




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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ELECTORAL LAWS (RESTORING ELECTORIAL FAIRNESS) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (6.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill. I think it is pertinent to reflect on the past when we debate bills such as this because there is an element of integrity in this bill. I want to confine my contribution to the monetary aspects of bill that is before us. In 1987 the acting premier of the day, Bill Gunn, introduced an inquiry into the state of Queensland after a period of corrupt behaviour by the then conservative Bjelke-Petersen government. It led to a number of ministers being jailed—from memory, three—as a result of the corrupt behaviour of the coalition government before it was called the LNP government, which it is known as today.

It is incumbent on all of us as legislators, as we legislate on matters of integrity, to listen to those who have skin in the game, those who know where the skeletons are hidden, also those who know that the right integrity measures should be introduced and maintained in the state of Queensland. I will concentrate and confine myself to the monetary aspects of the bill. There is no doubt it is a bill to allow the flow of additional money and influence in elections. It creates the real perception—and some people might say reality—of pay-for-play deals between donors and members of parliament. It will see the return of property developers to the potential donor list, which creates particular moral hazards for local councillors and also for the planning minister. I am not here defending the planning minister—it is the role of the government to do that—but I think he should consider some of the evidence that has been provided and also reflect upon the statement of reservation by the opposition members, who did an excellent job in terms of considering the bill before us.

The changes to the donation caps will effectively quadruple the amount of money individuals and entities will be able to supply to candidates in a single term. The statement of reservation reflected on donations from the gun lobby and gun owners of up to \$280,000 to date. If that amount over a period of time was captured and quadrupled one could do the calculations and work out the amount of money that will flow into the purses of the government as a result of their connections with the gun lobby. The special category of 'restricted donations' by property developers for 'administration purposes' at the local government level is deliberately vague and is open to interpretation. That was picked up by the submission of the Crime and Commission Corruption. Rather than tightening up corruption laws, this opens councils to the prospect of favours being bought and sold.

One only needs to look at what is ahead of us. We live in a prosperous state. We are in the lead-up to the 2032 Olympic Games and the infrastructure to be built surrounding that. There is opportunity for employment. I reflect on the fact that the Premier made a commitment to not build any new stadiums and backflipped on that. Considering that in the next six years the government is looking at increasing the opportunity for donors in respect to developers, that is a reality and perception that could occur. It is important that, as we become exposed to the world through the games, we have a high degree of integrity in terms of the development of that infrastructure and also the development and delivery of those games.

I do not have an issue with property developers. In fact, I can commend one particular developer that was instrumental in delivering the Ferny Grove Transit Oriented Development. It is a matter I campaigned for after engagement with the people in my electorate as the government of the day. When the project was awarded to the developers and construction workers, they acted decisively and with integrity and engaged with the community. I commend that particular developer for the work they have done thus far in regard to the Ferny Grove Transit Oriented Development.

In the last few minutes of my contribution I want to concentrate on a witness that was denied access to appear before the committee and provide relevant evidence: the peak watchdog of this state, the Crime and Corruption Commission. There are standards in the Crime and Corruption Act that people should reflect upon and be cognisant of in terms of their responsibilities and also the act's responsibilities of preventing corruption. I draw to the attention of members section 33 of the act, which is to raise standards of integrity and conduct in units of public administration—including this Legislative Assembly and local governments. The view of a recent survey that the CCC has done in regard to corruption is that there is a level of corruption in government. That is purely a perception at this point in time. There is no real evidence to demonstrate that. But perceptions are real. We know perceptions can change the outcome of elections and we should recognise that when making decisions around this bill.

In its submission the CCC considered that aspects of the changes proposed in the bill are a significant departure from Queensland's robust political donations framework and are out of step with reforms introduced to manage risks associated with political influence, and perceptions of it. The CCC was not given the opportunity to ventilate that further by appearing before the committee. It is a real shame that the peak watchdog of this state, which came about as a result of the Fitzgerald inquiry, was denied access to the committee to provide that evidence.

Mr HUNT: I rise to a point of order. That is misleading. I will be writing to your office in relation to that. The CCC were not denied. I have heard a couple of members say that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Nicklin, I caution you. I warn all members it is not an opportunity to prosecute an argument. If members feel that a member of the House has misled the House there is a procedure to follow in writing to the Speaker and there is nothing further to say.

Mr FURNER: Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. Once again I highlight the importance of ensuring government's decision-making is seen to be fair and impartial and free from influence. The CCC observes an increased risk of actual or perceived corruption in relation to political donations which may arise from this bill. They made this point in relation, in particular, to the lead-up to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. That is quite relevant. As I indicated earlier, a lot of infrastructure will need to be built and there is an opportunity for corrupt behaviour as a result of this government extending the donations possible from developers.

At the local government level, the bill proposes to amend section 113A of the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 by refining the property developer ban to permit property developer donations to political parties under certain circumstances.

Once again, I am perplexed by the statements that some people have made today reflecting on unions. I was proud to have worked for the Police Union, which is affiliated with the Queensland Council of Unions. Those who stand in this chamber and reflect upon unions should not forget that unions cover a variety of workers in this state, including the hardworking men and women who wear the blue uniform and who protect us. By making those statements in this chamber today they are reflecting on those people who serve and protect our communities. What a disgraceful attitude and position to take when it comes to people such as the police who work in our communities.

(Time expired)