




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.00 pm): We are having this debate today to put an end to the ongoing scandal, corruption and maladministration unfolding at Labor's Ipswich City Council. As a member of the opposition, I will not be opposing this bill and I will be supporting the member for Warrego and the shadow minister's amendments because the people of Ipswich need a clean slate. They need to be able to trust the administration and trust their council once again. This is sad enough, but the bungling way the Labor government have tried to deal with the Ipswich issue, which has been festering—this bill is the minister's third attempt—has meant that this has cast a dark cloud over all local governments across this state.

I have 10 local government areas in the electorate of Gregory. These councils start one hour's drive from the coast at Duaringa to cover right across the Simpson Desert and the Channel Country on the Northern Territory border. There are 10 bodies of mayors and councillors serving over 40 of Queensland's towns. Without these fine men and women—and this is important—it would be near impossible to provide on-the-ground administration that is responsive to people's day-to-day lives in Western Queensland.

We have fantastic councillors and mayors in Queensland. Councillors, mayors, CEOs and people who work for councils in Western Queensland do it as a service, not as a career. It is hard enough to try to find people to stand for council and to stand for mayor in these vast council areas across the state. Without these fine men and women, we would not have the councils we have today. Without their efforts on behalf of their constituents and without the knowledge they provide to state and federal governments, it would be far more difficult, inefficient and expensive to try to administer this huge expanse of regional Queensland.

To these fine people, local government is a community service, not a career. I can vouch for the hours each and every one of them devote to it. All of them see service in local government as a privilege and they are honoured to serve their shires. The reason I am saying this is that there are good people out there and people who do it for the right reasons. I suspect that it is an attitude that has been lost by a small number of people in a south-east local government called the Ipswich City Council—and I say a small number of people in that council.

Instead of these self-interested candidates, what they need is people who actually love their communities, take pride in their communities and are motivated by a spirit of public service in their own communities. Most councillors in regional Queensland are long-term residents who know that the prosperity, amenity and infrastructure they enjoy today is a result of the hard work of their predecessors. They come to local government wanting to maintain and improve upon this legacy to benefit those who come after them.

On this side of the House we have some fine examples of local councillors such as the member for Burdekin and the member for Gympie. The member for Lockyer, Jim McDonald, has played a significant role in his own shire and, as a police officer and as a local councillor, made sure that his

community was safe. I pay tribute to the dedicated efforts and sheer hard work and time invested by the many fine men and women serving local government across my seat of Gregory. This is what local government is supposed to be.

In sad contrast, we are having to deal with this legislation today because there is a former mayor and a suspended mayor from the Ipswich City Council and former council staff and council contractors who are facing 86 charges brought by the Crime and Corruption Commission. We are having to deal with this legislation today because the ratepayers of the Ipswich City Council have watched over many, many months these scandals unfold on the nightly news and on the front page of their newspapers. These charges have not been the result of a voluntary confession or remorse. They have only come about because of the work by the Crime and Corruption Commission and people continuing to put their story forward and not giving up.

How, as an Ipswich City Council resident, do you watch this drawn-out effort and not wonder where the end is? How do you not wonder whether there are matters that will never be uncovered? How do you continue to interact with your council with any confidence at all? To make matters worse, we have a state Labor government that at first professed ignorance to these issues and then has proceeded to handle the problem in a way that beggars belief in its bungling. First, the government announced the suspension of four mayors and a councillor under new laws that did not exist at the time of the announcement. Having issued not one but two show cause notices to the Ipswich City Council, the Labor government is now curtailing the Supreme Court with a piece of legislation which is offensive to just about every fundamental legislative principle in the book and ignores the recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry. With this legislation, the Labor government abrogates individual rights and liberties, breaches the presumption of innocence and excludes judicial review and appeal.

Constituents in my local area have even asked me, 'Why does the minister need a new bill? Hasn't the state government always had the ability to remove a council and put an administrator in charge?' Well, yes. The former Johnstone shire council is an example. What is different that we need a new bill? Could it be that the bill is intended to make the Supreme Court action, launched by the Ipswich City Council, suddenly pointless and irrelevant?

Even having drawn these sad conclusions, it is sad to see what has happened to local government. I think everybody here feels for the people of Ipswich, the residents of Ipswich. We only have to see the member for Ipswich West and the emotion that he has. He has obviously felt it on a day-by-day basis. It has been incredibly hard on the people of Ipswich, the residents. We only wish we can see a speedy recovery to regaining their confidence in council. It will take time.

The Labor Party do have form on councils. We only have to look at the amalgamation of councils under the Beattie and Bligh era.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr MILLAR: If the member for Logan would sit down and listen for once, he might learn something.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order, members! Let's stick to the long title of the bill.

Mr MILLAR: I sit in a unique position as the member for Gregory. I have both amalgamated and non-amalgamated councils in my electorate. As I move around the electorate of Gregory, I can report that there is still a strong minority of discontent where councils were forced to amalgamate.

Mr Bleijie: Isisford.

Mr MILLAR: I take that interjection from the shadow Attorney-General, who joined me in Western Queensland over the last couple of days. We only have to go to Isisford, which is on the Barcoo. The Isisford shire council was once a proud council. There is a very big sign up there which says they will never forgive the Beattie-Bligh ALP government for forcing amalgamation. They will never forgive them. With that, I will wrap up. We need to get this cleaned up in Ipswich for the people of Ipswich.