




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 November 2023

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

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.52 pm): Following the sentiment of the last speech, I feel like we should all bring it in for a big hug.

**Mr Madden:** Bring it down.

**Mr KATTER:** I do appreciate that and I do agree it was well conducted by the chair of the committee and fellow committee members indeed, because it was pretty in-depth and I took a lot out of the contributions of other members and their interest in it, so it helped people like myself get abreast of it. To be blunt, I probably echo the sentiment of some commentators and some of the more significant stakeholders in this at the start when asked, 'What do you think of this?' and they said, 'I would probably just throw it all in the bin.' However, I do not like saying that unless I have a better solution, and I am not sure I have a better solution to how things should run. My thoughts are with a lot of people involved with this. I can see the purpose it serves, but sometimes the antidote is just as bad as the problem that you set out to address in the first place.

I cast my mind back to some of my own negative experiences in the council. I remember there was one situation where we were looking at an issue on the riverbank in Mount Isa. Trying to be a diligent councillor, I went to the files and the lady from filing pulled me up and I said, 'I am just trying to find this environmental study on the creek.' The Breakaway Creek runs into the river. She said, 'I will do that for you.' I thought, 'Fair enough.' I was hauled into the CEO's office a week later where he said, 'What the hell are you doing? Mate, we should be reporting you to the CCC, but we will let this one slide.' For me, being a new and young councillor—I had been to the training et cetera—it is a fair disincentive to apply any initiative when that is the culture that is created. Maybe I was in the wrong, you could say, but there is that culture now of, 'Don't touch anything. Stay in your lane.'

I think I may have contributed this in one of the hearings, but one of my observations is that it is all about councillors staying in their lane. There is a very strict regime and there is so much focus on that, but then you have CEOs and council officers who do not want to stay in their lane and who often indulge in the policy side. They are quick to give their opinions in meetings, and they are not elected officials. You think, 'Hang on, where does it come from when they have to stay in their lane?' It was news to me, certainly through this process. This was all focused on the councillors, so there was not much in the process that turns it back on the officers who sometimes step outside their ranks and make it harder than otherwise. Those were just some observations I made.

Who could disagree that it is good to have a system that keeps checks and balances in place? In my experience in my own electorate, a lot of that still gets missed. It is not like this solves everything in terms of cutting corruption and collusion with industry and council and that sort of thing. There are still things that would make you question whether this is doing its job in terms of bringing issues to the surface and exposing things. It certainly is not rock-solid.

I did acknowledge and thought there was merit in the suggestion from the Mount Isa City Council about attributing a fee for the complaints which I guess was targeted to say, 'If you are going to follow through on a complaint, you better make sure it is right because if you going to make 10 of these, it is going to cost you.' You would want to be certain there is value in that. There are arguments both sides of that, but I thought it was worth raising again because there was merit in the sentiment behind that. I have no problem with the recommendations by the committee, of which I was a part obviously. I think those were done in the best interests of trying to get to where we were.

I will go back over some of the sentiments expressed by some councillors about the situations that were created by this process. Former Livingstone Shire Council mayor Bill Ludwig was reprimanded by the tribunal almost three years after he left office over a sustained misconduct complaint first raised in 2017. Mayor Greg Campbell of Cloncurry Shire Council spoke about the cost impacts of alleged vexatious complaints and how much it was costing council. A similar thing was expressed in Mount Isa, that some of the rules are so complex and that declarations of interest were chewing up a lot of the council time, as they tried to grapple with those problems. I think it was mentioned before the weaponising of the system for personal political reasons. Creating an environment of fear and intimidation, is the downside of it all. I think there is a lot of people in the system who are working hard to mitigate that.

From our perspective, especially in those bush councils, we want more autonomy at the local level, less big brother, less Brisbane imposing rules and guidelines, and people sorting themselves out, which is not how it is. I would say in the context of this bill and what it has tried to address within the existing framework, I do not have a better way to operate it, so I cannot be too negative. These amendments will improve the situation and are done in the best interests as far as we are concerned. Once again, thank you to the committee for the collaborative work in putting that together.