




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.50 pm): I am pleased to support the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill. It is a bill that delivers on our 2020 election promise to implement electoral expenditure caps for local elections which will first apply at the 2024 local government elections. Introducing expenditure caps is important for ensuring the equitable conduct of Queensland's local government elections and there is also broad support for it. All Queenslanders rightly expect that local government elections are democratic and fair. They deserve to have mayors and councillors who are truly representative of their communities. Expenditure caps will level the playing field and improve representation on our councils by ensuring that everyone is given a fair opportunity to participate in the electoral process. By taking the money out of politics the expenditure caps schemes will stop candidates with the deepest pockets influencing the outcome of our elections.

The electoral caps scheme for local governments is a much needed reform. It will help restore people's trust in democracy and encourage greater civic participation. The proposed expenditure caps in this bill are modelled on the state electoral caps scheme that is already in place. Its features are consistent with the state scheme which includes third-party registration, a seven-month capped electoral expenditure period, indexation of caps, penalty and recovery provisions and compliance and record keeping.

Unlike the state scheme, the proposed expenditure caps for mayors and councillors are grouped into tiers in recognition of the different shapes and sizes of Queensland's local government and their local government areas. This will mean that mayoral candidates for the Ipswich City Council will have an indicative spending cap of just over \$133,000 based on the number of enrolled voters in the 2020 election. Councillor candidates will have an indicative spending cap of just over \$25,000. When the former Ipswich mayor Paul Pisasale ran in the 2016 council election he spent over \$150,000 on his re-election campaign and he amassed over \$219,000 in donated funds. A sizeable proportion of those donations were from property developers. This campaign war chest gave Mr Pisasale an enormous advantage over his two other opponents and he ended up getting over 80 per cent of the vote. A little over a year later he resigned as mayor after the CCC raided his home.

One of the Palaszczuk government's biggest successes has been our project to deliver electoral reforms that make Queensland's elections fairer and more equitable. In 2018, upon the recommendations made in the Operation Belcarra report, we banned political donations from property developers to both state and local government officials and candidates, and I can tell members that this reform has really resonated with the community. In 2019 we implemented the second stage of the Operation Belcarra reforms which aimed to restore accountability, integrity and transparency in our local government elections. Those reforms introduced real-time electoral expenditure disclosures, required candidates to disclose their interests upon nomination, provided for greater transparency for councillors

operating as a group during elections, and required more information from candidates about donations, gifts and third-party expenditure. Queenslanders deserve to have greater faith that their elected officials are representing them with the utmost integrity.

The Operation Windage investigation into the Ipswich City Council demonstrated a widespread culture of governance and integrity failures, inappropriate workplace interactions and misuse of council funds and assets. It led to 16 people, including council employees, two mayors, two chief executive officers and one chief operating officer, being charged with 91 criminal offences, including official corruption. This was a council that did not represent the Ipswich community's interests because it was filled with too many people who were busy filling their own pockets. At the local government level we want a diversity of candidates who are passionate about their communities. Often those people do not have a large wealthy donor network they can tap into and they have to work hard at raising campaign money themselves through fundraisers and raffle drives. Taking the money out of campaign spending gives these people a fairer chance to contest at the next council election.

Another key element of the scheme is the expenditure caps for groups of candidates or for registered political parties and each endorsed candidate. These groups of candidates and political parties within a single LGA will be able to pool individual caps of all candidates in the group. This will allow candidates to organise coordinated group or political party campaign activities, such as joint advertising or shared how-to-vote cards. The bill also includes procedures for adjusting group or political party caps when the group membership or party endorsement changes. Another element is the registration of third parties with the Electoral Commission if they incur more than \$6,000 in electoral expenditure. The cap for registered third parties is equivalent to the mayoral electoral expenditure cap which would apply in the relevant local government area. Unregistered third parties cannot exceed this electoral cap of \$6,000.

This bill will ensure that the local government electoral expenditure caps will be indexed in line with the consumer price index, and information about the expenditure caps for each election must be published on the ECQ's website and provided directly to each candidate in each election. A seven-month capped electoral expenditure period will be introduced in the bill for local government quadrennial elections, which are typically held on the last Saturday in March. This means the capped electoral expenditure period will start on the first business day after the last Saturday in the August preceding the election and end on polling day.

The reforms introduced in this bill are another step in our ongoing agenda to make elections in Queensland fairer, more accountable and truly representative of our diverse communities. All of our local councillor candidates deserve a fair opportunity to represent the communities they are passionate about, and these proposed expenditure caps will be a step in the right direction to levelling the playing field. I commend the bill to the House.