




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (3.33 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022. The committee report states that it presents a summary of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee's examination of the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill. The committee has recommended that the bill be passed.

The policy objectives of the bill are to: establish an expenditure cap scheme for Queensland local government elections; and reinforce the equitable conduct of Queensland local government elections and minimise the risk of unequal participation in the electoral process. The bill follows a public inquiry conducted by the Economics and Governance Committee into the feasibility of introducing expenditure caps for Queensland local government elections. The committee report also states that the bill received widespread support.

What the committee report does not state is that the long title of the bill will be amended to include the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 and the Residential Tenancy and Rooming Accommodation Regulation 2009. There is a very good reason for that. We were only made aware of those amendments this morning when Minister Steven Miles came into the House and tabled his amendments.

There is a committee process that we follow for legislation in this House. I heard the member for Bundaberg say that we should just support the legislation—this is a great idea. I do not care what the idea is. There is a process to follow. They should go to a committee. The people who own houses for rent would be very interested in this. It is not as though if the legislation were presented to the committee that it would fail because every committee report under this government has as its first recommendation that the legislation be passed. It would get through the committee as the chair has the casting vote—four to three. It would be passed. It was not like it would be defeated. Why the government would bypass that process goes straight to the integrity and accountability of this government.

Ms King interjected.

Mr WEIR: I will take the interjection from the member for Pumicestone. It has nothing to do with that; it is about the process. If it is a good piece of legislation put it before a committee and bring it into the House. That is what should have happened.

The bill is modelled on the scheme that applies to state elections and includes the following: a sliding scale of electoral expenditure caps for mayoral and councillor candidates based on elector numbers in recognition of the different sizes of local governments in Queensland; the ability for groups of candidates to pool their expenditure caps within a local government area and up to a certain capped amount; the ability for political parties and their endorsed candidates to pool their expenditure caps within a local government area and up to a certain capped amount; applying expenditure caps to

associated entities and a registration system to monitor the electoral expenditure of third parties; and aligning key definitions such as 'electoral expenditure', 'campaign purpose', 'third parties' and 'associated entities' with definitions provided under the state scheme.

The caps would be across a number of bands. They are: band 1, up to 30,000 electors would receive \$30,000; band 2, 30,000 to 150,000 electors would receive \$1 per elector; band 3, 150,000 to 200,000 electors would receive \$150,000 plus an additional 50 cents per elector for each elector over 150,000; and band 4, over 200,000 electors would receive \$175,000 plus an additional 25 cents per elector for each elector over 200,000. The Brisbane City Council would receive \$1.3 million. The councillor candidate expenditure caps are: band 1, up to 20,000 in an LGA or a division is \$15,000; band 2, 20,000 to 39,999 in an LGA division is 75 cents per elector; and band 3, 40,000 or more in an LGA division is \$30,000. The Brisbane City Council is \$55,000 per ward.

The bill also provides for a group of candidates, or a registered political party and their endorsed candidates, to pool their electoral expenditure caps within a local government area. This is not an uncommon practice. In recent elections we have seen a number of regional councils running group tickets.

Some submitters spoke of the challenges that exist between divided and undivided councils. The electorate of Condamine lies entirely within the Toowoomba Regional Council boundaries, which is an undivided council. There is one mayor and eight councillors. This means that prospective councillors will be capped at \$30,000 to deliver their campaign message to 115,153 electors from Yarraman to Clifton, Millmerran to Quinalow and, of course, the major city of Toowoomba. It is interesting to note that there are five state electorates that sit within the Toowoomba Regional Council—Southern Downs in the south, Condamine covering a vast area, Toowoomba North, Toowoomba South and Nanango. They all have a footprint in the Toowoomba Regional Council. This is a big challenge for any new candidate. Incumbents have a huge advantage. This goes to the contribution of the member for Pine Rivers.

Incumbents under this scheme have a huge advantage. That is what happened in the recent council elections. To quote averages is to misrepresent what happened in the last council election in Toowoomba. Those new councillors spent vastly more than the incumbents. Incumbency is a huge advantage.

The Toowoomba Regional Council voted against divisions only a few years ago after pressure from the regions for the issue to once again go to a vote. Given this new funding cap and that the majority of voters are in the city of Toowoomba, it will be interesting to see if this issue will be visited once more. I am not stating a position on whether I support divisions or not. Some areas that have divisions believe they are a little parochial and those that do not have them would like to have them.

The Toowoomba Regional Council, as I have already stated, has a lot of regional towns and those towns feel as though they are not being fairly represented. They would obviously like to see divisions in the Toowoomba Regional Council. What we need more than that is for candidates from those regions to come forward and to get elected so that they can deliver for those regions. That is my concern with this legislation.

The LNP have stated that we will not be opposing the bill, but the shadow minister, Ann Leahy, will be moving an amendment that a statutory review be conducted by the relevant parliamentary portfolio committee within 12 months of the 2024 local government elections. I think that is essential. There will definitely need to be a review after the next election. As I said, we are not going to oppose this, but for large undivided councils like Toowoomba I do think we will see some problems.

(Time expired)