




Speech By  
**Daniel Purdie**

**MEMBER FOR NINDERRY**

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## **ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (4.29 pm): I rise to speak to the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2019. I acknowledge the members of my former committee, from whom we have heard. This is part of a string of bills proposed by the Labor government to reform electoral processes at state and local government levels. It is yet another proposed electoral reform bill with heaps of amendments that are blatantly driven by ideological Labor Party pursuits. Many of these amendments do not come from independent reports to government or public input. The LNP supports only the proposed local government changes that were created from independent reports and public submissions.

We support the local government changes within the bill that align with the CCC's 2017 Belcarra report. That report outlined a new framework that aimed to reduce corruption risk within our local government election processes arising from the 2016 council elections. Since the release of the Belcarra report in 2017, this government has tried to introduce a series of electoral reforms. In addition, the government has included additional amendments that are viewed by many as rigging the system in its favour—amendments that align with Labor's self-interest and preservation going into the next state election and that have little to do with corruption reduction.

Since the original Belcarra recommendations released by the CCC, another council election was held this year. We are now almost halfway through 2020 and we are still speaking about council electoral reforms that should have been enacted a long time ago. Why does it continue to take this Palaszczuk Labor government so long to enact the recommendations from a 2017 report, which is a framework that was intended to secure the confidence of voters by the next council election cycle? Unfortunately, the local government amendments in this bill are too late.

To add layers of complexity to Labor's overdue process in reducing corruption in local government elections, we are presented with myriad last-minute amendments regarding state elections in this same bill. The government continues to tell Queenslanders that it has fully adopted the CCC's recommendations, but that is far from the truth. One council election has passed since these changes to reduce corruption should have taken place. The delay is not due to the current health crisis or the economic crisis. It should have been complete over a year ago. Perhaps the government's current complacency is an indication of a tired government and an old party that has been in power for too long. It is disappointing to watch how slow the government moves most of the time, especially when we see how fast it is capable of introducing last-minute amendments, such as we have witnessed last night and today.

This bill contains last-minute proposed amendments that have not been adequately reviewed. There has been no committee process or public consultation, and they are not from direct recommendations or independent reports to government such as those contained in the Belcarra or Soorley reports. Due to their last-minute nature, these amendments are not fair or transparent. The beneficiaries of the changes are supposed to be Queenslanders, not partisan parliamentarians.

From the start, electoral changes have been plagued by unnecessary delays, resulting in a lack of enactment or implementation in time for the next local or state election cycle. A place where more time should have been afforded was within the original time frame for public consultation, which is a public process of parliament that is intended to increase fairness and transparency to create better legislation that balances the needs of all stakeholders. However, when you are trying to cram in legislation by the end of the year, you are left with a consideration period that is too short and that is disrespectful to organisations and members of the public who want to have meaningful input. Fortunately, 73 submissions were made to the bill, although many expressed that they had inadequate time to prepare due to the consultation period extending over the Christmas holidays. Due to the complexity and significance of these proposed electoral reforms, that was unfair to the public. Many stakeholders and not-for-profit organisations expressed concerns about the burden the new laws would place on them in terms of meeting the mandatory disclosure requirements. Additionally, concerns were raised about the definition of 'electoral expenditure' and communication and the effect on discouraging third parties from engaging in advocacy work.

Moving to the Trad laws, the Crime and Corruption Commission itself criticised the proposed amendments, in particular the implication of limiting prosecutions for breaches of disclosure.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock for a moment, please. Member for Ninderry, you have referred to legislation within the bill by an incorrect name. Please refer to the correct name rather than by referring to a member of the House.

**Mr PURDIE:** The CCC itself criticised the proposed amendments, in particular the implication of limiting prosecutions for breaches of disclosure in matters where dishonest intention is able to be proved. At a recent media conference, CCC Chairman Alan MacSporran stated that the current proposed laws duplicate and provide a lesser penalty, so it is lowering the bar rather than raising it. It is a contradiction that a bill to reduce corruption would actually water down penalties for those who breach public trust. The public has a right to question the purpose of this legislation and, at the very least, ask why this government did not move faster to ensure identified corruption risks during the 2016 council elections were addressed in time for our most recent local government election.

The public also has a right to ask why this government would create a new integrity offence that overlaps existing Criminal Code offences, such as misconduct in public office and fraud offences, with a new watered-down penalty. The implication is significant as a previous indictable offence would become a misdemeanour under some circumstances. A reduction in penalty does not take a stance on reducing corruption for public office holders; it turns a serious crime into a slap on the wrist.

This bill has not adequately addressed the key integrity issues raised by the CCC or the concerns raised by the public. It is paramount that proper transparent and accountable legislation is in place so that our electoral processes can be further strengthened and not weakened. It is also important that legislation creates adequate controls and checkpoints to ensure public office holders and candidates who are committing fraud are caught, fairly investigated and charged within well-defined laws. The penalty for fraud should meet community expectations and a misdemeanour falls short of that.

During these difficult times, we have seen how important it is for the public to trust government advice. Corruption within government puts that very important relationship at risk. It is our duty, as elected officials, to protect public trust now and into the future.