




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill. Before I discuss the bill, I want to rebut some comments by some LNP members. The member for Warrego suggested that some of these changes have been too long coming or that we have left the local government sector waiting. I point out that in recent years the sector has been through many changes, especially in the light of what Belcarra has revealed. When we talked to councillors and mayors, they shared that they sometimes have struggled to get across the changes that have been brought in already and that we need to go at a pace and a volume that suits the local government sector. I always have that in mind when we talk about how many changes we make and how quickly we make them. As we have seen today, members of the LNP are quick to spout slogans but they have little idea of what is happening out there in the real world.

I thank the member for Warrego for introducing a new statistical measure in terms of examining local government electoral expenditure: how many Freddo Frogs per vote do you need to expend? I think it is very novel. It is quite easy to grasp and brings to mind the image of a candidate doorknocking, as I did. Perhaps I should have given out more Freddo Frogs at each house I went to. I should have asked people if they wanted a Freddo Frog and if they wanted to vote for me. In fact, I still might use this idea. By talking about chocolate I think we can get kids interested in learning about local government elections, so I congratulate the member for Warrego for introducing this new statistical measure.

I do not think the member's proposed amendments to have a parliamentary committee review the changes under this act within 12 months are needed. I suggest that this work will already be done very well by the local government department and the ECQ. If a committee did this work, we would just be repeating exactly what the ECQ and the local government department had already reported. I also note that our committee is already doing an annual review of the councillor conduct system. We already have our head in that space. I see these proposed amendments as perhaps unnecessary and perhaps duplicative of the work that will already be done.

The bill, which introduces electoral expenditure caps for local government elections, will be very welcome. As the minister has said, it will make it a level playing field for our local government elections. Every elector and every candidate will know how much each candidate can spend. Every candidate will know that they will not face an obscenely funded candidate. It means that ordinary Queenslanders who want to run for council will know that they have a real chance of getting elected if they go out and work hard. These changes will also mean greater transparency in our local government system. We will have greater clarity on what constitutes a donation or a gift in kind. We can track what third parties are doing and what they are spending. We can see how candidates in a group are funded as well.

Probably one of the most important parts of this bill is that it increases confidence in Queensland's local government system. Electors will be able to see how much each candidate spends and where it comes from. Electors will know what is spent and know that essentially it cannot be hidden; it has to be seen. Electors can have confidence that the best person can win—not the person with the deepest pockets.

Building confidence—and this reflects the work we have been doing as a committee—in our local government sector is absolutely crucial because we know that councils make decisions every day that impact their local communities. Electors want to know that their councillors have their best interests at the heart of what they do every day. They want to know that this is what motivates those local councillors. We know that Queenslanders want to have faith in their local councils because they know councils do so much. As a state government, we know that they do so much for us.

Finally, our committee believes—and this reflects what the Economics and Governance Committee said as well—that training is crucial when we talk about these changes. As I have said, local government has seen many legislated changes over the last few years. All these changes have been necessary because we need to make local government more effective and build confidence. We know from the committee's OIA inquiry that further professional development and training is crucial for each councillor, and that includes councillors who have been in council for many years as well as new councillors. We will keep encouraging local governments to do more training and professional development to make sure their councillors are fully across all the changes that, I know, will be welcomed when the bill is passed. I commend the bill to the House.