




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.29 pm): As part of the committee looking into this bill, I would like to thank my fellow members, including the member for Logan, the illustrious member for Mermaid Beach, who was the only mayor of the Albert shire—

Mr Stevens: First and last.

Mr O'CONNOR: He was the first, last and only and, therefore, best mayor of Albert shire. I thank the committee staff as well. Trudy has now left the Parliamentary Service. We thank her for her time with the committee.

This was certainly one of our more interesting inquiries, particularly because the rushed nature of the government's action meant that we had a shortened time frame and were looking into a bill that had not yet been introduced into this place. We have an extraordinary bill before us. It is not every day the parliament is asked to sack a local government. It is certainly not every day the parliament sits. It has been so long since we have been here that I had to remind myself what this place looks like. In fact, this has never happened through specific legislation.

This is not some small regional council either. We are talking about the sixth largest council in Queensland, with over 200,000 residents. The LNP will not be opposing this bill because it finally achieves an outcome we have been calling for for months. The real shame of all of this is that Labor has taken each and every one of those residents for granted. A number of these councillors are members of the Labor Party. Every state seat in this area is Labor, by a significant margin, as well as every federal seat.

We have seen some of the most extraordinary abuses of power coming out of the investigation into this council, with 15 people charged with over 85 offences including against two mayors. Today we have seen even further reports that former mayor Pisasale pressured a junior council employee to take the points for a speeding fine incurred by a local business person the former mayor had gone on a weekend getaway with.

The mismanagement of this Labor council is evident across the city. The main street and CBD have claimed too many local businesses. Tumbleweeds fly through the council owned Ipswich mall. The Riverlink Shopping Centre across the Bremer sucked the life out of that part of town over a decade ago. Many plans for the revitalisation have been revealed—always with great fanfare and never with follow-up. This is despite the council being the largest property owner, wasting tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money and doing everything possible to avoid accountability and transparency while they did it.

Residents in the older part of town feel neglected. They are sick of smelling rubbish from the council approved superdumps. They are seeing their rates used to not improve their areas, but instead go towards providing shiny new infrastructure for the big developments in the south of the city.

I have spoken in this chamber before of how proud I am to have grown up in Ipswich. On the wall in my office is a how-to-vote card featuring my great-grandfather when he ran for this council as an alderman in the late 1940s. Back then it was all about service to the community. The only discernible perk I can see from his time in council was to have some input into naming two streets in Raceview, which remain so to this day, after my great-grandmother—that is, Dulcie and Gwendoline streets. How things have changed.

It is unfortunate that Labor has taken so long to resolve this crisis. I think this will be the third attempt to resolve the governance woes for the people of Ipswich. We have seen two show-cause notices issued to the council—something which incurred significant legal fees for both the ratepayers of Ipswich and the taxpayers of Queensland. Lawyers have been one of the big winners from this situation, with over \$80,000 spent on legal fees by the council to fight a right to information request about an off-the-books private jet jaunt across the United States.

Back in May the minister added over 40 pages of amendments to the other local government legislation. It took the minister over a month, until 20 June, to use some of these powers and issue a fresh show-cause notice. Those amendments did not make it to our committee for us to properly assess them, which is a great shame. We should have been allowed to do our job and properly look over these extra powers. We even had the minister announce the suspension of four mayors and a councillor under the new laws without even checking if they had been given assent by the Governor.

We have to wonder why we are in this position. Why has it taken so long to sort this out? I think we are in this position not only due to the government's incompetence but also because it must be difficult for Labor to sack their mates. At their final meeting yesterday we had a councillor despair that, had the LNP been in government, they believe Labor would have been out there barracking for them. From what I have seen, Labor has been barracking for them. How could they not have known about these systemic issues? The member for Bundamba has stood up for her city and has raised a number of these issues over the years. Surely, other members of the government had some idea.

Through our committee's inquiry several councillors raised the issue of compensation. The department has made it clear that there is no requirement to provide this and I do not think that would pass the pub test in Ipswich or anywhere else. The most staggering, although unsurprising, call for compensation came from councillor Paul Tully. His novel suggestion was that councillors should be paid two weeks for every year of continuous completed service to local government. This is from a bloke who has been in local government for nearly four decades. This is the definition of self-interest. His other option was that councillors be paid in full until March 2020. He wanted councillors to be paid well over \$100,000 a year to do nothing.

The money saved from not paying the wages of councillors will be appropriately redirected to properly fund an independent administrator. That independence is the most important part of ensuring Ipswich gets a proper clean-out. To make sure these systemic governance issues are resolved they need to have an administrator able to come in to restore proper, accountable governance.

This bill has a number of issues, including the very necessity for its introduction as there is an existing provision for the sacking of a council through the Local Government Act. We see in it breaches of just about every fundamental legislative principle. The bill abrogates the rights and liberties of the individual, disregards the presumption of innocence and excludes judicial review and appeal, contrary to the fundamental legislative principles and the recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry.

Today is a difficult day for local government. I have some great councillors in my area—people who want to make it a better place. I work closely with them to get things done for our community. It is a great shame that a small number of elected members have unfortunately tainted the many hundreds of good, hardworking local councillors across Queensland. It is even more disappointing that this government has made such a shambles of the process to resolve these issues.