



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 October 2019

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

**ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise to contribute to the 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. I am a proud member of the Economics and Governance Committee. As the member for Logan correctly pointed out, we did receive quite strong feedback in relation to the proposed changes. It did take quite a while to digest it all, as the bill was first referred to the committee in May.

The Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is designed to increase the confidence of the community in local governments, and I support the recommendations contained in the Belcarra report. We need to have transparency and integrity at all levels of government. Too often the perception of politicians is that we are 'in it for ourselves' and that we do not seek to serve the people we represent. The Belcarra report has opened a conversation about all levels of government and how they can operate with the highest levels of integrity. I have been encouraged to see that local governments in particular have been open to the changes Belcarra recommended, and I commend them for their desire to improve the integrity of their systems and processes. Councils do have a lot of direct power, so it is important that they have a system around them that can monitor those sorts of things. In fact, I am sure many of us have seen that they often have more direct power than some of us in this room.

It is important that people know who they are voting for on election day, and the real-time disclosure of electoral expenditure, the disclosure of candidates' interests and the disclosure of gifts and donors all goes towards this. We cannot have councillors running as independents when they clearly are aligned with a party and the public is not aware of their leanings. I think there are still concerns regarding how this will be monitored and even when the period of disclosure or candidature starts. It was clear from the public briefings that this is yet to be clarified and it may cause confusion.

This bill should be designed to support the intent of the CCC's recommendations from the Operation Belcarra report to minimise the risk of corruption and increase transparency and accountability in local government. There are significant aspects of the bill that have no relationship to that report. The Brisbane City Council and Local Government Association of Queensland stand with the LNP in stating that this bill should not be used for one side's political advantage. It must be for the integrity of our local governments, otherwise it undermines the broad purpose.

On the issue of compulsory preferential voting, I was pleased to see the government has finally listened and scrapped it. There was clearly very little support for it, with fewer than half of Queenslanders believing it would improve council elections. I think that our system of voting in local government is good, and people should not be forced to preference candidates they do not want to vote

for. They have essentially solved a problem of their own making by scrapping this today. The committee heard from the Assistant Electoral Commissioner on compulsory preferential voting. They used data from the state election to show there has been a near doubling in informal votes since the change was brought in at the 2017 election. It jumped from 2.11 per cent in 2015 to 4.34 per cent in 2017. That is a significant increase, with 123,000 informal votes.

In committee hearings we also heard officers from the local government department question the conflict of interest issue, which has thankfully been resolved today. It was certainly one of the biggest issues we heard from stakeholders. They said that it dominated their discussions with councillors as they consulted on the bill. Unfortunately, there was no data available on the changes already made and how much time it took up. I think it needs further investigation to see the impact it is having on the ground.

In the hearings, I also sought to find out how the disclosures operated and how they would be defined, such as when someone becomes a candidate. I am already seeing it visibly in my area. We have people who are campaigning in one of the relocated council divisions from Surfers Paradise to around Labrador, of division 7. The department said that it was when they publicly announce their candidature, like a campaign launch, as well as laying out a budget and getting money into their dedicated campaign account—things like that. I think that is still a little unclear. I remember asking whether it is when someone creates a Facebook page saying they are running for a particular division. I think that does need clarity as we move towards the March 2020 elections. I would hate to see some candidates inadvertently get caught out by those changes.

I also asked the department about the rollout of the mandatory online training. This is on the local government department's website under 'So you want to be a councillor?' although I note that the last time I checked it was still unavailable. The sooner this is published the better. I know they have been working on this since at least May when we first examined this bill. This is incredibly important. Candidates and prospective candidates need to know what their obligations are. From memory, they said it would only take an hour or two. The quicker they can get that up, the better it will be because there are already people out in the field running for the next election.

In relation to the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I thank the Attorney-General for the minor amendments foreshadowed in response to some of the committee's recommendations. I echo the shadow Attorney-General who mentioned our concerns with the deadline change for postal vote applications being moved from two days prior to the election to 12 days prior to the election. As he pointed out, that is particularly important for regional areas. In addition, the shadow Attorney-General pointed out the issues with the amendments to section 106 to provide that a person who is serving a sentence of imprisonment of three years or longer is not entitled to vote at an election for an electoral district. He did point out that only two other jurisdictions allow this in the way that is being put forward here.

Just to wrap up, there are some sensible changes here. The most controversial have been dropped and I thank the government for listening to basically every stakeholder on those.