the council.

Councillor Bromage went on to advise—

As you know, the ability to record that decision for everyone to see is not in the act anymore whereas it previously was. We feel that there are a lot of decisions that are made outside of council's and councillors' knowledge as well.

...

I think most of those issues that you have raised there are staff matters, where the direction is actually set by the CEO for the staff to follow. The majority of those issues that you raised about staff not following procedure, the payments and things like that are not a councillor's role.

Further to this, it was argued by some submitters that the behaviours of those charged were only uncovered due to the CCC being able to investigate using its investigative powers and therefore councillors could not be expected to have known about the behaviour of other councillors or council staff without similar powers.

When the member for Broadwater talks about rotten apples and wonders how they came to be in existence in our council, he need look no further than the very legislation that he brought into this House as the then LNP minister for local government. The member for Nanango should look no further than over her shoulder to find the creator of this mess—in fact, she should probably keep looking closely over her shoulder.

In concluding, ultimately it is as the Chair of the Crime and Corruption Commission, Mr Alan MacSporran QC, summed up at the public hearing supporting the dissolution of the Ipswich City Council—

There has been a collapse of public confidence in that council and those councillors. That is what is being addressed here. It is not about them individually being guilty of misconduct or otherwise. It is about systemic failures collectively of good governance, and a lack of transparency and accountability across-the-board. 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. There has been a failure of that.

Evidently there is a problem with the culture and organisation of Ipswich City Council that only a fresh set of eyes from an administrator can get to the root causes of and that will charter a new course that restores integrity and accountability within the framework of council and its operations. It is incumbent on this House to ensure that we restore faith in the function of council for the people of Ipswich—they deserve that much—that we provide the mechanism that ensures good rule is restored and adherence is made to the principles and operations of local government that the community of Ipswich expects. I commend this bill to the House.