




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.23 pm): I would also like to contribute to the debate on this committee report. I would like to thank the committee for doing their work and for what they had to go through. The reason I am standing is I want to obviously draw the House's attention to what actually happened in regard to a mayor out my way who is a mate of mine and a very close friend and that is Councillor Sean Dillon, the Barcaldine Regional Council Mayor. What we have to understand when it comes to being a mayor and being a councillor in rural and remote areas is that it is not a career, it is a service. We are finding it harder and harder to get people to stand up and want to take on this service.

The size of the Barcaldine Shire Council is the size of Tasmania and a bit more. It goes from Muttaborra all the way to Aramac and slides just east of Longreach all the way to Alpha, which is a huge area. The concern I have is what happened to Sean Dillon when we were going through the COVID vaccine rollout where he alerted us to an obvious matter. What was his crime? His concerns about a COVID vaccine rollout in a rural and remote council. His concerns were how do we vaccinate the entire shire and how do we get that entire shire vaccinated. That was his crime. As a mayor, he has a right to express that as a mayor and as a councillor. No-one knows Barcaldine Regional Council like Sean Dillon. He knows it like the back of his hands. He comes from Alpha. He knows where Muttaborra is, he knows where Barcaldine is, he knows the area and he knows the resources we have out there.

What happened to Sean Dillon? Because he made those comments, he was referred. That put a lot of stress on him and obviously his council. I think that was totally unfair. I think if we are going to encourage people to take on local government representation, we have to provide them with the resources and the assurance that they will be helped, not hindered. I thought that the way Sean Dillon was treated was not right. I remember talking to him when this all came out. He was nervous. He did not do anything wrong. All he wanted to do was make sure that, as we went through the COVID vaccine rollout and we went through the COVID issues, we had the right people in place. The concern was that some of the directives coming to the COVID vaccine rollouts were being dictated out of Brisbane, or the message was sent out of Brisbane. Those people in Brisbane were trying to do the right thing, but they needed to work with the local mayor and work with the local council to make sure that they had the right resources in place.

My concern—and it has been my concern for a while—is that when it comes to rural and remote councils and local government, we have to provide the resources and we have to provide the assurances that they will be helped, not hindered. It is getting harder and harder each term to find people willing to put their hand up. The amount of by-elections that we have in rural and remote areas is high, where people say, 'I cannot do this anymore.' It is a service, not a career. They say, 'It is just too hard.' I remember one mayor down at Barcoo who spent a lot of time having to go to Brisbane because of complaints—frivolous complaints—but he had to pay for his own airfare and pay for his own accommodation. He had to be away from his property for at least three or four days before he could get back home.

Ms Leahy: Plus his legal advice.

Mr MILLAR: And his legal advice. I take that interjection from the member for Warrego, who, like the member for Scenic Rim, understands the remoteness of our rural councils. I call on the state government to seriously look at how we deal with rural and remote councils. I understand the issues when you get to the bigger councils and obviously the south-east councils—I do understand that—but it is a service when it comes to us in rural and remote areas, not a career, and we need to encourage new, young people to take that service on because it is going to get to a stage where we will have a local council election and we will have vacancies that are not filled. It is important that we have representation.

I would like to reiterate the comments of the member for Scenic Rim that this government appears to want to subjugate local government representation through the mountain of red tape and rules and punitive processes that frighten councils from speaking out and discourage locals from putting their hand up for election. Queensland deserves better than that, and the government should get on with implementing this report's recommendations but should also go further and looking again at the conduct regime and fix the broken conflicts-of-interest system. Thank you.