




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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**WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (5.22 pm): I, too, wish to make a contribution to this bill. I will confine my remarks to two particular aspects. It will come as no surprise to members in this House that I am very sympathetic to the position of local government on these kinds of things.

Mr McDonald: Hear, hear!

Mr LISTER: I take that acknowledgement from my honourable friend, the member for Lockyer, because not only is he in touch with local government, he actually was local government; he was the mayor, and a very good mayor he was, too. In all seriousness, I read between the lines in talking to councillors and councils in my neck of the woods that wherever there is change or reform in waste management, it always causes a great deal of concern on the part of councils. Inevitably, they are at the coalface—they have to make do with the regime that is put upon them—and some of the moves by a government can be interpreted with a bit of suspicion about what their future use will be.

I note the LGAQ's concerns about clean fill and the current exemption arrangements and how some form of exemption will continue. I would just like to say to the government that this particular issue is one that does cause concern for councils. I see a friendly look from the immediate past minister for the environment and I take that as an assurance that the government has no intention to trespass upon councils in terms of the use of clean fill at their waste sites. I see a nod? No, I did not quite get that one, but we can live in hope.

I would like also to talk about the implications for free speech under this bill, and I am not the first opposition member to do so. I was thinking about Sean Dillon, the Mayor of the Barcaldine Shire. I was just discussing him with my honourable friend, the shadow minister for local government, the Member for Warrego. What happened to him was a virtuoso example of what has been happening to councillors and the fear they live under just for expressing their views, or just for operating in the democratic environment. Every Australian, every Queensland, has a right to express their views on things, and the provisions in this bill are arbitrary, they are repugnant and un-Australian. They put even the abuses of this Labor government's attacks on the opposition in this place with the guillotining of bills in the shade.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order, members.

Mr LISTER: I would ask the government: what are they afraid of? If a council or elected representatives wish to express to their community a political point of view, then they should be entitled to do so. It strikes at the very heart of our democratic society when the free speech of councillors is ripped away by the arbitrary—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Southern Downs, resume your seat for a second. Let's stop the cross-chamber argument. Let's return to our own seats if we are going to interject, and let's keep the noise down. I would like to hear what the member for Southern Downs has to say.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, sir.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr HART: Pause the clock. Minister, I heard what you said. You are warned under the standing orders.

Mr LISTER: I am known for my soft voice, sir, so I appreciate your protection. We have a situation here where the government is using the resources and the powers that it has, the access to the passage of legislation through this House by virtue of its numbers, to repress alternative viewpoints. I know the government prides itself on having been the government which emerged out of the ashes of Fitzgerald. I would remind them about what Commissioner Fitzgerald, in his seminal report on politics and governance and corruption in Queensland, had to say about this. He said—

The use of public resources at any time or in any way to inhibit or suppress the expression of opposing political opinion or a criticism of any administration is wholly objectionable.

Let that be understood: it is wholly objectionable. He went on—

Those in public life must accept the risk of criticism even if it is, at times, unfair, unfounded or even mischievous and couched in unflattering or abusive language.

He goes on to say—

There are ample opportunities for criticism or allegations to be addressed at a political level, in the parliament and by public statement. An elected representative's response to, or treatment of, wrong or unfair allegations is itself a yardstick for that representative's suitability and aptitude for the role.

What is this government afraid of? Really? They are muzzling the democratically elected councillors of this state—

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr LISTER: I do not think this is funny. I can hear some mirthful interjections from my left. In my neck of the woods, in Southern Downs, this is of great importance and it is a disgraceful liberty of this government to legislate and further clamp down on the rights of elected councillors and their councils to speak about matters which are of a political nature. Mr Fitzgerald said—

If politicians' public statements are wrong or misconceived or mischievous or malevolent, that should be demonstrated in public exchange. The politicians and their party will suffer the political consequences. That is the only detriment which should normally be involved ...

in terms of a criticism of the government.

This is no small thing. For the government to give the role of deciding what is misinformation and what is not to a chief executive, to a bureaucrat, is a disgraceful example of where this government has gone. They will not tolerate any dissent from anyone. It speaks of two things about the government: firstly, that they would have the temerity, the bare face, to come into this place and propose to further curtail the rights of ordinary individuals and councillors to express their views is bad enough, but it also says that they are on their way out because only a government that is jumping at shadows—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Members, I have the speaking list here. There is plenty of room. If you want to add yourself to the speaking list, just come and see me and I can add you straight away. Meanwhile, how about we let the member for Southern Downs have his say?

Mr LISTER: I say that a government that would stoop to institutionalising through legislation a restriction on the ability of councillors whose very councils are affected by—

Ms Leahy interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from the member for Warrego. That is the important thing here: elected. People who have the esteem of their community have been elected to represent them on matters such as this. To say that they are not allowed to speak up or that they should be subject to the censorship of a bureaucrat—the fact that we are facing this in this House demonstrates we have reached a new low in terms of respect for the community and respect for democratic ideals. On that alone, this bill ought to be rejected. It is a disgraceful attack on the councillors whom people in my neck of the woods have elected to represent them. I say to the government that they should be very wary about what they do in government in terms of restricting the rights of others to speak. They lose the argument and they lose the justification for what they are doing by censoring those who have an opposing view.