




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.14 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill 2018. This is a very, very sad and disappointing day for this parliament: for the government in dealing with this matter and putting this legislation into the history of this parliament and for the LNP opposition in agreeing with the government on this bill to deal with a very unfortunate situation that has occurred in local government in Queensland.

There may be some who are unaware that I was in local government. If that is the case, I am about to edify them on that. Once upon a time in the fairyland of local government, back in 1994, there was a council called Albert shire council. In the triennium election of March 1994 there was a very popular mayor elected to that council with a vast majority at that poll. Within 12 months that mayor was sacked by the local government minister, Mr Terry Mackenroth. I am a sacked councillor here in this parliament today. The reasons given back in those days were 'for the betterment of local government'. We had just had a local government triennium election and before the year had passed the local government minister had decided to immediately sack three lots of councils across Queensland: Mulgrave, Cairns; Albert shire, Gold Coast; and, believe it or not, Moreton and Ipswich.

As a result of the following election in March 1995, in what they called the doughnut rings around the city, the Albert shire mayor was elected to the Gold Coast as Gold Coast mayor; the Mulgrave mayor, councillor Tom Pyne, was elected to be mayor of Cairns city; and a good mayor of Moreton shire, councillor John Nugent, was elected as mayor of Ipswich city when it was acting honestly, professionally and in the right perspectives of local government as we all like to see it throughout this state. It went downhill after that period. Ipswich City Council Mayor Nugent was lucky enough to get five years of service as per the legislation that was originally introduced to sack all those mayors at the time. I was unfortunate enough to undergo another sacking by an LNP Premier in another 12 months. I have been sacked by a lot of people. I am here today to prove that you can just keep coming back.

Mr Boothman: Bring back Ray!

Mr STEVENS: I love that chant! I am back! Knock me down and I keep springing back up, just like the sideshow alley game Whack-a-mole.

I speak with a great deal of experience and I have a great deal of respect for local government. It is probably the most important level of government for our communities, as it is the level of government that is closest to the people. I see Jimmy Madden, who is from the Ipswich area, nodding. Communities deal with their local council members a lot more than they do their state government members, and we would not have a clue about the federal members because we never see them. They are like dodo birds.

It is a very sad day when the minister has to bring into this House legislation to sack the Ipswich City Council. From our perspective, it is even sadder that, basically, the opposition has to support the government in that. These events unfolded through a Crime and Corruption investigation that was instigated by the sniffer dog who is well known to us all and who did a great job of chasing down

corruption in the Ipswich City Council, as was reported on the television. We thank that sniffer dog for its wonderful work. That started the ball rolling on a matter that had been brought to the attention of this House over many years by the member for Bundamba. Unfortunately, the matters that the member for Bundamba repeatedly brought to this House were left unprosecuted.

This morning we were told by the Premier that the member for Bundamba was asked to take her allegations to the CCC, which she did. I was a member of the committee that held hearings with the CCC. The chairman of the CCC explained to us that it was very difficult to launch an investigation to respond to hearsay allegations. As the shadow minister pointed out earlier today, it was well known to the member for Bundamba in particular, as well as to other members in local government, that something was rotten not in Denmark but in Ipswich. Unfortunately, it has taken the sniffer dog to bring this legislation to a head for the betterment of the people of Ipswich city.

If we had continued with the same regime of council leaders in Ipswich, there is no doubt that we would have ended up with the same outcome. There is a fairly famous saying, which is also fairly true, and we see evidence of it from the state Labor government today, that absolute power corrupts absolutely. As I understand it, the mayor of the Ipswich City Council was one of the most popular mayors in Australia. That moniker gave him a fair bit of absolute power in the Ipswich city region, leading to the situation where the CCC has supported the government in relation to the actions that it is taking here today. That brings a bad smell to all local governments, even those that should have no bad smell associated with them.

I feel sorry for those Ipswich city councillors who are absolutely clean in this matter. I am not sure who they are, because there are ongoing investigations and others have not been identified at this point in time. However, the reality is that there were some squeaky clean councillors in that council. One of the Ipswich councillors once sat in this House. I think we all had a high regard for ex-councillor Wayne Wendt. I know Wayne personally. I believe that good people have been affected by some bad people who have brought about this situation. I am aware that ex-councillor Tully was a councillor for many years and was well and truly associated with the Labor Party, as I recall. On the Gold Coast we had some issues with nightclubs and ex-councillor Tully, and I am stretching my memory back a fair way. Ex-councillor Tully is another person who will probably see the end of his career as a result of the legislation that is before us today. However, it is in the interests of local government to clear out the deadwood and, in this particular region, a lot of deadwood has been identified.

This announcement is a real shame for local government. There are 77 local governments in Queensland and a couple of them have been named. Whenever an inquiry is announced, people say, 'The Gold Coast city has to be corrupt. It has to be a sunny place for shady people, so we'll have an inquiry down there.' As I understand it, the CCC has announced that it is looking into matters at the Gold Coast City Council. That will be the third inquiry. I have been involved in a couple of inquiries as a witness. In my view, this will be another witch-hunt for the Gold Coast City Council. It is not just the Labor dominated Ipswich City Council that is rotten to the core; we will be looking for other areas to match it.

I know from my contacts at the Gold Coast City Council, and it amazes me, that at this point in time there has been little or no investigation or questioning of members. While the secret service of the CCC may well be listening in and doing all the things that they do, one would expect that also questions would be asked and interviews would be held to further the investigation. It has been a good six months at least, and possibly more, since the inquiry was first announced. There is nothing to be gained from pointing the figure at different local governments without getting on with the job of investigating and either clearing names or bringing prosecutions. We do not want mud hanging around local government, because it is a very important and valuable part of the governance of our communities. At the moment, there are all these shady curtains hanging over local government not only on the Gold Coast but also in the north.

If the CCC has something to prove, do or charge, I urge it to release that information. It has stated that it is conducting an investigation, so if there are matters that bring the council into disrepute then the CCC needs to make them public. We need to know why it is investigating the Gold Coast City Council, rather than being told, 'Yes, we're going to investigate the council because the Gold Coast has the moniker of a shady place,' which is a load of rubbish. The reality is that, as I go around my community, people are already saying, 'The council is corrupt,' but that may not be the case. In fact, I am sure it is not the case. I will hang my hat up here at this point in time, because I am sure it is not the case. If I am proved wrong, I would be happy to jump up in the House and say so. However, if any matters of corruption are found on the Gold Coast, I can tell the House that it would be absolute kindergarten stuff compared to what has gone on in the Labor dominated Ipswich City Council.

Unfortunately, as the member for Bundamba has correctly said, this matter should have been addressed a long time ago. Let us not forget that Ipswich had a Labor dominated council or all of the 'property developer donations' that came to the 'Labor Party' over those years. Why would we have investigated a Labor dominated council that was so successful in development? The Ipswich City Council had a wonderful thriving period of development while Jim was a councillor.

Mr Madden: I was on the Somerset council.

Mr STEVENS: I am sorry; it is just up the road. It is in the same area. I retract that and I apologise to the member who was with the Somerset council. The reality is that there were plenty of developer donations flowing into the Ipswich region. Unfortunately, because we did not want to ruin the little land bank of money that for many years we had out at Ipswich, we have reached a point where now there is a general slur over local government in Queensland. We will be supporting this legislation to address the concerns of the Ipswich community. However, I feel very sorry and ashamed for local government. I hope that we can remove this cancerous activity in the Ipswich City Council—and I hear that Jude Munro might be sent along to fix the problem, which would be a great move and I make that recommendation to the minister—so that local government can get back to doing what it does best.