




Speech By
Hon. Mark Bailey

MEMBER FOR MILLER

Record of Proceedings, 16 October 2019

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

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (11.51 am): I rise to speak in support of the legislation before the House. These bills are the next step in implementing the recommendations of the Crime and Corruption Commission's Operation Belcarra report. Operation Belcarra was initiated following the 2016 local government elections to examine practices that may undermine public confidence in the integrity of local government, with a view to identifying strategies or reforms to increase public confidence. In the Belcarra report, the CCC made 31 recommendations to 'strengthen equity, transparency, integrity and accountability in local governments throughout Queensland'. The government has supported or supported in principle all the recommendations, and we have already implemented our response to five of them. We have done this because we believe in transparency, integrity and accountability.

As a former councillor on the Brisbane City Council of nine years, I take particular interest in these matters. The reputation of local government has no doubt been tarnished in recent times. This is due to the unfortunate actions of a very small minority of councillors and staff, but it must be addressed. Doing nothing is not an option. As representatives of our communities, we alongside our counterparts in local and federal government have a responsibility to uphold the highest standards of integrity, accountability and transparency. This legislation enforces those standards.

The laws in relation to state and local government elections are currently disparate and confer different obligations on candidates, electoral groups and voters. This legislation fixes those discrepancies. Allegations of misconduct and corruption in the Moreton Bay Regional Council, the Ipswich City Council and the Logan City Council shocked many Queenslanders who demanded action. This legislation takes that action. On this side of the chamber, we know the value of local government. We do not exploit loopholes to pay for our taxi fares to Cher and Keith Urban concerts and we do not describe watching *The Bachelorette* as a 'work commitment'. We take local government seriously and that is why we are getting on with the job of implementing these reforms.

One of the major areas of reform in this legislation is in relation to donations and the obligations surrounding them. This legislation introduces real-time disclosure of expenditure and strengthens the disclosure requirements for gifts and donations. This measure certainly assists voters. The government is also reforming the way that groups of candidates and councillors campaign and operate together. The changes in this legislation will mean that a group is defined by the behaviours of the group, not the purposes for which it was formed. This too makes our electoral system more open and more democratic.

This legislation will also require anyone who intends to stand as a candidate in local government elections to undergo training in relation to their obligations as a candidate, including around disclosure, and as a councillor if they are elected or appointed. This is a common-sense measure aimed at ensuring candidates and councillors cannot claim ignorance of their obligations. Finally, campaigns will be

obliged to use dedicated accounts for expenditure to prevent candidates using their credit cards, which can lead to difficulties in reconciling individual purchases against campaign expenditure. This change also improves transparency in local government elections without imposing onerous requirements on candidates and their campaign teams.

Beyond the Belcarra report, this legislation implements a number of recommendations of the Soorley report, which reviewed the conduct of the 2016 local government elections, the referendum on fixed four-year terms for the state parliament and the Toowoomba South by-election. The inquiry that led to the Soorley report was launched in response to 'the large number of complaints following the elections and referendum which were managed and implemented by the Electoral Commission of Queensland'. It is vital to our democracy that our electoral processes are sound and that the public has confidence in these procedures. The implementation of these recommendations is another part of the government's commitment to transparency and accountability in the democratic process.

As part of the government's response to the Soorley report, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of early voting processes, such as postal and pre-poll voting. Under this legislation, postal vote applications will need to be received by the returning officer by 7 pm two Mondays before polling day. This will mean that everyone who applies for a postal vote will have the highest possible chance of receiving and returning their ballot paper and having their vote counted.

By changing the donation disclosure requirements for sitting councillors, we are bringing the legislation in line with community expectations. It cannot stand that sitting councillors are not required to disclose donations between their election and the receipt of their nomination for the following election. We do not want to have a situation where political parties or electoral groups exploit loopholes and rely on technicalities to undermine transparency and trust in the electoral process. Political parties cannot be allowed to hide \$3 million of donations from the public for five months. That is not what integrity and accountability look like. That is something that those opposite still have not addressed, and they still have not apologised to Queenslanders for hiding that level of donations.

Governments at all levels, whether it is federal, state or local, are based on trust and that trust comes from representatives conducting themselves with transparency, accountability and integrity. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring that Queenslanders can trust their local governments, returning faith in the sector. This legislation is an important step in that and it is by no means the last.

I look forward post this legislation and past the next round of local elections to seeing an improvement in the faith that people have in local government in the South-East Queensland sector. It has taken a battering in recent years. This is very strong legislation that addresses that. I look forward to the confidence in local government representatives returning as a result of these reforms, as a result of the elections next year and as a result of further reforms in the future.