




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2020

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

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (3.52 pm): Guess what? Four months out from the Queensland state election we have legislation before the House that is basically poll driven for the Labor government to enhance their possibility of winning the next election. It is very disappointing that this legislation encompassed a notification at 9.09 last night, when some members were in bed getting their beauty sleep, of 229 amendments to the legislation. The committee of which I am a member, along with the member for Logan, spent a lot of time examining the bill when it was referred to it in late 2019. We said, 'We have to get this done urgently before the local government elections.' Fortunately, sanity prevailed and we took further interest and further direction, and now here we are today four months out from an election.

The bill amends legislation regarding local governments and the state government changes to the election. Mr MacSporran from the CCC was obviously the genesis of much of this legislation. I would advise that as part of the all-powerful Ethics Committee I will be very tempered in the comments I make on some of the matters that are in this particular bill that have been brought down upon members because of other behaviours that the CCC noted at that time. I will touch on that personally as that committee is involved, as you are aware, Mr Speaker, in other matters. Because of that, I will not pursue a matter that I would have really liked to have pursued in speaking to this particular legislation.

As I said, this piece of government legislation is very much about increasing the power of the union backed Labor candidates at the upcoming election in October. With somewhere in the vicinity of \$87,000 per trade union as a third party and with 26 unions, there is the capacity to throw forward a million dollars at the state election while limiting the business community, which normally supports the LNP, in their capacity to donate. Of course, the business community is all about jobs for Queensland whereas Labor government members are about jobs—care of the poll in October—for themselves. Unfortunately, they do not care about the mining industry, with New Hope and Adani being prime examples. The tourism industry on the Gold Coast is suffering because of the current border closure, but they really only care about polling. The only job they care about is their own. Unfortunately, this legislation is designed quite clearly to enhance their prospects and decrease the LNP's prospects at the upcoming election.

I talk again from experience. The great former Labor president Barry Jones conducted a complete review of public funding for the federal government. Afterwards he said that one of his greatest regrets was that all he did was lift the base and further moneys were added on top from the public. As honourable members will see in this bill, there is an increase from around \$3 per vote to \$6 per vote coming out of the public purse, from the taxpayers of Queensland, for the election of particular members and political parties. That is fine, but if we were to go and ask people in the street whether they want to see more taxpayers' money going towards getting candidates elected, they would quite clearly tell us what the answer is: no. It would be loud and clear: no. They would see that as politicians looking after themselves thanks to taxpayers' money coming into the election.

Apart from those sorts of issues, as I said in relation to the changes brought about for this upcoming election, including such things as the reduction in the amount of bunting and signage at elections, they are all matters that are in the interests of the party that sits on that side of the House—for the moment—in order to enhance its electoral prospects.

I return to the local government component, which is something I am very familiar with—did I ever tell you I was mayor of the Gold Coast? The Gold Coast was the subject—and we see some recommendations regarding this—of Operation Yabber. For those members who are not informed, Yabba was a loudmouthed heckler on the hill of the Sydney Cricket Ground. That is exactly what we have here: the hecklers of the Gold Coast city council. This is the third inquiry by the CCC into the Gold Coast city council and they have come up with nothing—no corruption. It is not like Ipswich or other areas. They just love going down to the Gold Coast, presumably because of its so-called reputation as a wonderful place to do business.

Mr Power: It might have been the previous mayor!

Mr STEVENS: That was Ron Clarke. Do not be rude to Ron. That is elder abuse in elder abuse awareness week. Mr Speaker, control the member for Logan.

Mr SPEAKER: You have the call.

Mr STEVENS: They have conducted three investigations costing millions of taxpayers' dollars. They have gone on three 'let's go fishing' trips down at the Gold Coast city council and have found nothing on every journey. As the Minister for Local Government alluded to, what they did find were some staffing matters. That is all that came out of this 'corruption' matter. As the minister referred to, it was a staffing matter between a council adviser and the CEO. From day one there were many ructions down there. I am very familiar with that part of it.

There were councillors put under threat by the actions of the CCC and were publicly pointed at as having been involved in corruption when there was no corruption found. After an extensive multimillion dollar—I do not know the final cost, as we know Mr MacSporran keeps his \$65 million expenditure to himself. The fact of the matter is that there have been three fishing trips on the Gold Coast and it needs to stop. There has been no corruption down there. It has been a very well organised council. My years there were a long time ago. I applaud the people involved now, particularly the CEO, who has kept a close eye on matters in relation to council officers et cetera. The Gold Coast is absolutely clear.

The committee received a number of recommendations. In fact, Mr MacSporran appeared before our committee and basically said that he believes there should be a different rule for council advisers as there is for advisers to ministerial staff in that they should not necessarily be under the CEO direction because they have a different job to do in terms of looking after mayors and councillors. As the mayor said, it is not a corruption issue; it is a staffing issue. As Queensland taxpayers, we have paid millions of dollars for another investigation and it has been a waste of time.

I refer to the part of the bill relating to the state government and to the Greens complaining about donations. When they get a million dollar donation from one particular person it is okay, but everyone else is corrupt! I cannot believe that it is not right and proper for the business community to support a party that delivers on its philosophies in terms of no direct involvement. Mr MacSporran said that we needed an inquiry to find out the relevance in relation to a state. We support the local government recommendations of Mr MacSporran, but he said that he did not support the bill's proposal to limit prosecutions for noncompliance with disclosure of obligations such that only matters of dishonest intention need to be proved. We have not agreed with Mr MacSporran, but this legislation will be passed here today for their betterment.

(Time expired)