



Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 16 May 2018

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

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (11.53 am): I am pleased to rise in support of these bills. Operation Belcarra exposed allegations of failings and potential misconduct across several Queensland councils. Local councils are important institutions in our community, responsible for transforming cities and supporting regional towns. I have always said that there is so much to love about my own community of Logan. We are a growing, thriving community. There are many important projects that we are working on across levels of government, such as social housing renewal, providing the very best start for our kids with Logan Together and delivering the vital transport infrastructure and community services that our growing community needs. These projects and others like them in councils right across Queensland deserve the full attention of the elected officials tasked with delivering them.

The Palaszczuk government has always made integrity, transparency and accountability core to its values. We expect it of ourselves and we expect it of all other levels of government. We are the government which introduced real-time disclosures and returned the disclosure threshold to a reasonable level—something those opposite are still fighting. These bills continue that work with the ban on developer donations. The amendments reinforce integrity and reduce the risk of corruption potentially caused by political donations from property developers at a state and local government level. We have seen many concerns raised in this area and it is time we just took away the risk.

Members opposite have questioned why the donation ban has not been extended to unions. It is simple—it is because the CCC chair, Mr MacSporran, advised that the same risk is just not present. It is not just the LNP that has form when it comes to political donations; the Greens have also shown some breathtaking hypocrisy on this matter. Yesterday we heard from the member for Toohey about how the Greens have hidden corporate donations by using the federal disclosure laws for corporate donations between \$1,000 and \$13,000, but I see the member for Maiwar calling for a ban on all corporate donations. They are happy to take donations though from wealthy gamblers like Duncan Turpie. A look at the Australian Greens website shows that, even though they say they do not like taking gambling donations, they are happy to take a donation from Clinton Lollback, whose LinkedIn profile says he is the chief risk officer for Tabcorp.

I think everyone in this House can acknowledge the important responsibility that comes with public service and representing your community as an elected representative, which is why these amendments introduce an automatic suspension of mayors or councillors charged with one of a series of corruption or integrity offences and expand the range of intervention options available to the local government minister to dismiss or suspend members of council and appoint an administrator where appropriate.

Many of my constituents have contacted me with concerns about the charges brought against Mayor Luke Smith. These are serious charges that understandably are troubling to many members of the community. They are troubling because they want to know that their elected representatives and council officials are working for them. Members of my community have already experienced the drama and insecurity surrounding criminal charges laid against another councillor, Councillor Stacey McIntosh, and those charges are still ongoing. The latest charges against the mayor further erode their confidence.

As a former lawyer, I absolutely believe that people are innocent until proven guilty and that everyone deserves the right to natural justice. However, while serious allegations are before the courts, there is a community expectation that elected representatives will stand aside until the matters have been finalised. These amendments put the community interests above the interests of any one person, group or party—because the community, when faced with continued disappointment from their elected council or council officials, have turned to the Queensland government and they expect us to act, and we have. We have acted within the powers that are clearly able to be exercised.

These bills in combination clarify and importantly strengthen those powers and the responsibility of the state to step in and put an end to behaviour that not only damages confidence in council but threatens growth and economic development in these vital regions. The success of the community is being held back by the actions of a few. If the Minister for Local Government is of the view that local government principles are being breached or councillors or council are incapable of performing their duties, we will intervene in the public interest. We cannot let uncertainty hold our communities back. Families, ratepayers, small businesses and industry need to know that their local government representatives and staff are relentlessly pursuing growth and success for their region and their communities and that they are doing that with integrity and honesty.

Again, in my own community business is also feeling the impact of the uncertainty. Whether the allegations are proven or not, the reputation of our region has been impacted. The Logan Chamber of Commerce secretary, Stewart Fleming, has expressed concern on behalf of businesses in our region. He said—

There's quite a bit of unrest in the community and disappointment in the council ... certainly the businesses are concerned.

He went on to say that it was 'a matter of stability and strong leadership'.

The Palaszczuk government went to the election promising to strengthen and improve integrity and confidence in local government and establish a simplified and independent process for properly investigating complaints and concerns. I think all of us have been shocked by the allegations of criminal behaviour by multiple elected officials across our state, and this legislation is an important step in rebuilding confidence in our councils. Our communities have had enough; they expect us to act. I commend these bills to the House.