




Speech By
Nikki Boyd

MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2023

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

 **Ms BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (3.24 pm): Not only was this an election commitment to the people of Queensland, but local government expenditure caps have been the subject of considered consultation and development. Local government expenditure caps are all about creating a fairer, accountable and transparent system, a playing field that is levelled with equal opportunity, participation and conduct. This is a system that takes the big-money, cashed-up influence out of politics and, in doing so, increases confidence in the system. It is clear that there is broad support for this system here in Queensland. In fact, I talk to a lot of elected officials, and I struggle to recall a conversation with anyone who does not support this model and the reforms in this bill.

I was on the committee for a time when it commenced its public inquiry into expenditure caps in 2019 and 2020. The report was initiated by the recommendations of the Crime and Corruption Commission's Belcarra report. I recognise and acknowledge those who have engaged in the large amount of work that has been undertaken to get to this point. In particular, I acknowledge the always phenomenal and committed contribution of our Executive Director of Strategy and Service Delivery, Local Government Division, Bronwyn Blagoev, who is with us today.

Other than the actual amount of the caps, the proposed scheme for local government is consistent with the key features of the state scheme including third-party registration, a seven-month capped electoral expenditure period, indexation of caps, penalty and recovery provisions, compliance and record keeping. Unlike the state scheme, the proposed caps for mayors and councillors are grouped into tiers. This recognises the different shapes and sizes of Queensland's local governments and their local government areas.

While we have heard much from those opposite around the difference for caps for undivided and divided councils, the department, on the back of its extensive consultation, has determined that there is not sufficient evidence that this is required. The application of scaled caps acknowledges that the number of electors varies in Queensland's local governments. Specifically, the councillor candidate electoral expenditure cap for the Toowoomba local government area sits in band 3, the highest band for council candidates outside Brisbane City Council. This band currently only applies to Queensland's largest undivided councils, providing an expenditure cap in Toowoomba of \$30,000. Candidate expenditure levels disclosed in Toowoomba's 2020 quadrennial—

Mr Watts: Twenty-six cents a voter.

Ms BOYD: Listen up, member for Toowoomba North. I am sure you will learn something here. I am very confident that the honourable member will learn something here. Candidate expenditure levels disclosed at Toowoomba's 2020 quadrennial election indicate that this cap is not overly restrictive. If the scheme had applied at the 2020 election, only two of the 30 councillor candidates—both successful—would have exceeded the cap of \$30,000. These two candidates' expenditure would have

averaged approximately \$15,000 over the cap. The remaining 28 councillor candidates would have averaged approximately \$25,000 under the cap. During consultation on the scheme, which included consultation—

Mr Watts interjected.

Ms BOYD: There are still some more lessons for the member for Toowoomba North on this. If the member just wants to pipe down, I am sure he will be able to listen. Two ears, one mouth.

Mr Watts interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Order! Member for Toowoomba North.

Ms BOYD: During consultation on this scheme, which included consultation on the electoral cap levels, stakeholders did not raise any concerns about caps for the Toowoomba local government area. I hear the nattering of the member for Warrego. She might want to listen to this bit: notably, the Toowoomba regional council carried a motion in February to consider moving to a divided council structure. If implemented, this would impact on the expenditure caps for each councillor candidate. In terms of the amendment proposed by the member for Warrego—this is a real doozy—

Ms Leahy interjected.

Ms BOYD: One wonders whether the member for Warrego, if she was not admonished and kicked off committees in her very first term, might have picked up some lessons here at all. In terms of the amendment proposed by the member for Warrego in relation to a statutory review, the committee concluded that a review would be best carried out by the department as the policy lead in conjunction with the Electoral Commission of Queensland as the regulator of the scheme.

Ms Leahy interjected.

Ms BOYD: Still talking, member for Warrego. Listen up. We support recommendation 3 of the report on the bill. During the last sittings I spoke about our inquiry into the OIA and how much we recognise good practice and good sense in reviewing frameworks to ensure they meet their policy intent.

Ms Leahy interjected.

Ms BOYD: Still talking, member for Warrego. Only one person has a microphone here. The ECQ, of course, will conduct—

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Pause the clock. Members on my left, I have asked for order. I would like to hear the member on her feet. Member for Pine Rivers, if you could focus on executing your speech that would be fantastic.

Ms BOYD: Thank you for your protection, Madam Deputy Speaker. We support recommendation 3 of the report on this bill. As I said, I spoke only last sitting week about our inquiry into the OIA and how much we recognise the good practice and good sense in reviewing frameworks to ensure they meet their policy intent.

The ECQ will, of course, conduct compliance activities for the scheme during and following each local government election. Where was the opposition on this point when we implemented our expenditure caps at a state level? We are working to general alignment with our state expenditure caps scheme that is already in place and—spoiler alert for the member for Warrego—there is no provision in the state scheme for any kind of statutory review.

The Parliament of Queensland Act specifically stipulates that portfolio committees can initiate inquiries into any matters they consider appropriate. The parliamentary committee can already initiate a review into the operation of electoral expenditure caps, regardless of the express provision in the bill. Just so it is very clear for the member for Warrego—I think we need to break this down into very simple terms—if we have the department completing a review, if we have the ECQ completing a review and if we have the provision for the committee to initiate a review, I completely agree with the member for Bundaberg that this is an amendment for the sake of amendment.

I am keen to move on to amendments that matter in this place—effective amendments and our rental reforms that will change the lives of people in my local community. Stabilising rental increases in the private rental market will make an enormous difference to the lives of my community members. A single rental increase each year will ensure certainty for my community in an economic climate where cost-of-living increases are having an impact on some of the most vulnerable members of my community.

Only yesterday I received a text message from a friend of mine—a single mum with two small children, not yet school age, who is a teacher. She was letting me know some news that she was ecstatic about. She had just renewed the lease on her three-bedroom home in Pine Rivers for the next 12 months for \$460 a week. I share this because I felt, in that moment reading that text message, the same thing she felt—relief and jubilation knowing that this meant certainty and security for her and her family.

We in Labor have a strong record of delivering safeguards, good minimum standards and fairer rental agreements and frameworks for Queenslanders. Our work in this space is not complete. Be it local government elections or a roof over people's heads, these reforms deliver fairness and level the playing field for Queenslanders. I commend them to the House.