




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR CONDUCT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (3.22 pm): I rise to address the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I hopefully will be able to return to the substantive component of the bill that many members of this House have already addressed. I heard the member for South Brisbane comment around the fact that many of us are dealing often with complaints about council inactivity or council not doing what they should be doing. I keep telling my constituents that is because the world has completely and utterly changed for councillors. The councillors that they once knew pre Belcarra and pre the legislation can no longer operate.

Do not get me wrong: there were a number of councillors who clearly did the wrong thing and needed the book thrown at them. As other members have said—and what this bill demonstrates—is that perhaps there was overreach in terms of dealing with councillor complaints. Now we have to bring it back because, as the member for Southern Downs has said, councillors have become hogtied, fearful and hamstrung. They are unable to do their day-to-day jobs of delivering for their divisions—in the area that I represent, they are the divisions of the Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast councils.

I hope to return to that, but I want to pick up on one element of this bill others may not have—the reclassification of the Moreton Bay Regional Council. In July 2023, the Local Government (Moreton Bay City Council) and Other Legislation Amendment Regulation 2023 amended the Local Government Regulation 2012 to change the clarification of the Moreton Bay Regional Council to Moreton Bay City Council, as well as other subordinate legislation to update references to MBRC. This bill makes consequential amendments to various acts to replace references to MBRC accordingly.

I think it is important to reflect on what has occurred in the Moreton Bay region—the southern part of the electorate of Glass House. Many may question why a state representative, who represents a very rural part of Moreton Bay, would want to reflect on the fact that we are no longer Moreton Bay Regional Council and we are now Moreton Bay City Council. I applaud this decision by Mayor Peter Flannery and his team and their consultation process with the broader community. I understand that there were a number of people who were concerned about this change and what it might mean, but let me just give you a couple of key statistics about Moreton Bay that will demonstrate why the change from region to city is actually very important.

At the moment, the region is doing the heavy lifting when it comes to population growth in South-East Queensland. By 2041 it is anticipated it will have a population of 700,000 people—that is larger than Tasmania. They are the third largest local government area in Australia—not Queensland but Australia. They are the fifth fastest growing region in Australia and they are the third largest in terms of regional dwellings in Australia. What is interesting is that after they were branded Moreton Bay Regional Council following the amalgamation of the Pine Rivers, Redcliffe and Caboolture shires and they would go to Brisbane or Canberra to pitch their case for infrastructure requirements in particular,

the first question they would often be asked is: where are you again; which part of the state are you in; how far north are you; how far west are you? Little did people realise that they are literally across the Pine River from Brisbane City Council and the third largest LGA and the fifth fastest growing.

By becoming a city, it is now very clear that they operate within South-East Queensland and that they operate with many of the pressures that South-East Queensland local government areas are facing. I want to draw on that. The other thing I like about what Mayor Peter Flannery and his councillors of the now City of Moreton Bay are doing is that they realise they are not like Brisbane where there is a central business district. They are an amalgamation of three former shires. They have areas around Strathpine, North Lakes, Redcliffe and Caboolture and growing areas at Caboolture West and Morayfield South. They are now talking about becoming a polycentric city—not one central business district but five maybe even six. It is important for them that they get the public transport and road infrastructure they need to make that workable and that they are given the powers to develop employment opportunities locally so that people might be able to live around Strathpine and work at North Lakes or vice versa or live in Caboolture and work in Redcliffe and easily get to and fro—and ideally not just by car.

When the mayor and his councillors have sought infrastructure investment from the state and federal governments for the region, it has proved really challenging. We believe it will be less so as a city. There are some key projects that they desperately need like Buchanan Road—a \$300 million connector between the Bruce Highway at Morayfield and the future Caboolture West development known as Waraba, which sits inside the electorate of Glass House. We are eventually expecting to have a city the size of Gladstone in that area. Similarly, there is Blewers Road, a \$200 million project that will link Morayfield South to Waraba itself. Further south, Oakey Flat overpass is another \$200 million investment. That is without mentioning the two state projects—the Bruce Highway western alternative, which will ultimately link Beerburrum through Waraba, through Moorina and Rocksberg and down into Narangba and onto Bald Hills; and the Moreton Connector, which will do the same on the eastern side of the Bruce Highway. These projects are desperately needed in the City of Moreton Bay.

It is disappointing that it has come to this. They are concerned that the government has stopped listening to them at the state level. They have raised repeatedly that the projections that Treasury use, and then ultimately the infrastructure departments use around population, are woefully wrong. They are out of whack with the reality of what is happening in terms of population growth. Therefore, investment decisions are not being made based on up-to-date population figures. They are failing to get the leadership they need, despite the fact that they have the Deputy Premier as one of their local members.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr POWELL: I am interested. Back on 24 October I submitted a question on notice to the Premier asking to advise, since the 2020 election, how often the Premier had visited the City of Moreton Bay—Australia's third largest local government area—and/or met with the mayor to discuss this growing region's priorities.

Mr Janetzki: How many times?

Mr POWELL: Unfortunately, I do not have the answer to that because the response is not due until 23 November. I look forward to getting that response.

Mr TANTARI: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order is on relevance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Member, I have been listening to your contribution. I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr POWELL: As I said, one significant element of this bill is the changes to a number of acts—consequential amendments to acts—to replace references to the Moreton Bay Regional Council with Moreton Bay City Council. Therefore, it is really important that we listen to the needs of that growing community. We cannot make the mistakes of other council areas where we have retrofitted infrastructure after we have put the people in there. We cannot make those mistakes at Waraba or Morayfield South. This region is already bursting at the seams. We need to be investing—and investing quickly—to ensure people can move about and not only get from where they reside but also get to where they work and home again to enjoy precious time with their family.

I said that I wanted to return briefly to the local government councillor conduct aspect of the legislation. As I said, so many constituents of both Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay are frustrated that they cannot seem to get the action they used to from their local councillor. The councillor used to be the person closest to the grassroots. They were the ones in touch with their constituents around the potholes on the roads, their rubbish not being collected or the libraries not having the books they

wanted. Now it is almost impossible because councillors are fearful because they are hamstrung and because of the OIA that they cannot give directions to the council officers. In some cases, there is some obscure conflict of interest which prevents them from doing the job they were elected to do.

It is my hope that the changes we are debating here today will free that up a bit and will take some of those pedantic, frivolous and vexatious claims about councillor conduct out of the OIA or allow the OIA to dismiss them relatively quickly and easily so that the councillors can get on with doing the job they were elected to do. That is what we need to empower them to do. To be blunt—and I reflect on contributions by our shadow minister for local government—we may have to come back and look at this again. We may not fully resolve this in this piece of legislation. I think it is important, as the committee mentioned, that we continually monitor the effectiveness of the OIA to pick up those local councillors who are categorically doing the wrong thing or not doing the job our constituents expect them to do.