




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (4.50 pm): It is October, the jacarandas are out and thank God that this time in 12 months that incompetent, shonky, dodgy mob on the other side of this House that call themselves the government will not be running the state.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order! Some of that language that you used, member, is unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw.

Mr STEVENS: Whichever it was I withdraw.

Mrs D'ATH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I ask you to withdraw—

Mr STEVENS: 'Some of it', you said, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask you to withdraw completely.

Mr STEVENS: I withdraw. This minister who is now running local government has frightened the daylight out of all the councillors throughout Queensland. He has made a complete mess of his portfolio, as he has done with rail fail and as he did when he came in here at five minutes to midnight and changed the system to compulsory preferential voting for state elections to try to suit his—

Government members interjected.

Mr STEVENS: Okay. He supported the then attorney-general at five minutes to midnight. However, I know he was the great mind behind it. His track record in this House in terms of his portfolio responsibilities is absolutely and completely hopeless. Just 12 hours ago we were coming into this House to debate a different bill. We support the very recommendations that the committee spent a long time going through and investigating and we put forward our objections to the main tenet of this bill.

Make no mistake: this bill is in this House for the very reason that the minister was trying to wrangle it so that the Brisbane City Council elections would be held under compulsory preferential voting which would swing, with Greens preferences, towards them. That was his preferred method of rigging the voting system. That is why we had compulsory preferential voting as a main part of this bill, a focus of this bill. I can assure honourable members that my Gold Coast councillors and all the other councillors I have talked to during this time have been absolutely horrified at what they would have to do if this bill were passed. As we have seen, the costs to local government of compulsory preferential voting would have been a fortune. However, there was no concern about costs; it was all about trying to win the Brisbane City Council election.

The minister, as we all know, goes to the local government conference and tries to sweet-talk his way back into popularity with the myriad local governments by abolishing the key elements of the bill that were problems for the government. The councillors that I talk to tell me it is not worthwhile being a councillor anymore because of all the issues they have to deal with—the issue of conflicts of interest and other related problems. This minister is responsible for driving people out of local government.

What we see in terms of this government is a complete backflip. Coincidentally, the conflict of interest matters seem to have followed on from other conflicts of interest arising at the state level such as the conflict of interest of the member for South Brisbane involving her own dealings with the CCC, and the reaction is just amazing. All I heard from the councillors of the Gold Coast, who are still under investigation, as you would be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, is, 'Hey, we are being investigated over minor issues compared to the major issue,' which went nowhere. The outcome of that was, 'Sorry, I've lost my Cross River Rail portfolio.' That was the only outcome of the major conflict of interest that we had in the state parliament.

We are completely disappointed in this legislation. We are satisfied now in terms of supporting the initial parts of Belcarra et cetera and we are pleased to go forward. What we are not satisfied with is why the minister keeps belting local government black and blue and forcing people—I love local government. I was a mayor once, believe it or not. In case anyone here does not know, I used to be the mayor of the Gold Coast. I love local government. It is the government that is closest to the people. The way they have been shoddily treated by this government and particularly this minister—in fact, what he is doing to local government is even worse than what he has done to racing in Queensland, but I will not even go there.

In terms of the training component of the bill we will be passing I can assure honourable members, having had hands-on experience in local government—and I do not think the member has ever had that—that the training of some of the people who put their hands up for local government is not easy. When I ran for mayor of the Gold Coast, I had the nude campaign and the Elvis Presley guy; all these sorts of people run for the fun of it. Now they are going to take a lot of interest in being trained by the department, at great expense to the management, to be a good councillor when they have no interest, no hope, but they want their five minutes of fame, which they are entitled to under our democratic system, and if they get enough votes they get their money back for nomination.

Under this bill there will be media training for these folk a month out regardless of whether or not they win—I am not too sure how long it is going to take. This is going to be a major cost to the departments and most of these candidates will not be interested in it anyway. We are living in fairyland because the minister has not had any involvement or taken advice from those myriad people who have had a lifetime of involvement in local government, many of them on our side in this House. The minister should stop picking on local government. The next things we will probably see are a limit on expenditure coming through the House and stopping state members from running for council; the old Terry Mackenroth trick will be back in again. These things are not for the betterment of local government; it is all about the betterment of the ALP in Queensland. That is what this legislation was initially intended to do: 'We will pick up the Belcarra matters as we go through and Mr MacSporran's good recommendations.' We all want to see a clean local government. What has happened in Ipswich and to a degree in Logan—

An opposition member interjected.

Mr STEVENS: There are no guilty ones yet.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr STEVENS: Oh, there are a couple of guilty ones.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order!

Mr STEVENS: It is an—

Mr Power interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Logan.

Mr POWER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, resume your seat. I had called 'Order'. Resume your seat, please, member for Mermaid Beach. What is your point of order?

Mr POWER: I think the member for Mermaid Beach may have spoken in error. I am sure he did not wish to assert that anyone—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr POWER: It is sub judice, and I just wanted to be helpful for the member for Mermaid Beach, who I am sure did not wish to assert anyone's guilt or innocence before the court.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Logan. I warn the member for Mermaid Beach in relation to that matter. I ask you to come back to the bill.

Mr STEVENS: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. In terms of the bill, I am trying to say that in terms of the integrity of local government, which this bill is designed to improve, it is absolutely imperative. It is a primary concern for all those who love and live local government. The fact is that we see it used for political purposes rather than betterment.

Until 12 or 24 hours ago, the intent of this legislation was for political purposes. That is not what this legislation should be about. It should be about providing a better framework in which local governments operate instead of hiding behind the pretence of bettering the ALP's chances of winning local government, state government or anywhere. Yes, at the end of the day I support this legislation that we will vote on, but I am totally disappointed in all of this time and effort, threatening all the people involved in local government, for no outcome whatsoever. In 12 months time, I have a big surprise in terms of compulsory preferential voting at the state level which will not affect this bill.