




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL
(IMPLEMENTING STAGE 1 OF BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.36 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 1 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The first point I would like to make is that this legislation, like many others pieces of legislation, is done with the best intention, but I have a reservation about how it will be applied and its impact in the long term.

Councils are very different animals. Councils in remote, discrete communities such as Indigenous communities are very different animals from megacouncils such as the Brisbane City Council and others. I cannot think of a really good analogy offhand, but it concerns me that this bill will give more power to the state and I am worried how that will impact on local governments. We have seen adverse effects from that before. It certainly raises my antenna to think that something like that could be happening again.

I want to talk about the automatic suspension of councillors for integrity related offences. The crossbench had a briefing from the government, and I appreciate where the minister is coming from. I think the intention to tidy things up is good and I see merit in that. I turn to the additional powers being given to the local government minister to dismiss a council. Again, I can see where the government is coming from and I see the merits in it, but I have an issue with the public interest amendments to be moved by the minister. I think in the wrong hands that could be used as a tool that would not serve local communities but serve the interests of the government of the day.

I was serving in the Mount Isa council when a controversial statement was made by the mayor at the time. If you did not like the mayor and if he was not of the right political persuasion at the time, it would have been easy to build an argument that we should get rid of him. That might be despite his capacity to carry out the civic duties of mayor. There was a protest outside the civic centre and I was a councillor at the time. It was all over the news and it would have been easy to say that we need to dismiss the council. If political prejudice were involved, this would now give the power to the minister to move in there. I think that is a realistic scenario for anyone who lives in the political world. That is something I am not comfortable with in that respect.

I have had interactions with smaller local councils. In some cases, if the facts were presented to the minister of the day or the government representatives, they might feel that that council should be sacked, but they might think differently if they dug deeper and engaged properly with the local community. I know we all say that that would always be done, but often it is not done and then things would not be done in the best interests of that community and an arbitrary decision would be made from a long way away that could impact heavily on local councils. Basically, I am not comfortable with placing more power in the state government to make that decision, even though it might be done with the best intent and with good reason due to some of those failings recently.

With the Belcarra legislation relating to the developer donations, we can see where the impetus has come from. I acknowledge that there have been recommendations around the question of electoral funding. We will see an amendment from the opposition on the unions. We would not be supportive of those intentions from either side because I think that is a much broader question about political support and donations and it should be addressed in a much broader spectrum than what is proposed with both the government amendments and the opposition amendments. The general public would love to see less impact, but I think it is oversimplifying the issue. Narrowing that down to just one group is unfair. The definition of developers was also discussed. Some people who might engage in that some of the time could be pulled into that and that might not be fair in some instances.

The amendment that deals with councillors having the ability to make a determination on a fellow councillor excluding themselves from a vote on a conflict of interest is an interesting one. I again draw on my own personal experience with four years on the Mount Isa City Council. There have been propositions put that a council would just want to ram through a vote and get the numbers and could use that maliciously. The minister did explain that can be measured because it would be an offence to do that maliciously, and I acknowledge that. I think there have been efforts made there, but I raise it as a concern with what is trying to be achieved.

I am appreciative of what the government is trying to do to tidy this up around local government. I have a great aversion to more involvement of the state government as it pertains to local government. I am a much stronger believer in more autonomy at that local level than less. What can sometimes be seen from afar as a big issue may not be as big an issue to people on the ground.

I like the idea of setting up the body separate from the CEO. I think that can work both ways. It can work so that the CEO is not the centre of those issues when they arise with a council and they are not put in a compromising position. I also find it can be an issue the other way, where in some of the smaller communities the CEO has an unhealthy influence on the rest of the councillors and the councillors want some sort of autonomy away from the influence of the CEO. It could be to the benefit of the CEO or the disbenefit in some ways. All in all, I think there is a lot of merit in that initiative.

We definitely support the impetus to do something here and support the general intent of what the government is trying to do. We do not agree with some of those parts I have just gone through, particularly with the donations. We hope that the minister is very mindful of those concerns and remembers that there are very different animals here. Once this legislation rolls out, we will be watching very closely the impact it has on those smaller councils. In closing, we support some parts of this bill but do not support others.