




Speech By  
**Steve Minnikin**

**MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH**

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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 MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (5.57 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to speak in the cognate debate on the Local Government (Councillor Complaints) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 1 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It has been a very interesting debate this evening and the later part of this afternoon. It is almost like a little bit of tit for tat here. If you put on the table Don Lane, then I will raise you with a Gordon Nuttall or a Brian Austin. Then we will talk about Keith Wright or Leisha Harvey. We will talk about the phantom, the original Bill D'Arcy. I think it is fair to say that there is not one of the two mainstream parties in this chamber that can claim any moral high ground.

Secondly, I will centre my contribution around the local government councillor complaints bill. I reaffirm my absolute commitment to local government. I will quote from a book from the Parliamentary Library that I recently read written by Roberta Ryan and titled *A People's Federation*. Under the heading 'Local governance and efficiency' it reads—

A key justification for central governments establishing systems of local government is to promote efficiency. Two senses of efficiency are relevant here. The first has to do with economies and diseconomies of scale in the provision of services. Local governments can be more efficient in delivering certain services than provincial/state level governments. The second relates to allocative efficiency which involves ensuring that the bundle of government services and taxes matches as closely as possible to what people actually want.

I could not agree with those words and that sentiment more if I tried.

We on this side of the chamber have a strong history of support for robust local government. As has been said on both sides of the chamber, sadly we have seen some recent examples—in terms of sub judice I will not go into specifics, but it is all right to highlight that there have been issues in the local authorities of Ipswich, Logan and also the Fraser Coast.

In relation to the councillor complaints bill, the LNP do not oppose the bill as it is clear that, after an independent review, an overhaul of the existing legislative policy framework applicable for councillor complaints was absolutely required. We have absolutely no problem with that sentiment at all. We express our regret that the recent disappointing events involving the conduct of certain councillors—that is the key point here: like anything in life, we are talking about a small minority of councillors amongst the vast pool of councillors who go to their particular local authorities and do a great job every single week—whilst small in number, have nevertheless contributed to a situation where the community's confidence in their local governments and their local government representatives has been eroded at the very least.

This bill provides transitional arrangements for the commencement of the new councillor complaints system and, rather than using heavy-handed tactics, we stress the importance of the Labor government working in close cooperation with local councils and the Local Government Association of

Queensland to ensure the successful rollout and implementation of the new framework. The primary objective of the bill—specifically the councillor complaints bill of the two bills we are debating here tonight—is to implement the government’s response to the independent Councillor Complaints Review Panel’s report *Councillor complaints review: a fair, effective and efficient framework* by amending primarily the Local Government Act 2009 to provide for a simpler, more streamlined system for making, investigating and determining complaints about councillor conduct in Queensland.

I note with interest that the key components of the bill involve establishing the position of the Independent Assessor and the Office of the Independent Assessor to investigate all complaints and information about councillor conduct and provide sufficient powers to undertake investigations where need be; strengthening offences to support the new councillor complaints system, such as providing protection from reprisal for local government employees who make complaints against councillors; providing for the minister to make a uniform code of conduct to set appropriate standards of behaviour for councillors; reallocating the functions of the current Local Government Remuneration and Discipline Tribunal and the regional conduct review panel by establishing the new Councillor Conduct Tribunal. That has been done so that it can hear and determine complaints of councillor misconduct. The last couple of key components are very important: establishing the new Local Government Remuneration Commission to decide the maximum remuneration payable to councillors throughout the state; and allowing certain review rights for decisions about councillor conduct, including review rights to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal for decisions of the Councillor Conduct Tribunal.

Very simply put, we support the amendments contained in the bill and acknowledge that these proposed changes to the existing legislative framework applicable for councillor complaints will make addressing this problematic area far less challenging. Importantly, it will also help in dealing with concerns over the potentially conflicted role of chief executive officers, the CEOs, of council in assessing complaints against their own councillors in their own particular jurisdiction—in other words, one of their employees.

Many, many years ago, when I had a fine head of hair, I was the executive officer at the Redland shire council, as it was then known. It was a particularly interesting role because my role sat between that of the office of mayor and the office of CEO. I know that when conflicts arose from time to time between the elected arm and the organisational arm it was extremely testy at times for certain senior officers in relation to the way those conflicts and that complaint-handling mechanism was dealt with. To be very clear, the LNP has always been a strong supporter of the work that mayors and councillors do for the betterment of all Queenslanders. We know that local governments share many of the same goals as we do—that is, to provide jobs and to give their local areas the best quality of life.

What I would like to talk about in the remaining few minutes of my contribution are a couple of points in relation to the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 1 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. There is no other way to say this: this is simply political opportunism taken to a new level. We have seen a litany of bad behaviour from certain areas in the community—in other words, some of the puppetmasters that control the destiny and the decision-making power of those opposite. To quote the Deputy Premier—she always likes to look at factual based evidence—where has it been presented tonight by members of the government in their contribution to the debate? It has been zero, scant, nil, naught. Let us just roll the tape and have a look at union influence.

We know that they have control over who gets into cabinet and specifically which portfolio certain ministers get. We know that. They reintroduced the union encouragement policy, selling out the privacy rights of public sector workers. It is very simple: after maybe a couple of days or a couple of weeks, having been appointed an AO4 or whatever, you are at the water cooler and who do you get a visit from? You get a visit from your local union representative from whichever union they represent. It would probably go something like this: ‘Hello, Cheryl. Hello, John. Welcome to the state Public Service. We are going to give you a little career tip. If you don’t want to be encouraged to join up, not a problem. Enjoy your grey cubicle. Enjoy your potential view of the corner window one day because you won’t be getting very far.’ That comes with absolutely no influence whatsoever, does it! You might be better off though because, when it comes to the health minister, you could at least try to get PIN code access.

We move on to the CFMEU. We know the stories where they literally had to get in trucks to bury the evidence. This is simply political opportunism at its worst. I support the amendments introduced by the member for Toowoomba South.

*(Time expired)*