




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.48 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the bills before the House. I would like to take the debate in a different direction. Firstly, I acknowledge some of the points raised about donors. Who could argue about having transparency of donations? I get it.

The member for Glass House made an interesting contribution about compulsory preferential voting. It is not a one-dimensional issue. Compulsory preferential voting has a different meaning at a local level than it does at a state or federal level. In response to some of the assertions made in that earlier contribution, I think who is for compulsory preferential voting depends on the politics of the day. I know for a fact that, in the last parliament, a lot of people in the LNP were certainly excited about it when One Nation was on the rise and their preferences were looking to come their way.

It can be a matter of timing as to whether or not people choose to support compulsory preferential voting. Those comments are in response to comments on compulsory preferential voting, but if we are going to have a mature debate about it, compulsory preferential voting is a very different proposition in Boulia, with councillors who have no party affiliation, to a state government where there is a much broader array of issues and a much more sophisticated political infrastructure built around parliament. I do not think it is as simple as saying what is your position on compulsory preferential voting across all levels of government. I think it is important to make that distinction.

Mr Powell: So you can get consistency.

Mr KATTER: I take that interjection. The member for Glass House keeps piping up about this. He talks about consistency. I have just tried to explain—perhaps he did not understand—that there are nuances between state and local government. If he is going to stand by the position that a similar system should apply to Boulia as should apply to the state government, I am happy for him to take that position, but I certainly would not have that position.

It has appeared that the government has listened to stakeholders when it comes to compulsory preferential voting, and good for them. Local government certainly did not want it, and good for them. It is important to make that distinction. From a political point of view, it seems to be convenient for governments, both Labor and LNP, to back compulsory preferential voting at different times depending on the prevailing political winds of the day. Personally, I think it is important to acknowledge in relation to compulsory preferential voting that point of forcing people to think and consider their vote, to try to get people a bit more engaged in the process so that fewer people would see their vote not exhausted so fast. Whilst it has its faults, it is not a perfect system and can deliver some bad results, I think by and large, certainly at the state level, it delivers a more robust system.

What is missing from this debate is that there seems to be a growing appetite to legislate good government at local government levels. I do not have a wealth of experience in local government, but I do have experience. I was in Mount Isa City Council for four years. I was really disappointed in my time there insofar as it was very difficult to try to engage in the process. It applies more in the smaller more rural councils where you are a lot more on the ground at the coalface with the issues. In a place like Richmond you would know the roads there, you are constantly being batted up against the roads and you take to it the council and you are told that is operational, stay away from it, wait until you have your quarterly works meeting and you can address it then with the engineer. It may be a consulting engineer who you do not see again. It becomes very hard to take those concerns from the public and action them because you are supposed to be involved in a policy level. I get why there is a process but I think the equilibrium has been disrupted and I think it has gone too far. We have tried to control too much at the local government level and we have lost our autonomy.

I think I can speak with authority on those rural and regional areas. It is nice to have scrutiny and try to keep people in check, but there is a cost to that. I think we have severely lost autonomy and the ability for councillors to inject themselves at that local level. There are always theories—conspiracy theories if you like—that governments at the state level want more control over local governments. Whether it is done intentionally or not it does not matter; I think it is a very real thing. There is a cost to sometimes not having as much scrutiny and legislation. In the last few years there have been some highly evident bad outcomes in local government, but there is that saying that you cannot always legislate for idiots. There will always be people who come into these roles who do not do the right thing, but there are a lot of councillors out there who are doing the right thing and want to get involved and who are heavily constrained by the limitations that are put on their ability to get involved. It always comes back to them only involving themselves at a policy level, not at an operational level. I think it is a big issue that is confronting councils.

The way I see it, quite often councillors are feeling constrained or that it is difficult to engage in the process and they are copping a lot of criticism from their constituents in town. They just do not have the grunt they used to have to have a greater control over the outcome. There is more and more legislation shrouded around that activity. It is perhaps done with good intent, but I think we need to call it for what it is and recognise there is a problem with autonomy in those local councils. Bringing in more legislation will contribute to that. I raise that as a deep concern of mine. I could not say that there is a lot in this bill that heavily impacts in that space, but I have had a lot of complaints about the previous legislation, which has people walking out of the room all the time. That is probably more acute in the small towns when you are a part of every club and it is pretty hard to not be involved. Usually, people get voted in as councillors by virtue of the fact they are involved in the clubs and groups in town. If there is a problem with the mayor or if there is a rift in the council they can start playing games and getting them to stand out for everything. I think that is at risk of being exploited. I think there are problems and we have to be really careful about applying more and more legislation in these areas and reacting to the poor behaviour of a select view.