




Speech By  
**Jim McDonald**

**MEMBER FOR LOCKYER**

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

 **Mr McDonald** (Lockyer—LNP) (12.24 pm): I rise to speak on the amendment bill before the House and, in particular around the local government expenditure area, a couple of amendments that are being moved today. It would have been nice if they had been included in the inquiry by what is a very workable committee, the State Development and Regional Industries Committee. Alas that was not the case.

The Lockyer state electorate is made up of two local government areas, the Lockyer and Somerset council areas, which I will talk about in a moment. One of the things that governments should do is encourage people to be a part of local government. Local governments are the level of government closest to the people and are responsible for many things that people in our communities see, feel and touch every day. In speaking to this bill today I want to talk about integrity, fairness and complexity. I ask the question: does this bill and other bills encourage councillors and mayors to again run for local government as community champions or do they actually discourage them? When government makes the local government sector more complex then certainly that question is raised. Mayors and councillors have raised it with us in many inquiries, particularly the inquiry into the Office of the Independent Assessor that happened across the state. Many mayors and councillors are very concerned about even nominating and some have said that they will not nominate for local government again.

As I mentioned before, the Lockyer state electorate is made up of the Lockyer Valley Regional Council and the Somerset Regional Council areas. I have not done this before but I would like to place on the record my sincere appreciation and thanks to Lockyer Valley Regional Council's Mayor Tanya Milligan as well as Deputy Mayor Jason Cook and councillors Chris Wilson, Michael Hagan, Rick Vela, Brett Qualischefski and Janice Holstein; and the Somerset Regional Council's Mayor Graeme Lehmann, Deputy Mayor Helen Brieschke and councillors Sean Choat, Cheryl Gaedtke, Kylee Isidro, Jason Wendt and Bob Whalley. Those community champions have talked to me about how the government can make changes that affect local government and that do make things more complex. Certainly we need to have accountability and fairness in every sector of government. I note that one of the goals of this bill is to see state and local government aligned. As the member for Burleigh and I have outlined in our statement of reservation, we have some significant concerns in this space.

Before I talk about the difficulties that the Toowoomba regional council faces, I place on the record that my brother Geoff McDonald is the deputy mayor in Toowoomba, but has in no way influenced what I am about to say. I also give a shout-out to Mayor Paul Antonio who is another great community champion. He is originally from Millmerran but has at heart the best interests of the Toowoomba Regional Council.

The Toowoomba Regional Council has 115,000-odd electors. Candidates in that undivided council area are given only \$30,000-odd to contest an election campaign and I think that is very light on. There were 24 submitters on the bill, including the LGAQ and other councils. While they support the

bill in principle, each of the submitters, and particularly the LGAQ, outlined their recommendation that there be a statutory review within 12 months of the 2024 local government election. That is one of the reasons why I am very pleased that our shadow minister for local government and member for Warrego, Ann Leahy, has moved an amendment to embed that in legislation. As we all know, following stage 2 of Belcarra the government promised that there would be a review after two years but that has not happened. We want to see it embedded in the bill as an amendment.

In fact, the government recognises the State Development and Regional Industries Committee recommendation 3, which basically says that we will undertake a review within 12 months. It should be included in the bill so that the department has clear guidance to undertake that review. With any changes to legislation, unintended consequences can occur. With such a complex change to the local government expenditure caps, there will be. I know that in two years we will be coming back to this place to consider amendments, because there will be unintended consequences—whether it be from the amounts of money available to candidates, what those moneys can be applied to or some of the pooling arrangements.

I recognise that the Deputy Premier did clarify that the pooling arrangements would be one less than the multiple of the number of positions available for the local government area. The committee welcomed that advice when it was provided to us by the department. As members can imagine, we were very concerned. One briefing note said that we might end up seeing a large number of candidates in a group with up to the cap multiplied for that group and that some of those candidates might ‘run dead’, meaning that there would be more money available to their cohort. That is a big change to the local government electoral arrangements across the state. That is another reason that embedding a 12-month review in the bill is vitally important.

I want to focus on the issue of fairness. As members elected to state parliament, we have the opportunity to spend up to \$140,000-odd—\$56,000 locally and then a party contribution. That is a very large amount compared to what is available to some of the local government areas. The issue of the benefits of incumbency comes into play when candidates may not be able to spend an amount that somebody else may.

Through its inquiry, the committee was very concerned at a number of aspects of what was included in these caps and particularly the duration. I welcome the government’s stance on a seven-month period before an election rather than four years, as proposed by some. Again, there is complexity and difficulty in reporting by candidates at upcoming elections. As I said earlier, we want to encourage good members, champion members, of our community to run as mayors and councillors so that we get the best elected local governments possible.

The other issue we raised in our statement of reservation concerned the level of funding and resourcing to the Electoral Commission of Queensland. As its good officers outlined, when an election is occurring and complaints are coming in about electoral matters or about unfairness of electoral matters, they simply do not have the capacity to guarantee that they can address all of those complaints within an election period. Complaints against candidates could well be weaponised against other candidates. Certainly, all will be politically motivated in trying to give somebody the best standing in terms of being elected. One of our real concerns was that the ECQ is not properly resourced to address those complaints in a timely manner. I recognise that the ECQ did give the committee a guarantee that it will certainly be able to administer the changes in this bill and provide adequate training.

I recognise again the unintended consequences of some of the different laws. During the committee inquiry we discovered that Darren Grimwade, a councillor close to Brisbane, could not even run a raffle amongst his supporters to raise funds without triggering some contested legislation. Let us get this right. Let us embed an amendment to provide for a review to make this a better bill.