




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION (VALIDATION OF RATES AND CHARGES) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (12.16 pm): I rise to make a short contribution on the Local Government Legislation (Validation of Rates and Charges) Amendment Bill 2018. I would also like to commend the committee for the excellent work they have done on this bill, and of course it is important.

**Mr Stevens:** Hear, hear!

**Mr MILLAR:** I take that interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach, who is a former mayor of a significant region when it comes to local councils. It is also an opportunity for us in this place to recognise the important role that councils play in our democracy to ensure that our regions are cared for. As the member for Gregory, I would say that I have the best councils in the state with the Central Highlands Regional Council and the RAPAD councils, which include Winton, Longreach, Barcoo, Blackall, Barcaldine, Diamantina and Boulia.

It is extremely important that we validate rates and charges. One of the big issues we have with councils in outback areas is that there is not a huge rate base. There is a very small rate base, and I am sure that former councillors in this chamber would recognise that, year on and year off, councils are being asked to do more and more all the time. Councils are no longer just roads, rates and rubbish. Where I come from in the seat of Gregory, councils play a significant role in economic development. With the outback and the drought we have had over the last five to seven years, councils have played a significant role in providing support services—whether it be mental health support or economic support—to try to help our regions and communities get through the drought.

In relation to this bill, validating rates and charges is extremely important and financial surety is paramount for every council. Certainly in regional and western areas councils do not have the capacity to put on a lot of staff. The mayor, CEO, councillors and staff all work very closely together to provide an excellent service, and I think what we are doing here today is extremely important to make sure that we give them the surety they need. We all value and support the role of councils in providing essential services to communities across the state. Furthermore, we are all committed to working in partnership with councils and the LGAQ to implement policies that ensure we can see these services continue for ratepayers. We must recognise and provide financial surety to local governments to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities. It is essential to meet statutory requirements, and that is why we need the assistance of the minister and his department to make sure they have that surety and advice.

We do have a department of local government, and they need to play a significant role in making sure that councils right across Queensland have the right information. As was mentioned previously, we are going to have a ratings master class later this year. I am sure that will be very exciting and it could make a great TV program. We also have a department that needs to play its role. They did a desktop audit and found that approximately 20 councils are affected by this.

Is the minister confident that all councils' rates and charges have been validated? What role is the minister's department playing to ensure this happens from today? What is the department doing to ensure this is happening today? Of course, mayors, councillors and CEOs are responsible for the budget, but we need to give them support and guidance. We must also remind ourselves that councils play a significant role in providing services right across the state. As I said, it is not just roads, rates and rubbish anymore; it is economic development, mental health, wellbeing, drought assistance and providing a lot of infrastructure for the community. They need our support and they certainly have it.

Finally, I congratulate the Central Highlands Regional Council. As an example that it does more than just roads, rates and rubbish, the Central Highlands Regional Council has just released its economic master plan. It is a significant document and is an audit of the Central Highlands Regional Council's capability to not only provide services for local people in the town but also try to attract agricultural investment. One example relates to the proposal for an inland port at Yamala and what it is trying to do with logistics in terms of moving grain, cotton and other produce, hopefully horticulture, to our ports. Mayor Kerry Hayes, CEO Scott Mason, the councillors and the staff of Central Highlands Regional Council, along with the Central Highlands Development Corporation, have done a fantastic job. We need to ensure we support them. I certainly support this bill.