




Speech By  
**Rob Molhoek**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

---

Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2023

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

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.19 pm): I rise today to speak on the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022. This bill is a key piece of legislation that holds the power to influence the course of our local government elections. As the member for Southport and an LNP representative, I emphasise our commitment to integrity and transparency in government, including local government. Ensuring our local government elections are equitable and devoid of undue influence is crucial.

The bill's objectives are to: implement the government's policy regarding the recommendations made by the Economics and Governance Committee in report No. 47 to the 56th Parliament, *Inquiry into the feasibility of introducing expenditure caps for Queensland local government elections*, the committee report submitted on 15 September 2020; to incorporate the results of further analysis and consultation in the final structure of the local government electoral expenditure cap scheme; and to promote and uphold equitable conduct during Queensland local government elections by reducing the risk of unequal participation in the electoral process, including uneven financial competition among candidates, and ensuring fair opportunities for participation.

The LNP is not opposed to this bill or the implementation of electoral caps in local government elections. However, we must guarantee that the new system undergoes review and prevents the state government from exploiting the system to favour particular candidates or groups—something that the current government has a history of doing. That is why it is important that we adopt the amendments that have been proposed by the member for Warrego to amend section 206A. A statutory review following the 2024 local government elections aligns with the expectations of Queenslanders of a responsible government. We are calling on support for the proposed amendment that a review within 12 months of the 2024 local government election be conducted and, more importantly, that that review be tabled in the Legislative Assembly so there is complete transparency of the findings and opinions of those who conducted the review.

While making considerable changes to the electoral system we need to ensure its effectiveness for the community. Regrettably, the previously promised government review within two years of the last significant change in local government, stage 2 of Belcarra, never occurred. The LNP has consistently supported council's collective stance on their voting systems. However, Labor's stringent donation laws ensured that, through unions, Labor can collect significantly more funds than the LNP. Labor and the unions could potentially outspend the LNP in a state election by a ratio of 26 to one, and this will now apply to the Brisbane City Council elections as well. How can the Labor government expect Queenslanders to believe they are a party that supports fair elections when they will happily manipulate legislation to maintain power?

Allowing the definition of electoral expenditure to be changed solely by regulation would empower the government to modify the definition of electoral expenditure to advantage one campaign style over another. We have witnessed Labor's tendency to create electoral changes that benefit themselves and,

as it turned out, the Greens. If you ask me, this is why the Labor government cannot be trusted. In 2019 Labor attempted to discreetly introduce compulsory preferential voting for local government elections despite widespread opposition. The backlash was so strong that the minister withdrew the proposal and removed the provision during the detailed consideration. Councils continue to oppose compulsory preferential voting in their elections.

This government is notorious for prioritising announcements over delivery, and the subject of local government is no exception. Over 600 days have passed since the Deputy Premier promised reform to overly stringent conflict of interest rules for council with no results. Six months have passed since the report into the Office of the Independent Assessor was submitted, and the House is owed an update from the Deputy Premier on implementing the committee's recommendations. A concerning aspect of the bill is the ability for a group of candidates to combine their spending caps across divisions. This implies that a party like the Greens could run token candidates in unwinnable divisions, pooling their caps into the two or three divisions they genuinely intend to target. This exemplifies how legislation can be exploited for political gain.

The 2020 local government elections experienced numerous operational issues due to inadequate resourcing of the Electoral Commission of Queensland. Issues included delayed publication of voting data, and Antony Green notably called it the most significant failure he had witnessed. The narrow terms of reference for the parliamentary committee's inquiry hindered the recommendation of necessary changes. We must avoid repeating the mistakes of the 2020 elections by properly resourcing the ECQ. If the government plans to implement this new scheme for the upcoming local government elections next year, they must prepare training materials as soon as the legislation is enacted. The ECQ must receive adequate resources in this year's June budget to ensure they can provide proper training and manage the system effectively.

Queenslanders deserve efficient elections that bolster confidence in the democratic process. As we proceed with the bill's implementation it is vital to focus on serving the people of Queensland, maintaining transparency, fairness and equal representation for all Queenslanders. Unlike the current government, we the LNP are devoted to these principles and will persist in holding accountable the government responsible for fulfilling its commitments.

I want to emphasise the LNP's unwavering commitment to integrity and transparency across all government levels. We support the implementation of expenditure caps in local government elections, but we must remain watchful to ensure government does not exploit the system to its advantage. Conducting a comprehensive statutory review after the 2024 local government elections is crucial for preserving the integrity of our electoral system.

We must guarantee that the ECQ is adequately resourced and that the necessary training materials are provided to facilitate the seamless transition to the new system. Queenslanders have the right to expect fair, transparent and efficiently managed elections and we are obliged to deliver on that expectation.