




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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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 MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (12.09 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a very personal matter for me. I rise today to speak about the two bills before the House which have been joined in cognate. I am very concerned, because in 2004 when I was elected as a councillor to the Gold Coast City Council that council was subjected to a Labor inspired inquiry into alleged corruption. I have to say that the process was, if nothing, quite insulting. It was a terrible slur on one of the great cities of Australia—the sixth largest city in Australia—and a terrible slur on the development industry. I see that Labor has not changed. It saddens me that after some 12 years Labor is still out there developer bashing the biggest industry in our state—the construction industry—which accounts for about 18 per cent of all jobs. What do we see? The same government, which is quite happy to take money from the CFMEU to live off the fat of the unions, now wants to bite the hand that feeds it.

In 2005 there was a report tabled in this House which contained the findings of the CMC inquiry the Labor government of the day initiated in relation to the Gold Coast City Council. I am happy to re-table it, but it has already been tabled. At the outset I want to talk about how offensive the title of that report was—*The Gold Coast: Queensland or a foreign land?* What is clear to me today is that those on the other side of the House still do not fully understand what a powerhouse and engine room the Gold Coast is to the Queensland economy, because right back then in 2004 the Gold Coast was being bashed and kicked around like a football by the then Labor government, which did not appreciate the value—

Government members interjected.

Mr MOLHOEK: I am not taking those interjections, Mr Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order!

Mr MOLHOEK: Nothing has changed. This is just another piece of legislation about developer bashing. Back in 2005-06 we saw the then local government minister, Desley Boyle, rise in this House to introduce the Local Government Amendment Act in response to the CMC inquiry. What came out of that was some discussion around improving councillor conduct, some discussion around greater accountability, and a new code of practice introduced. What has happened? That has been kicked around again for another 10 years, and here we are again with another bill from the Labor government saying, 'We're going to fix it.' This is your third attempt. Frankly, so much of this legislation is nothing but council bashing. It shows an incredible lack of disregard for grassroots councillors who work hard for their local communities across this state. Frankly, I am fed up with the bashing that the Gold Coast and some of developers receive. Those on the other side of the House were more than happy to take millions of dollars from the development industry on the Gold Coast back in the day, and they have continued to do so right up until recent times.

I want to put this on the record, because these are the findings of that 2004 inquiry. I spent the first two days of a six-week inquiry in the witness box. It cost the state some \$12 million at the time. It was a complete waste of money; a complete witch-hunt. What did it find? Commentary surrounding the report states—

The CMC report on the inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election, released today, had cleared all involved of any offences under the Local Government Act in relation to misleading voters and electoral bribery.

It further states—

The report also clears the Gold Coast City Council and its councillors of any official misconduct or other criminal offence in relation to council decisions made since the 2004 elections.

It goes on to say—

... no evidence of any breaches of the Local Government Act, or of any other law for that matter, by the Gold Coast councillors or the council as a whole, since the conclusion of the 2004 elections.

This is the important bit, because we have been talking about these new conflict-of-interest provisions, the safeguards that we need and councillors getting to vote on whether somebody has a conflict of interest or not. The arbiter of whether a council is doing the right thing is called an election. If the community are not happy with their councillors, every four years they have the opportunity to decide whether that councillor remains as a councillor and a representative of their community. I was proud to be a councillor for four years. I was sad to miss out on the mayoralty by a few thousands votes, but I was proud to be a councillor for those four years and I am incredibly proud of the Gold Coast. I want to return to the commentary on the report—

The evidence before the inquiry was that the Gold Coast Council has, since the 2004 elections, made thousands of decisions aimed at benefiting the residents of the Gold Coast. The inquiry itself examined a number of those decisions and failed to uncover any wrongdoing.

In relation to those decisions which the inquiry did examine, Mr Needham—

who was the commissioner at the time—

stated: *'... in none of these cases could the actions of councillors involved amount to offences under the LGA',* ...

I suspect that this latest witch-hunt—this new set of rules, these new transparent standards that those on the other side of the House want to keep spruiking—will again find no wrongdoing. Interestingly, the only person about whom there has been any serious suggestion of wrongdoing is Penny Toland, who failed to disclose her connection to the unions and in the early stages was not open about the donations she received from a number of unions. That is the only person, and where is she from? Labor. She is a Labor person. In 2008 when I ran for—

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Ms D'Ath interjected.

Mr MOLHOEK: I am not taking those interjections.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister! Attorney-General! Order!

Mr MOLHOEK: In 2008 when I ran for mayor I set the benchmark. I was the first candidate in any local government election to simultaneously declare and disclose donations as they came in online within 24 hours of receipt. I am absolutely passionate about transparency, but not the sort of nonsense we are hearing on the other side of the House.

In 1972 a new building went up on the foreshore at Surfers Paradise. It was one of the first high-rises. It was called the Shore Motor Inn and it is still there today. As a young 12-year-old my father walked me up the stairs—you probably could not do it these days because of work health and safety issues—to the top of the unfinished building. After the war my dad migrated to Australia, spent a couple of years in Melbourne and then moved to the Gold Coast in 1956. My dad, a tradesman and someone who passionately loved the Gold Coast, said to me, 'Son, look at this place. It is incredible. This is going to be one of the most amazing cities in the world one day. You mark my words. You wait and see.'

What have we seen in the last 30 or 40 years? We have seen the Gold Coast become one of the most stellar tourist and holiday destinations in the world. We have seen people like Keith Williams develop some of the most incredible theme parks and lay the foundations for an incredible world-class city. We have seen people like Soheil Abedian and Jim Raptis—I know they are colourful, controversial figures—whose companies have led the renaissance of Surfers Paradise with some stellar projects. I remember only too well Anna Bligh proudly strutting around with Sunland at the opening of Q1 talking about how wonderful they were. I remember as a councillor attending events at Hope Island when members on the other side of the House were more than happy to skite about what a great job John Fish was doing and take money in donations from the development industry. The hypocrisy from that side of the House is breathtaking.

The reality is that there will always be the odd developer who does the wrong thing, there will always be the odd Labor member who does the wrong thing—there is a list of Labor members who have gone to jail or been charged with corruption—and there is the odd person on our side of the House who has had to be dealt with, but the reality is that this legislation is nothing but a witch-hunt. It is aimed at trying to marginalise the LNP and other parties and their ability to work with business across the state—not just the development industry but all business—because we are the party that is pro business. We are pro farming, pro industry and pro economic growth. This bill is an absolute disgrace. It is nothing but a witch-hunt. It is such a shame that those opposite are not targeting the union leaders—

(Time expired)