




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2023

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


 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.57 pm): I rise to address the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022. From the outset I wish to reaffirm the Liberal National Party's support for measures which enhance integrity, transparency and accountability across all levels of government, including local government. Integrity, transparency and accountability in government first begins with elections, and in our democracy it is vital that elections are conducted fairly and free from undue influence. With that in mind, I wish to turn to the specific legislation which is currently before the Queensland parliament. This legislation originated from the Economics and Governance Committee of the 56th Queensland parliament, following its consideration of the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2020 and consideration of recommendation 1 of the Crime and Corruption Commission's Operation Belcarra report.

Tabled on 15 September 2020, the committee made seven recommendations including those pertaining to the alignment of the definition of electorate expenditure in the Local Government Electoral Act and the Electoral Act; the establishment of a sliding scale of expenditure caps for local government elections; consulting with stakeholders to determine relevant cap amounts; and establishing expenditure caps for third parties. The Queensland state government, having supported the seven recommendations in principle last year, released a discussion paper for consideration and feedback prior to the introduction of this specific legislation. Under this legislation, a new electoral expenditure caps scheme for local government elections will be established and applicable to all candidates from the 2024 local government elections.

As outlined by the 57th Queensland parliament State Development and Regional Industries Committee in its report No. 37, the key features of the electoral caps scheme for local government include: councillor and mayoral candidates with individual caps based on a sliding scale in recognition of the different sizes of local governments in Queensland and the number of electors in a local government ward or division; groups of candidates who will be able to pool the individual caps of candidates in a group within a local government area and up to a certain capped amount; registered political parties that endorse a candidate in an election who will be able to pool the individual caps of their endorsed candidates within a local government area and up to a certain capped amount; and third parties such as trade unions, industry associations and community groups, if registered, who will be able to spend as much as an individual candidate and, if unregistered, third parties who will be able to spend up to \$6,000.

I note through the committee's examination of this legislation and through submissions and feedback provided by relevant stakeholders that this legislation is broadly supported with the exception of some specific concerns. This includes the Crime and Corruption Commission, which was supportive and overall believes that this legislation will increase the consistency between state and local

government elections. I also note that the Local Government Association of Queensland was also generally supportive of the policy framework with some exceptions, including the need for a statutory review to be held within the first 12 months after the 2024 local government elections.

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.00 pm), continuing: In continuing my contribution to this legislation, this is an incredibly important aspect and one which the Liberal National Party fully supports, which is why, as articulated by the shadow minister for local government, the Liberal National Party will be moving its amendment to include this statutory review.

Queenslanders deserve nothing less than to know that their democratic institutions and the processes of electing their representatives are sound and capable. A government that is committed to integrity, transparency and accountability would ensure that having made a substantial change to its electoral system it would review these changes to ensure they properly serve the community. As we know, when the Labor state government last made significant changes via stage 2 of the Belcarra report, it promised a government review within two years. Queenslanders are still waiting for that review.

The Liberal National Party is not opposed to this bill. That being said, there is no doubt that the introduction of a comprehensive expenditure caps scheme for local government elections is still a significant change to the electoral system in Queensland. Accordingly, the Liberal National Party has every right to be concerned with the Palaszczuk state Labor government's track record and history of electoral changes that have been made in the state of Queensland. Who could forget, with less than 20 minutes notice, Labor's complete overhaul of the voting system for Queensland state elections, which was solely for the benefit of the Labor Party.

Further, there are still concerns that the Palaszczuk state Labor government's severe and one-sided laws allow Labor, through the unions, to collect millions of dollars more than other parties to be spent on elections. Labor and the unions combined already have an election spend advantage of 26 to 1 at Queensland state elections and this legislation will allow the same arrangement for Brisbane City Council and other local government elections as well.

In my remaining time I wish to stress the importance of the Palaszczuk state Labor government ensuring that the operation of the upcoming local government elections are properly resourced with all participating fully aware of their obligations with appropriate training provided. The Electoral Commission of Queensland has already advised that, whilst it is confident it will be able to administer this new scheme and provide the appropriate training to candidates and parties, it will require additional staffing and budgetary resourcing to meet these objectives. With only a year before the next local government elections time is fast running out. Queensland cannot again become a national embarrassment, as it was in 2020 when the local government elections were beset with a multitude of operational issues due to Labor's failure to ensure adequate resourcing of the Electoral Commission of Queensland. It is incumbent on the Palaszczuk state Labor government to ensure that these reforms are implemented properly and carefully and with a strong attention to detail. It is also vitally important that a comprehensive statutory review takes place after 12 months of the local government elections. I encourage all members of the Queensland parliament to support the Liberal National Party's amendment.

Whilst on the subject of local government, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the dedication and service of two outstanding local government councillors, Councillor David McLachlan and Councillor Peter Matic, both of whom have announced they will not recontest the 2024 local government elections. Both Councillor McLachlan and Councillor Matic have served the people of Brisbane and their respective wards of Hamilton and Paddington for 16 and 17 years respectively and both councillors have been instrumental in delivering significant public transport, parks and local road improvements throughout their communities and worked tirelessly for the people of Brisbane during its significant weather and flooding events. I thank them for their service and wish them all the best for the future.

Finally, I wish to briefly address the amendments as introduced by the Deputy Premier pertaining to tenancy and housing. The inclusion of these amendments is totally representative of this third-term Labor government's chaotic and dysfunctional approach to good policy and good government here in Queensland. As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for housing and public works, the member for Everton, alluded to earlier in this debate, the real reason why these amendments have been rushed through and included with this totally unrelated legislation is because the Labor state government does not want these amendments to be subjected to the full scrutiny and proper parliamentary committee

processes. This is certainly no way to govern Queensland. Labor has rushed through these amendments because it has to be seen to be doing something. It has failed to act over a long period of time and now it is trying to urgently rush these through without proper scrutiny. Queenslanders know that this Labor state government has failed to comprehensively address Queensland's housing and rental crisis, a crisis that has occurred under the watch of this Labor state government over the last eight years.

Since coming to power in 2015 this Labor government has overseen a 33 per cent decrease in the trend of lot approvals, which is equivalent to 60,000 houses that could have been built but have not been built because Labor will not address social and affordable housing. This is a crisis that continues to worsen under this Labor state government. Yet again, as these amendments show, Labor has failed to strike an appropriate balance between the rights and responsibilities of both renters and landlords in Queensland. At a time when rental market vacancy rates are the tightest they have ever been, when we are seeing almost daily stories of Queenslanders struggling to find a rental property—they are sleeping in tents or in their cars—Queenslanders deserve better than the rushed and ill-thought-out, last-minute amendments that have been added to this legislation.

The Labor government could have properly planned and considered these amendments by going through the proper scrutiny and oversight mechanisms that exist here in the Queensland parliament. They have failed to do that and that is why we have a housing affordability crisis here in Queensland combined with the cost-of-living crisis which this Labor government is completely out of touch with. They are not listening to Queenslanders when it comes to these issues. Queenslanders are struggling. At the last minute we have seen this included within this totally unrelated legislation. If the government were properly planning and considering how to respond to these issues, both housing affordability matters related to those who are renting as well as cost-of-living pressures, it would consider it more thoughtfully and go through the proper and rigorous process to ensure that the right policy framework was implemented to ensure that it delivered for Queenslanders.