



Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 1 November 2018

CRIME AND CORRUPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (4.53 pm): I rise to speak on this latest iteration of the Crime and Corruption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which will widen powers for the latest version, for want of a better word, of the CCC to deal with corruption in Queensland.

I have basically seen the birth of the CCC. There was a young backbencher at the time called Peter Beattie running the EARC community consultations. I went to the Albert Waterways Community Centre, the library building in the Albert shire, to listen to this young backbencher promise the world in terms of ruling out corruption et cetera by the establishment of a group. We have seen many changes—it was the CJC, the CMC and of late the CCC. Basically it is the Queensland watchdog for corruption. I support a watchdog for corruption in Queensland 100 per cent.

Some of the people who have been identified—admittedly some of them through good luck—have been dealt with by the CCC. Hopefully that has lifted the standard of politicians in this state. The few bad apples that are in any profession or any business or any following such as politics should be very afraid of the CCC. On this side of the House, we have always supported and will do everything we can to support the reasonable powers of the CCC to bring those perpetrators to appropriate justice, as we have seen on several occasions.

Having said that, we have to temper that keenness to drive the CCC with the fact that there has to be fairness and justice delivered in the CCC's ability and capacity to carry out their work and not for them to be given absolute power because absolute power corrupts in itself. In expanding their powers in terms of expanding the definition of 'corrupt conduct', we have to be very careful that those powers are not beyond what is fair and reasonable and that they provide reasonable justice.

In all of those iterations—the CJC, the CMC and the CCC—I have starred in certain investigations. Some members might remember one lady who lived down Currumbin way—a lady called Merri Rose, who was a Labor member. She complained about the council zoning at the corner of her street. She later moved to the corner of Boggo Road! The CJC, as it was then, appropriately kicked the complaint about the then mayor of the Albert shire out the door. It is very important that those frivolous and vexatious complaints cannot be masked by the wideranging capacity of people for silly, imagined or political reasons to make complaints to the CCC.

Again, I starred at the CMC—I think it was Mr Birmingham—as the star witness in the Gold Coast City Council investigation. I was not a star witness; I was a minor one—I am playing up my role here. They moved me out very quickly and said that I had nothing to offer and to go home. The reality was that that particular Gold Coast City Council inquiry was predicated on a 78-page dirt file, or dossier, by—and I will say it—a councillor who was a bit of a dropkick, to be honest, if that is not unparliamentary. It is unparliamentary?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Member for Mermaid Beach, I ask you to withdraw that comment.

Mr STEVENS: I withdraw. An unsavoury person—how is that Mr Deputy Clerk? This unsavoury person called Councillor Peter Young dropped this 78-page dirt file which caused a lot of people to go through a big inquiry. I was chief of staff to the mayor Ron Clarke back then. The CMC themselves spent millions on it—somewhere between \$3 million and \$5 million. You never find out the real cost of it because it is all secret squirrel business. All of those members who were called up—I was only a witness; I was not in the box as it were—had to spend literally hundreds of thousands of dollars on the lawyers to defend themselves against rubbish allegations. The CMC, I think it was back then, dropped that dirt file in the bucket and did not use it one iota. We had a multimillion dollar CMC investigation for no result, no outcome—just some minor taps on the wrist for a couple of lawyers and councillors. Nothing really came out of that witch-hunt, if you like, by the CMC in those days.

We have to be very mindful in expanding these powers that we do not see a repeat of what I believe are political investigations for no worth. I have a senior lawyer on the Gold Coast in terms of other matters that the CCC—I have to be very careful, Madam Deputy Speaker—is reviewing at this point in time, and the plea bargain offer to a person of interest to the CCC was an embarrassing outcome for the CCC. It might have been a good political outcome, but I am aware that they used that in a very unsavoury manner. Those sorts of powers have to be very carefully monitored.

Do not forget that we have had our corruption watchdog for over 25 years or so. In today's dollars it is about \$65 million a year, but if you multiply that over the 25 years that it has been in operation we have spent \$1.5 billion on our corruption watchdog. Now that is a lot of money. Yes, we have had a result—an accidental result, particularly with Mr Nuttall, which was very famous, and they picked it up from other matters rather than the issue itself. Those sorts of things are very important and bringing those bad apples to justice is a great thing. We all support that 100 per cent. However, we have to be very careful in terms of widening these powers. I note that the Queensland Law Society had concerns about this bill in relation to some of the matters which may now be included as corrupt conduct such as collusive tendering; fraud in relation to applications for a licence permit or authority; dishonestly obtaining a benefit from the payment or application of public funds or disposition of state assets; evading a state tax, levy or duty; or fraudulently obtaining or retaining a government appointment.

Without going into the specifics of the matter, is it corrupt conduct if someone is offered an inducement to return a political favour to them—and the CCC would have to determine this through its code of conduct—and then when those matters were no longer needed, or they were unnecessary, or they would not do what someone politically wanted them to do, those inducements and favours were taken away? Does that qualify under the CCC's new code of conduct as corrupt conduct? It may very well be that Mr MacSparran would say, 'Yes, it does.' We have given our support to the bill, and with the government's support—and I hope the government members support their own bill—we should see this bill passed. Should this bill pass, it would mean that corrupt conduct of that nature may well be re-looked at in terms of an offence against the state.

I encourage the CCC investigators to use their expanded powers wisely. I think they have been funded for an extra \$10 million this year. I hope they spend that wisely. I ask the CCC to not just investigate the Gold Coast City Council again and again and again on a whim and a whimsical report by some disenfranchised politician. We want the CCC to make sure they use these very much appreciated, expanded powers—

(Time expired)