




Speech By  
**Lance McCallum**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2023

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR CONDUCT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (12.53 pm): I rise in support of the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Councils play an incredibly important role in both our system of democracy and our local communities. Councils are responsible for development and housing through local government planning schemes. All of the development applications and the conditions that councils oversee are incredibly important. In my experience, the vast majority of local councillors are people who are professional and who work hard and diligently on behalf of their communities—as they should—on behalf of the people who pay their rates and expect the services they need from local government to be delivered in their communities, like in our Bundamba community. To ensure the public can have confidence in their elected councillors, there needs to be a framework that reflects community standards. On those occasions when councillors do not meet the standards that are demanded of them, there should be a framework for those consequences to be fairly meted out.

That brings us to the report and the inquiry that the State Development and Regional Industries Committee conducted into the functions of the Independent Assessor and the councillor conduct and complaints system. It was a very thorough and comprehensive inquiry. I congratulate the committee on its work in that regard. That report made 40 recommendations to improve the councillor conduct complaint system in our state. Of those 40 recommendations, 19 necessitate legislative changes, and those legislative changes are reflected in the bill that is currently before the House. It is worth noting and putting on the record that the government accepted in principle or in full all 40 of those recommendations that came out of the committee report.

In respect of the 19 recommendations that are being given effect in this bill, those reforms will recalibrate the councillor conduct framework to make it more effective and more efficient and to ensure that only matters that are of real substance and in the interest of the public and the community do proceed to the Councillor Conduct Tribunal for action and determination. It takes a lot of time and resources. We have heard many speakers reflect on the trivial or vexatious complaints that have been clogging up the system and draining resources under the current system. I will speak to those in more detail a little bit later in my contribution.

It is worth noting that this bill and the reforms that it contains have broad support across the local government sector. Indeed, it has strong support from the Local Government Association of Queensland and broad support from Queensland mayors and councillors. One of the most important reforms is the introduction of a preliminary assessment process and time limits for the Independent Assessor's consideration of councillor conduct complaints. This is a really important reform that will help improve the complaints process here in Queensland to deliver better outcomes for the community. Part of that is introducing a process to declare a person as a vexatious complainant.

I am particularly pleased to see these reforms requiring the tribunal decisions to be published in full, subject to appropriate redactions. That is entirely consistent with open and transparent government and it is entirely consistent with modern community expectations. It is important that these reforms allow

the withdrawal of applications to the tribunal if it is in the public interest. It is also excellent to see requirements for local governments to report annually on the information around conduct breaches and the matters that have been referred to them and to publish external investigation reports, once again with the appropriate redactions.

In the time I have remaining to me, I might turn to the matter of vexatious complaints. At this point I will associate myself with the excellent contribution of the member for Jordan. It is of great concern that, in Ipswich City Council, out of 68 complaints only three have been substantiated. I note in the committee's report when it comes to the application of vexatious complaints to sitting councillors that the committee formed the view that this process should apply to existing councillors. I am glad to see that that has been put forward in the bill. I commend the bill to the House.