




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION
(EXPENDITURE CAPS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (3.55 pm): I rise in support of the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022. This legislation will establish an electoral expenditure caps scheme for local government elections which will first apply at the 2024 local government quadrennial election. It will apply to all electoral participants, including: councillor and mayoral candidates, groups of candidates, political parties and third parties participating in an election. The proposed local government election expenditure caps scheme was modelled on the state electoral caps scheme already in place under the Electoral Act 1992.

Other than the actual amounts of the caps, the proposed scheme for local government is consistent with the key features of the state scheme, including: third-party registration; seven-month capped electoral expenditure; indexation of caps; penalty and recovery provisions; compliance and record keeping. Unlike the state scheme, the proposed caps for mayors and councillors are grouped into tiers, which recognises the different shapes and sizes of Queensland's local governments and their local government areas.

This bill aims to give effect to changes by ensuring mayoral and councillor candidate expenditure caps will be determined by the number of electors across the LGA in which the mayoral or councillor candidate contests the election except for Brisbane City Council, which is a set figure. There will be allowances for the grouping of candidates and those candidates that are endorsed by political parties, which in Queensland at the time of this bill being debated is only within a small number of LGA areas. The bill also contains amendments to third-party donor registration to align with the state system with a relevant threshold of \$6,000, with the registered third-party expenditure cap being set at 100 per cent of the mayoral cap in the relevant LGA without the ability for caps to be pooled across the LGAs. Other amendments include the indexation of electoral expenditure caps and compliance and enforcement provisions.

In the Deputy Premier's introductory speech the Deputy Premier advised that the objectives of the bill were to ensure a consistent, transparent and open local government electoral system. I support the comments of the Deputy Premier, and in particular I would like to add my own perspective to this debate stemming from my former role before entering this place as a former candidate for local government and a member of the department of local government. In a regional context, my own experience of working in the department of local government, but also being a local government candidate, showed it was very clear that for potential candidates there was an uneven playing field for individuals based on the amount of funding they could spend in an election campaign.

During my time as a departmental officer one of my responsibilities was to manage the rollout of the So you want to be a councillor? program information sessions in regional areas of the Wide Bay-Burnett and central regions of our state—which, by the way, were a huge success, in my judgement, in helping potential candidates for local government to determine whether the job was for

them or otherwise. I urge the Deputy Premier to give consideration to continuing this program of information sessions across our state prior to the 2024 local government elections to ensure potential candidates are fully informed of the pros and cons of running for this very important level of government within Queensland—I note that I trained the member for Gympie when he ran for the council, which was probably a mistake—and in particular in rural and regional areas, which have their own set of unique circumstances for potential candidates.

There is great work being done by the department of local government by extraordinary staff. They are a credit to the public service. They are frank and fearless champions of our local democracy. Every one of them tries very hard to ensure that candidates in the future are well informed before they make that decision to stand for council, but I am a little biased.

From my experience talking with many potential regional candidates over a number of local government elections, it became very clear that candidates who would struggle to fund their own campaigns or who did not have considerable backing from a benefactor were already at a disadvantage in regard to their success or otherwise. Whilst this did not necessarily deter a popular and well-known individual from running, it was very clear that those individuals who sought to serve their community at a local government level were further disadvantaged by their inability to fund their campaigns.

Many potential candidates would confide in me after an information session and say that they would make a determination to contest or otherwise based purely on the costs associated with running for local government. Some would say that the cost of campaigning alone—in regards to time and travel across in many cases vast rural and regional areas as well as managing their finances within their own personal lives—put them at a disadvantage against those who had effectively unlimited budgets due to their wealth. It was unfortunate that during my time as a departmental officer I saw individuals who were very talented and would have brought a great benefit to their local communities by being in the contest for a position on their local council were incapacitated in their desire to serve their communities because their opponents had the ability to simply outspend them.

I am also fully supportive of this legislation because of my lived experiences and my desire to see individuals have a level playing field. I particularly think of those of a younger age or from a lower socio-economic background who have not yet been able to accumulate enough wealth or potential funding for themselves to be in a position to run a successful race for a position on their local government and are then eliminated simply because their opponent can outspend them. This was so when I had my first shot at local government over two decades ago. As a first time candidate, I was confronted with the incapacity at that time to be able to run for a division of my local government because, as a working man with a young family, my ability to be able to raise enough funds to challenge my wealthier and well-established opponents was just a bridge too far.

Any way you look at this, I think having a system that promotes this is not a good outcome for democracy in our state. I believe that this legislation goes a long way towards ensuring that we can give access to individuals who believe they can make a difference in their communities. The capacity to outspend should never override the genuine capacity to serve. I have no doubt that no-one here would agree that wealth should be a sole determiner for representation. I firmly believe that we do not want a situation like that in our state—where people with enormous capacity to serve and do good for their communities and the people of Queensland are restricted simply because they do not have the wealth and the financial ability to outspend other candidates. We hope it will never befall our state that we get to the point where we have a democratic system like that in America where only the very wealthy or the very privileged can ever become an elected community representative. The numbers that are thrown around in America regarding the costs associated with running for their councils, state seats or federal seats are simply eye-watering with regard to the level of wealth, privilege or pure dollars needed to get anywhere near being a potential candidate, let alone a successful candidate.

We should be pushing back at every opportunity now and into the future against that sort of a model because this is not what we want for a thriving democratic Queensland. We as legislators should never allow this form of elitism to happen to our democratic system, particularly at the elected level that is closest to our communities. I am all for the capping of electoral expenditure. I believe it levels the playing field, I believe it builds a better democracy, and I believe it gives every person in Queensland, and indeed the voters, an opportunity to stand and select individuals to represent and lead in their communities based on their capacity to be leaders and to serve their communities, and not on the depth of their or their mates' pockets.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Premier and the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for the work they have done on providing a working set of recommendations. I would like to particularly thank all the participants for their contributions to this

legislation and acknowledge the work done by the committee secretariat. This legislation meets its intent and creates a more modern legislative framework to underpin local government democracy within our state.

In the time I have left, I would like to talk to the amendment that was brought in by the Deputy Premier this morning. The member for Maryborough and the member for Bundaberg clearly articulated what this amendment is about. This amendment to reduce the frequency of rent increases to once a year to stabilise rents in the private rental market is a good thing. We need it. Like the member for Maryborough, I have had constituents come to my office who have been in tears with regard to the amount of rental increase that has been brought before them in only a six-month period. They would have one increase and then get another increase six months later. I believe this amendment is in the best interests of the tenants, and I fully support the amendment. I support this bill.