




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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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 WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.17 pm): I would like to start by quoting the chairman of the CCC, Mr MacSporran. He stated—

The Inquiry terms of reference did not include state elections. Consequently the Belcarra Report recommendations did not involve any detailed specific consideration of corruption risks in state elections and decision-making. Accordingly, the reforms depart from the scope of the Belcarra Report ...

He went on to say—

... the CCC did not contemplate that the proposed reforms would be introduced without preliminary review to identify and mitigate corruption risks in state elections and decision-making. A proper public consultation process is highly desirable.

That is the head of our corruption watchdog. I want to talk about what would have happened if there had been an investigation. In Queensland, we have, let us say, 15 or 20 key developers. Imagine if, with the government's blessing, those key developers had been given the name, address, mobile phone number and email of every public servant—imagine that. Imagine the developers receiving this information.

Imagine if those developers could decide who could run for preselection for an election in Queensland for one side of politics. Imagine if the developers had that power over preselection. Imagine if those developers had power over who could be a minister in Queensland. Imagine if they had power over which portfolio those ministers could be given. Imagine if we had 15 or 20 developers in the state who had that kind of power over our political process. Imagine if those developers could collect other money from lots of other little developers and small business people and consolidate it into one big lump so it cannot be traced and then they just slid it all over the table to the people whose preselections they controlled, whose ministries they controlled and whose appointments they controlled. Imagine if we had 15 or 20 developers in the state who had this kind of power over our government.

Imagine what would happen if these developers could, through a little backchannel, have a communication with one of their appointed ministers in their appointed portfolio and discuss pay levels and suggest that maybe the pay levels should go up a bit because those people have been good contributors to this particular developer. Imagine if they had some control and influence over the taxpayers' funds through the budget process and through various tenders that the government was putting together. I would suggest to honourable members that that would be truly an undue influence and a potential political corruption risk.

Imagine if whilst Mr MacSporran and the CCC were investigating a report of people who might have undue influence over our political system they uncovered these 15 or 20 developers and their ability to communicate directly with everybody appointed in the Public Service, their ability to pick ministers and to arrange portfolios, their ability to influence outcomes of legislation and appointments

to government quangos. I would suggest that, without knowing, Mr MacSporran would come back to this chamber and strongly suggest that that kind of influence over the political system and the spending of money in Queensland by a government would be a serious threat to the independence of our government. I would suggest that it would be sloppy legislating if someone came into this place and said, 'Without any due consideration I put a piece of legislation together and that, in the words of Mr MacSporran, 'there is a potential successful challenge to the constitutional validity of the measure'.'

If we put all that together and we were living in a state where 15 or 20 particular developers have that level of control would anybody suggest for a moment that they do not have undue influence over the outcome of government, that they do not have undue influence over potential outcomes that are in their own benefit? What would happen if we had developers who sent some of their staff out to break industrial laws of Australia and when they were caught they just simply paid their fines for them? What would happen if we did that? I think people in this place would be rightly concerned that the level of undue influence was growing, and so I do question why this bill has been rushed into this place.

I want to talk about one other part of the bill, which is its retrospectivity aspect. To suggest that making this bill retrospective to 12 October 2017, interestingly enough just prior to the election, was not politically motivated in any way to disadvantage one side—imagine if there was a piece of retrospective legislation brought in here that said any union donations that are received will attract a penalty of \$190,000 and 10 years imprisonment and we made it retrospective to just before the election. Imagine what people would say.

I put it to honourable members as they are thinking about Queensland and its governance, what is good for the people of Queensland and the strength and the integrity of our democracy is that they should not bring legislation into this place that will allow one side of politics to have a distinct financial advantage over the other. I put it to them that they are not serving the people of Queensland. I put it to them that all the powers that I have suggested people would find abhorrent if they were given to developers are actually powers that exist for the union movement in Queensland.

If we are going to ban a class of donation and particular individuals who conduct business legally and legitimately in our state, complying with all the various rules and regulations, and to suggest that they are not allowed to participate in our democracy is abhorrent. More abhorrent is to try to do it in a political way that will make sure that only one political voice can be heard, only one thought process can be heard in this place because that will not lead to good government. Good government comes from people listening to what happens out there in their community.

If members go out into the community and they listen to those people, they will find they are very concerned about the undue influence of the union movement on the decision-making of this government. I do not want to besmirch all unions. There are good unions out there and there are good members of unions out there. What I do want to say is that the level of influence is a serious risk to democracy here in Queensland and is no different to what it would be if we had 15 or 20 developers with all of those powers and controls available to them.

I am very concerned about the legislation. I think it is bad law. I think it will lead to unjust elections and, ultimately, it will lead to Labor losing government.

(Time expired)