



Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY**

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL (IMPLEMENTING STAGE 2 OF  
BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (2.13 pm): I rise to speak to the Belcarra bill. In doing so, I would like to speak about the postal voting provisions and the importance of these changes. In the last 10 years or so the nature of voting and how we vote has fundamentally changed, largely with the advent of pre-poll.

I recall as a young shiftworker who worked every Saturday as an apprentice hairdresser that the only option my little sister, Genevieve, had was to vote via postal vote. It was a real nuisance according to Gen. There were several bits of paper that had to go backwards and forwards. She was trying to fit this in around her busy full-time work schedule. She worked a full day every Saturday without fail. She could not risk trying to vote on election day and either being late back from lunch or get to the polling booth after she finished work and missing out because clients were running late. Every election she had to apply for a postal vote.

Thankfully, times have changed. I know that the many shiftworkers and FIFO workers in Mount Ommaney are grateful for the introduction of pre-poll. It gives a more convenient option to those people who are capable of leaving the house to vote but have very busy schedules on election day and who might not have the time to keep an eye on the letterbox every day.

It is amazing to think that only fairly recently in our history postal voting was the only genuine alternative a lot of people had to voting on election day. I know that most of Gen's co-workers at Bach Hair were young, fit tradies who could easily have attended a polling booth if one were open. That was back in the day when people had to provide a proper reason for applying for a postal vote in the first instance.

We know that at every election more and more Queenslanders and more and more Australians vote at pre-poll. As a result, the need for postal voting for people like my sister and her tradie mates is reduced. I know she is very grateful for the introduction of pre-poll. She has often commented to me that, because she still works every Saturday, she loves the fact that she can vote at a time that is convenient to her and her family.

It is with these fundamental changes in mind that the Belcarra bill makes changes to the postal vote rules. Changing the deadline for the receipt of postal votes by the Electoral Commission, the ECQ, to 7 pm on the day that is 12 days before polling day places more responsibility on voters to request their postal votes in a timely way. This is really important. The 12-day cut-off for postal vote applications implements Soorley report recommendation No. 41, which was for applications to be submitted no later than 10 working days prior to the election. This bill is a bit more generous and provides for 12 days. This includes weekends.

These changes will mean that there is a reasonable prospect of the postal ballot being received before polling day. In fact, the committee noted in its report that some stakeholders considered that the bill's proposed deadline should be extended even further back from polling day, but we have chosen to go with 12 days to allow plenty of time for everybody to get all important applications in.

There are alternatives in place for some people who miss the postal vote deadline. An elector whose address is more than 20 kilometres from a polling booth may apply to be included on the register of special postal voters. Electors in many local government areas have access to pre-poll voting. Telephone voting is also available. The proposed time lines align with the proposed amendments to state election processes. As noted by the committee, they are supported by the ECQ.

It is worth noting the increasing importance of getting all of our polling results back in a timely manner. For example, in the 2015 election in the seat of Mount Ommaney we waited 10 days for the result while those postal votes trickled back, little by little, in the days and weeks after the election. The community were understandably anxious to know the outcome of the election and due to the nature of the election so was the state of Queensland. After the 10-day wait just 126 votes decided the result in Mount Ommaney. Those postal votes were crucial.

Close contests are not unusual in politics. They happen all the time. These changes to postal votes allow those critical postal votes that need to be counted to be received in a timely manner by the voters and then posted back. It is also pertinent to note that, due to the fact that local government elections are fixed date elections, we know today when the next local government election will be. It is easier for voters to remember to request that postal vote early. It can be as simple as setting a diary reminder or popping it in one's calendar.

I am pleased, as are many people in my community, that we have at the state level also adopted the four-year fixed terms after the referendum. Many in my community appreciate certainty on this matter. Schools, churches and community groups can better plan their calendars, specifically their fundraising opportunities. There is nothing more aggravating for a hardworking P&C that has scheduled its school fete than to find out that it has been gazumped by an election. All of their plans are thrown in the air with just a month's notice. This gives them this certainty. We know that P&Cs are big businesses these days. They work hard. Those school fetes are critical to their fundraising calendar. I think it is wonderful we have provided that certainty.

The end result of these changes is that the final result for elections will be known sooner. I think everybody can agree that, with the advances we have seen in other methods of voting, these updates make the legislation very sensible.

I want to finish by reflecting on the excitement and interest that accompanies an election in the community. I know some people say that voters have never been more disengaged, but I have to say that that has not been my experience. As I said, for many schools and community groups, state, local and council elections are a highlight in their fundraising calendar. It is an opportunity to build community capacity. This year during the federal election the iSEE Church at Seventeen Mile Rocks had a bountiful bake sale. Sausage sizzles have their own hashtag and they have their own online following. All of this is to say that polling day itself is very important in our national culture. I hope it is always as important, but so too is postal voting.

Last week I went to Corinda State High School to talk about our government's 60,000 free TAFE places for school leavers. I was there to speak to the next generation of tradies—those men and women who will be working on Saturdays and who will need those additional voting provisions. There were 600 kids there all keen and eager to learn about great jobs in trade. This strong interest in trades into the future shows me that there will always be a need for us to have robust processes in place for people who cannot cast a vote on polling day. That is why these provisions are so important. There are many other provisions that I can speak on, but that is one that I am particularly passionate about. I commend the bills to the House.