




Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.20 pm): I rise to speak on the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill. I begin by recognising once again that the Greens condemn corruption in all its forms. We have campaigned for a long time to crack down on all types of corruption, including unlawful corruption and legalised corruption through corporate donations. As others have said, it is a grim set of circumstances that bring us here today. I do ultimately support the bill. The Greens strongly supported the ban on developer donations. We had been pushing for that ban for years before it came into place. We are very glad that Labor has finally listened.

During the 2017 election campaign we focused on a really strong initiative against corruption. We proposed a number of necessary measures like the ban on corporate donations and the cap on other political donations, which I have started to deal with through private member's legislation. We need to stop cash-for-access meetings with government ministers. We need to give our corruption watchdog, the CCC, real powers to launch independent investigations, hold more public hearings and jam the revolving door between politics and big business.

Sacking the Ipswich City Council is truly a grave step, but I acknowledge the government has said that is their proposal and I support them in that. The people of Ipswich do deserve a fresh start. We have heard plenty so far today about the circumstances: 15 people facing over 80 charges. It clearly is a grave matter. It is clear that the culture of the organisation of council needs to change. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of all of those ordinary people in Ipswich who have worked to draw attention to the allegations of corruption and misconduct over the years. They have often had to do so in the face of indifference from local and state governments. They also had to deal with a system that is ill-equipped to deal with corruption. At the same time, it is deeply disappointing that Labor has not been able to manage this dismissal under existing processes.

We have concerns that there are very limited oversight and transparency mechanisms in this bill in relation to the interim administrator and acting interim administrator, and the amendments put forward by the shadow minister really do not do anything to meaningfully address this. In fact, they look more like a reason to debate inserting the name of the Labor Party into the title of the bill. All appointments will be made without any input from the parliament or the people of Ipswich. The Governor in Council and the minister hold all the cards, and short of passing this legislation—which will clearly be done before the day's end—the parliament has no further role to play. Despite apparently dropping information to the *Courier-Mail* this morning, the minister still has not let us in on who he intends to appoint. Ipswich residents will be without a democratically elected council for about 18 months. I do welcome the news that divisional offices will stay open, but there are real concerns with further centralising power in the hands of an unelected administrator.

The residents of Ipswich are facing some serious issues which will no doubt be dealt with or progressed significantly by the administrator over the next 18 months. There is the super dump at New Chum proposed by BMI and a number of other waste industry projects, including the expansion at the

Cleanaway landfill, and the proposed incinerator that has been mooted under the guise of waste to energy. A lot of locals have contacted me and our Greens colleagues in Ipswich with genuine concerns about runaway development there. The administrator cannot be held to account for decisions that Ipswich locals disagree with. This unelected official will wield all the powers that an elected body is supposed to exercise. Despite the atrocious administration they have been subjected to in recent years, the people of Ipswich are being asked to trust the government as far as appointing the administrator and advisory committee. They are being asked to simply trust the administrator and the advisory committee to make decisions on important issues which will affect the entire community.

Ultimately, across all local governments in Queensland we need to move towards decentralising power and giving ordinary residents more control over their neighbourhoods. We can make those changes with any number of bold ideas such as participatory budgeting for local government expenditure, giving city residents a vote on major amendments to their city or neighbourhood plans, or novel approaches like trialling citizen juries for big decisions on major projects and planning matters. Decentralisation and genuine engagement with the community are the kinds of steps that we need to take if we are going to turn around the growing cynicism we are seeing throughout the community with all levels of government.