



Speech By  
**Kim Richards**


**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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

### **ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (4.42 pm): I rise in this House to speak in this cognate debate on the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. These bills were introduced into the Legislative Assembly and referred to our Economics and Governance Committee. I agree with the member for Bonney—we certainly consulted far and wide using digital technology to pull all of those mayors together and we indeed listened to what they had to say.

Next March we have the 2020 local government elections, and this legislation will build on transforming the confidence of our community in their elected representatives and those who put themselves forward for consideration. In the Redlands, we had our council and three individual councillors make submissions to the committee inquiry. The issues being addressed in this bill have been experienced in our region, particularly in the 2016 election.

As we all know, the 2016 local government elections and local government administration have seen some of the darkest days. As I said, in the stage 1 Belcarra debate we have seen a never-ending procession of newspaper headlines highlighting the significant issues that exist within local government, from Ipswich City Council through to Logan City Council and the list goes on and on. You only need to look at the workload of the Independent Assessor and the Integrity Commissioner to see the level of issues that do exist. Bad behaviour has been from a minority but it has affected many. It has affected the reputation of all politicians. It is paramount that we clean this up so we can instil confidence back into the system which has been perceived as broken and which the community has lost faith in. This continues on our government's reform agenda to repair that system.

These systemic issues impact all levels of government and they have reflected on all of us in our communities. This bill continues the government's rolling reform agenda in the local government sector and delivers on the government's commitment to improving transparency, integrity and accountability for the benefit of each and every community right across Queensland. I do not think there is a community across Queensland that has not been touched by this in some way, shape or form.

The bill represents many months of significant and continued consultation with the community and stakeholders. These stakeholders have included the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Local Government Managers Australia, the Electoral Commission of Queensland, mayors, councillors, chief executive officers and various community and ratepayer groups. I take this opportunity to again thank the CCC chairman, Alan MacSporran, and the Integrity Commissioner, Nikola Stepanov, who joined me and the member for Capalaba late last year to talk with our community about integrity, transparency and accountability expectations that our community should have of its elected representatives.

I also take this opportunity to thank all of the agencies—the CCC, the Integrity Commissioner Nikola Stepanov and Kathleen Florian and the Office of the Independent Assessor. As I said, they have had their work cut out for them as we continue to shine the spotlight on issues within local government. They have had a substantial workload as a result of these reforms. There is a lot of great work going on but there is still an awful lot to do.

The bill builds on reforms already implemented in Belcarra stage 1, which was the government's response to five of the 31 recommendations from the Crime and Corruption Commission's Belcarra report, including the prohibition of election donations from property developers and measures to improve the way councillors must deal with conflicts. It is critically important that as elected representatives we continue to improve the systems and frameworks that we conduct ourselves within and that we seek to repair the perception of communities in both the system and those elected to administer the system. This bill continues to implement our government's policy and commitment to improve transparency, integrity and accountability in Queensland local government elections and decision-making by continuing to implement further recommendations of Operation Belcarra and the Soorley report. This bill is guided by four key principles of integrity, transparency, recognition of diversity and consistency.

As we all know, the bill is the second stage and I think it is important to note that it is certainly not the last. We know there is still a lot more work to do. We should always be striving to continue to improve legislation and the framework of good governance. The bill amends the Local Government Electoral Act to implement real-time electoral expenditure disclosure requirements. Real-time expenditure disclosure enhances transparency in relation to resources applied by candidates and third parties to election campaigns, and we have experienced some of those issues in relation to third party donations out in the Redlands.

The bill amends the Local Government Electoral Act to require candidates to disclose particular interests as part of their nomination as a candidate. These interests include if a candidate is currently or has previously been a member of a political party or a trade or professional organisation. Again, this increased transparency allows voters to be better informed. We saw that out our way in the 2017 state election when a local councillor took leave of absence in a campaign period to run in a state election. That was highly unusual. I do not think anyone would think that passes the pub test.

The bill amends the Local Government Electoral Act to further define a group of candidates by the behaviours of the group or its members rather than the purpose for which it was formed. We saw this in Redlands in the 2016 election. These amendments will provide greater transparency to the public. If councillors are operating in a group, you should know that they are operating in a group and that they may need to make decisions as a collective.

The bill amends the Local Government Electoral Act to require all candidates, including sitting councillors, to undertake mandatory training. I have had a number of conversations with councillors in my area on this very topic. They are calling for it as elected councillors already. I think it is really important that we get the information on what their obligations are. It is a momentous decision to decide to run as a candidate, let alone if you are elected, so it is very important that you actually understand the framework you are going to be elected to operate in.

The bill amends the Local Government Electoral Act to require all candidates, including sitting councillors, to undertake this training. In our public hearing last year with former Ipswich city councillors, this was very evident due to the fact that longstanding councillors who had been in there for over 15 years did not understand their obligations. It is quite incredible that you can be within an institution for 15 years and not understand your obligations to act with integrity. As I said, this training will go some way to ensuring that the conduct and standing of candidates and councillors is raised.

This bill is more than just a response to the recommendations put forward by the Belcarra report and the Soorley report; it is a continuation of our government's focused reform agenda to further improve accountability, transparency, integrity and consistency in the local government system, decision-making and local government elections.

The bill will also amend the Local Government Electoral Act in terms of the definition of 'candidate'—I think the member for Bonney touched on that—making it clearer around when a candidate becomes a candidate. I think that is very important. Finally, with regard to the electoral reforms, that bill aims to further strengthen public confidence in our electoral system. It supports operational improvements to the electoral system, which I think is really important not only to allow ECQ to achieve efficiencies but also to improve the voters' experience.

From these amendments we should expect to see a clearer indication of where results sit, and I think that is really important for our communities as well, particularly as they relate to the counting of postal votes. In those marginal seats there can be a lot of time waiting. The seat of Redlands was declared two weeks out, so I think to actually have that information sooner is really important.

Integrity, transparency and accountability are the cornerstones on which our framework of government must be founded. It is important for us to continue to improve, and these amendments do just that. These reforms will provide our communities with the confidence they rightly deserve to have in their system of government and their elected representatives. I commend the bill to the House.