



Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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CRIME AND CORRUPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (4.13 pm): As we participate in the second last sitting week of this 57th Queensland parliament, it is no surprise to see that the *Notice Paper* is absolutely crammed. This government has consistently handed in late and sloppy homework and now it finds it has left many of the most important pieces of work until the last minute. No bill could be considered more untimely or overdue than this one.

The LNP will not oppose the bill and, in fact, the bill will go through. I do not intend to speak at length, especially after the excellent speech by the LNP shadow minister, the member for Clayfield. I do want to protest the culture of cover-ups that has marked this Labor government's time in power. This bill represents the Labor government's attempt to address multiple reports and recommendations dating back to 2016. Talk about overdue homework! Some of the homework in this bill is eight years old.

I refer to the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee report No. 97, titled *Review of the Crime and Corruption Commission*, tabled in parliament on 20 June 2016. The bill also addresses PCCC report No. 108, titled *Inquiry into the Crime and Corruption Commission's investigation of former councillors of Logan City Council; and related matters*, which was tabled on 2 December 2018. These tabling dates are making a point for me.

This is a government that is based on a culture of cover-ups and deceit. It pays lip-service to integrity, but when there are major issues that are glaringly obvious to everyone else it is in no hurry to do anything about them. The latter report is vital. People across Queensland are disgruntled with the way that local government is having to operate under Labor's laws.

In the bush, local government is absolutely vital if communities are to receive services, and the best way for councils to work well is to be allowed to work in a collegial and open way. Under Labor's laws, people with their own political agendas are incentivised to lodge endless complaints about councillors with the OIA. I hear that it took about two weeks for the first such lodgement against one of Gregory's newly elected mayors.

Mayors and councillors cannot do their job with this shadow of fear and harassment hanging over them. The Labor government argues that it is necessary to protect us from corrupt councillors, yet it seems to me that the bulk of complaints are trivial or, all too often, proved wrong. An example is the complaint lodged against former Barcaldine mayor Sean Dillon that he had brought Queensland Health into disrepute through a critique of aspects of Queensland Health's plans to deliver COVID vaccines in his shire. His constructive criticism proved to be correct and this time-wasting complaint should never have been accepted. It was in no way misbehaviour or anything else. Sean Dillon was simply doing the job his ratepayers had elected him to do, and he was doing it well, even though he trod on a few bureaucratic toes.

There will be long-term consequences for the quality of local government in Queensland if we continue down a road where words count more than records of achievement. I have spoken about this many times. We are finding it harder and harder to get mayors and councillors to stand in rural and remote areas because of this. They are questioning why they are spending so much time doing the job

and then being criticised and hauled down to Brisbane, having to fly from places like Windorah, to receive a complaint that should never have been put forward. We have lost good quality people from the positions of mayors and councillors because of that. It is time—

Mr Stevens: You can't say 'ranga'.

Mr MILLAR: No. I take that interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach. I know the councillor and he is a good bloke. Tom Tate, the mayor, is a good person. They had a simple exchange of complimentary words.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr MILLAR: Yes. It is an absolute disgrace. The whole Logan City Council saga was a disgrace as well. It is even more of a disgrace that this bill today is still addressing aspects of the report and the recommendations tabled in 2018. The LGAQ, in its submission, said—

Queenslanders deserve to have a corruption watchdog that is unbridled from its recent failings, not a pile of reports that simply gather dust.

Yes, we must absolutely have the strongest integrity laws if we are to ensure that Queensland is not a nest of corruption, yet this government not only has been slow to act but also has muddled priorities.

In July 2023, the *Courier-Mail* reported that the CCC had started recruiting eight professionals for a new corruption prevention and engagement unit to help Queensland's public sector agencies prevent corruption internally. This is the same agency that refers complaints from whistleblowers back to the department that they are complaining about—often the same department that employs the whistleblowers. We should be protecting and thanking whistleblowers, not setting them up for reprisals.

Greg McMahon, the Secretary of the Queensland Whistleblowers Action Group, said in the same article that whistleblower protection has not been addressed properly since Tony Fitzgerald's watershed inquiry raised concerns 30 years ago. We are still in the same position over a year later and although this bill affects journalist shield laws it does not give a blanket protection by any means.

In their submission to the committee, the Australia's Right to Know Coalition raised the issue that the bill, as drafted, means the CCC will have to make preliminary decisions about whether journalist privilege arises in a given case. They make the point in their submission—

As the investigatory body seeking disclosure of the document or information in question, the CCC—colloquially—has skin in the game. The CCC's interests will, by definition, always be aligned with seeking to overturn the privilege claim.

This is absolutely correct and glaringly obvious. The bill places the CCC in an unending conflict of interest when it comes to judging journalist privilege. The Queensland Law Society raises a similar issue with the undermining of professional legal privilege.

The bill will also change the tenure of the CCC appointments. In the LNP's statement of reservation, appended to the committee report, our members noted that the PCCC has recommended that the term of appointment not exceed seven years. Instead, the bill provides a fixed tenure of seven years for the positions of chairperson, deputy chairperson or ordinary commissioners. This is a very different outcome. Not only might it cause recruiting difficulties, the ability for the PCCC to change the length of the proposed term of their positions when the committee is assessing applicants is important to ensuring the bipartisan nature of the employment.

Finally, the government's lack of commitment to integrity is never more clear than the fact that they have put off critical changes needed to remedy the reporting powers of the CCC. The Labor government could have moved such amendments as part of this bill or it could have agreed to pass the LNP's private member's bill, introduced by the member for Clayfield, which has been sitting before the House for more than a year. Instead, they have chosen to continue the great Labor tradition of cover-ups—

Mrs D'ATH: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, on relevance. The member is now talking about a private member's bill and not the bill before the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): I am listening closely to the member for Gregory. I have given you a bit of leeway, but I will call you back to the bill.

Mr MILLAR: That is the last I will say of it. With reservations being expressed about journalist privilege, legal privilege and whistleblower protections Queenslanders should not expect sunshine from this bill.