




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2023

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR CONDUCT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.47 p.m.): I rise to address the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. On 13 September 2023, the Deputy Premier and Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Steven Miles, introduced the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill into the Legislative Assembly. The bill was referred to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee, which reported on 27 February 2023.

The committee made five recommendations: firstly, that the bill be passed; secondly, that the department take further steps to ensure the councillor conduct framework is operating as intended and is fit for purpose for Indigenous councils; thirdly, that the department, with the tripartite forum, prepare and update training materials to assist stakeholders interpret the distinction between private and public conduct; fourthly, that the government ensure the Councillor Conduct Tribunal is adequately resourced and has representatives from regional Queensland and First Peoples communities where practicable; and, finally, that the relevant parliamentary committee conduct a review of the councillor conduct complaints system in the next parliamentary term.

As is denoted by the explanatory notes, the objectives of the bill are to: implement the government's policy in relation to certain recommendations of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee in its report No. 28 of the 57th Parliament titled *Inquiry into the Independent Assessor and councillor conduct complaints system*, the councillor conduct report; make further changes to the councillor conduct complaints system, including limiting the system's application in relation to former councillors; further clarify and enhance the conflict of interest requirements and modernise local government advertising requirements; provide a discretion to the Electoral Commission of Queensland in relation to the recovery of local government election costs; make consequential amendments resulting from the change of classification for the Moreton Bay Regional Council; provide appropriate transitional arrangements for commencement of the improved councillor conduct complaints system; and, finally, make a minor amendment to the Queen's Wharf Brisbane Act 2016.

The committee received 15 submissions. One was confidential, six were from councils and councillors, and eight were from other agencies and interest groups. The Local Government Association of Queensland was broadly supportive of the bill. The Councillor Conduct Tribunal made the following recommendations: that the principle of upholding the public trust by elected officials remain in the definition of 'misconduct'; that at least two members of the tribunal be required to hear a contested matter; and that a matter may be dismissed immediately upon receipt by the tribunal if they deem that appropriate.

The Liberal National Party supports integrity and transparency in government, and this includes local government. It is vitally important that any complaints that are made against mayors or councillors are handled with due diligence in an open and transparent manner, with a timely resolution of referred issues. There is no doubt that local government officials want these issues resolved by this legislation once and for all, given the number of matters we have seen in the public domain. There is also no doubt

that the current problems facing local governments in Queensland with respect to these issues are a direct result of a broken councillor complaint system. That system was established by the Palaszczuk state Labor government in 2018.

Since Labor's changes in 2018 there have been countless examples of overreach by the Office of the Independent Assessor, with frivolous complaints, damaged reputations and careers destroyed. This has certainly been unfortunate for many of those people who have been trying to discharge their responsibilities with due diligence as elected representatives within various local councils right across Queensland. It can only be hoped that, with the passage of this legislation, Labor's mess with respect to the framework for managing and resolving complaints made against mayors and councillors is fixed once and for all. The reforms and the amendments contained within this legislation should make a material improvement to the complaints management framework and the associated processes.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge all members of the committee for their work in scrutinising this legislation and also the committee secretariat in preparing the relevant report. They undertake some very important work on behalf of democracy here in Queensland when they examine legislation which has been put forward. I know that our committee secretariat do important work in preparing these reports.

Finally, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the service of former councillor James Mackay, who recently retired as the Brisbane City councillor for the Walter Taylor ward. Former councillor Mackay was a passionate and fierce advocate for his ward who delivered significant benefits and improvements for his local constituents. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and congratulate Councillor Greg Adermann on his advocacy and community achievements in the Pullenvale ward. I wish both Councillor Adermann and Penny Wolff, who is now the new Brisbane City councillor for the Walter Taylor ward, all the best. They are champions for their local areas. They continue to be involved with local government and delivering for their respective communities.

I conclude by saying again in relation to this legislation that hopefully this will now resolve many of the issues we have seen with respect to local government and the complaints management framework. I know that with the passage of this legislation there will be many in the local government sector, in the Local Government Association of Queensland and various stakeholders who will really be hopeful that the processes moving forward will be better for all who are elected councillors or mayors in various local governments right across Queensland.