




Speech By  
**Hon. Dr Steven Miles**  
**MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA**

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Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2023

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

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympic and Paralympic Games Infrastructure) (5.13 pm), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate on the Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022. In my opening remarks I reiterated that every Queenslanders deserves the best representation they can elect as well as every opportunity to be on their council. This bill comprehensively addresses recommendations from a wideranging inquiry by a parliamentary committee. It will minimise the risk of uneven financial competition among candidates in council elections.

I would like to address some of the specific matters raised by members during the debate. The government recognises that it is good practice to review legislative frameworks, including reviewing if they are appropriately achieving their policy intent. The State Development and Regional Industries 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 regulator of the scheme. The ECQ will also undertake compliance activities for the scheme during and following each local government election. Findings from these compliance activities will also inform evaluation of the scheme's performance over time.

The local government expenditure cap scheme also aligns with the state expenditure cap scheme that is already in place. Consistent with the state expenditure cap scheme, the bill does not include provisions for a statutory review. The government supports recommendation 3 of the committee's report on the bill—that the department consider conducting a review of the electoral expenditure cap scheme within 12 months of the 2024 local government elections and that key findings of the review should be published.

A departmental review of councillor and mayoral candidate expenditure at the 2020 local government quadrennial elections has indicated that there is not sufficient evidence that differentiated caps for divided and undivided councils are required. However, to address differences in Queensland's local government areas, the scheme applies scaled caps acknowledging that the number of electors varies across Queensland's local governments. The cap levels have been determined to appropriately balance capping extreme levels of expenditure incurred by a minority of participants without imposing onerous caps on the majority of participants which would unduly restrict their ability to conduct campaign activities.

I note that a number of contributions referred to the Toowoomba local government area. The council candidate electoral expenditure cap for the Toowoomba local government area sits in band 3, the highest band for councillor candidates outside Brisbane City Council. The band currently only applies to Queensland's largest undivided councils, providing an expenditure cap of \$30,000. 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 out of the 30 councillor candidates would have exceeded a 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.

In addition, during consultation on the scheme, which included consultation on the expenditure cap levels, stakeholders did not raise any concerns about the caps for the Toowoomba local government area. Notably, Toowoomba regional council carried a motion in February to consider moving to a divided council structure. Changing the cap levels would have an impact on the expenditure caps for councillor candidates. The purpose of the cap is to limit excessive expenditure to ensure even campaign contests. A cap would be ineffective if it were set at a level above what anyone would spend anyway.

I note that the State Development and Regional Industries Committee was satisfied that the level of caps for mayoral and councillor candidates were appropriate and were underpinned by a comprehensive modelling and consultation process. It is important to reiterate that the committee has noted broad support for the scheme which has been made clear through a widespread and rigorous consultation process, with regular engagement with key stakeholders throughout the bill's development. Importantly, the committee's report noted unanimous support amongst inquiry participants for the introduction of an expenditure cap scheme in Queensland. This bill ensures a fair opportunity to participate in the local government electoral process.

As I outlined earlier, the government will move amendments to the bill to limit the frequency of rent increases from every six months to once a year for residential tenancies and rooming accommodation agreements. Around one-third of Queensland households rent. For most households, rent is the single biggest expense in their household budget. The government is taking immediate action to support renters now. Acting quickly to limit rent increases is a critical government response to community concerns about the impact of current market conditions on renting households and to give a fairer go to Queensland renters. The majority of landlords do the right thing, but taking immediate action will protect Queensland renters from landlords who are not operating fairly. The housing pressures we are seeing are not unique to Queensland and are being experienced by all states and territories. These amendments to limit rent-increase frequency will bring Queensland into line with other Australian jurisdictions.

These amendments balance the rights and interests of Queenslanders who rent and property owners and investors to maintain rental supply. I note that some contributors called for data to support these amendments. The Residential Tenancies Authority advised that in 2022 the number of tenancy agreements that saw more than one increase was over 24,000. In addition, in 2022 the RTA received almost 9,000 calls about rent increases, which demonstrates the size of this issue in the community. The government has taken decisive action to increase supply, affordability and diversity. These amendments are an immediate action to stabilise rents in the private rental market.

I would like to once again acknowledge the contributions of stakeholders to the many engagement processes undertaken in recent years on the local government expenditure caps reforms. I would particularly like to thank the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Electoral Commission of Queensland for their input into these reforms. I commend the bill to the House.