




Speech By
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EMPOWERING COUNCILS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (5.40 pm): When you have a talented minister like this, it is little wonder the debate has been guillotined. How many amendments is the minister moving and why on earth are they not already circulated? That was a selective and sheltered contribution from the member. The minister talks about committee support and committee agreement, but I remind her that they have the numbers on the committee. If she flicks to the back of the report she will see a statement of reservation. There was not committee support and there was not committee agreement, let alone stakeholder agreement, for a lot of the provisions within this bill.

I am often asked what I love most about working with our local governments. When you get our 77 councils in a room, you appreciate what an eclectic bunch they are—full of different ideas, ambitions, views on the world and perspectives. They do not want much from a state government: reliable funding streams, workable frameworks and the confidence that they can do their jobs to deliver for their beloved communities. Last year this Premier went to the LGAQ annual conference and outlined a suite of legislative reforms, made promises, gave assurances and made plenty of remarks of a hollow and slippery nature. Many councillors have been around the block more than once and they know that, with a politician as clever as the Premier, it always pays to take notice of what he does not say rather than what he does. The room was abuzz when they noticed what he did not say.

The Minister for Local Government commenced consultation on this bill in May 2025, and history has shown that many key reforms proposed by the bill have been unsupported by the sector in whole or in part. What is more, this government attempted to hoodwink the sector with its proposed restrictive and undemocratic resign-to-run clauses. It became clear that the LGAQ policy executive would not and could not accept this. The Premier and minister then intentionally omitted that from public announcements, including media statements, on this legislation, only to sneak them in through the back door. This is a government that will not stand up for their convictions but will use subterfuge to ram home their ideological agenda.

So unsure of what they actually stand for, their very first piece of legislation in this place for the local government sector is to wind back the Premier's own policy. On any other day and under any other circumstances, I would be pretty unforgiving of that. Times can change and with evolution there needs to be flexibility—an ability to bend and be responsive to problems and the need to address them. However, let us not fool ourselves: that is not what is happening here. The Premier and the minister have snuck provisions into this bill requiring a councillor to resign their position if they nominate for state parliament. Their resign-to-run provisions were rejected by the sector during consultation, and the Premier and the minister knew that. They proceeded to deceive the sector and sneak them through in this bill despite knowing full well that the local government sector vehemently opposes them. These bad actors went so far in their attempts to blindside the LGAQ around the need for councillors to resign to run that the LGAQ needed to run a ballot of their members to be assured of a policy position because they did not have a current one. Why? Because this matter was not a policy priority for the sector!

This proposal has been ruled out of the question by the policy executive. Through consultation, the minister knew that. When the LGAQ finally called out this deception, they did not hold back. The discredited minister continued to lobby. Despite calls, ultimatums and all-or-nothing threats, the LGAQ maintained its position and then it got done over. This government brags about an equal partnership in local government and yet the additional submission from the peak body was quick to detail the multiple clauses that the Premier and the minister had violated in their dishonesty.

The LGAQ submitted that 'resign to run' is a retrograde step. They issued a call for us not to support this. Why? Because it is contradictory to the words and the sentiment of the Equal Partners in Government agreement. Specifically, it does not align with the following clauses: 3.1, 'Local government should be empowered to serve their community, including through fit for purpose legislation, whilst being held to high levels of integrity and accountability'; 3.4, 'Local Government will be subject to minimum intervention from the Queensland Government in respect of its legitimate interests and jurisdictional responsibilities (including but not limited to revenue raising, local laws and land use planning)'; and further under 3.4, and this is the best of them all, 'The Queensland Government interest will only be exercised where legitimate State interests exist.' That really bells the cat.

This minister and the Premier have come close to hoarse with their bragging that the local government sector has never had it so good and that now they have an equal partner in government. They do not have an equal partner; they have an unfaithful partner. The LNP is a partner that knows full well that this is a nonsense proposal. This LNP government is coercively abusing them to sandbag itself. This kind of behaviour goes beyond the gaslighting that is common bad practice from the government; it is escalated to utter disrespect and abuse.

Let us wind the clock back to 2012. Reading through historic *Hansard* is not a pastime of mine, but I did so in my preparatory research. I was taken back to the future as what I read contained the same old formulaic method, altered rhetoric and slogans of the now Premier when he introduced his first bill as local government minister. There was one glaringly obvious difference, which was the glorious backflip on the resign-to-run provisions. On 13 November 2012 the now Premier declared—

The removal of the legislative requirement for councillors to automatically vacate office when nominating for state parliament will result in the removal—

Government members interjected.

Ms BOYD: These are the Premier's words—

of the need to conduct costly by-elections where that councillor is not successful in being elected to state parliament.

Two ears, one mouth! He continued—

The cost of conducting a by-election is a significant burden for councils which can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. He is not wrong. The current-day price tag on a by-election is around half a million dollars, as seen recently in Mackay and Townsville, and upwards of \$20,000, which is really significant, for a very small council like Balonne.

When you skip back to that 2012 debate when the LNP changed the legislation so that a councillor could run for parliament and maintain their position in council, one of the staunchest voices of support for the current-day model was the former member for Warrego. He said, '... they wanted to reduce the odds of losing the next election.' In other words, they rorted the system. What on earth changed in the minds of the Premier and those advising former members, such as the current member for Warrego? What is the LNP's motivation for this change?

This provision, since 2012, has seen members come into this House like the current federal member for Hinkler, the member for Lockyer and the member for Gympie. Twenty-one councillors have contested elections in the almost 41 years since the then Premier made these changes. Eleven were successful; 10 were unsuccessful. Imagine having 10 additional by-election expenses shouldered by ratepayers and councils in a local community.

The Premier is on the parliamentary record, calling this now policy a 'significant burden'. The member the current minister was working for at the time called it a 'system's rot'. The Premier has called this now policy 'ridiculous'. How on earth did we end up here with subterfuge for the sector, trashing the Equal Partners in Government agreement? The balloting of the LGAQ on this matter came back vehemently opposed to the change. There has been no sensible reason provided demonstrating that change is needed: no documented instances of harm, misconduct or governance failure; not a single integrity investigation, court decision or CCC finding that recommended automatic resignation or nomination; not a single person able to articulate why the Premier or minister has taken this action in such a deceptive, scurrilous method, misleading the sector and putting the legislation through in peak

disaster season. How fitting! This is a proof point of how the government only cares about politics and not about governing Queensland. It demonstrates that they are only in it for themselves, not the local government sector. The politics of self-survival is held above all else under the Crisafulli government.

I want to turn my focus to the ineptitude in the timing of this bill. In May 2025, consultation commenced. In October 2025, the deceptive announcement was made, but the bill's introduction lingered, leaving the committee's examination of this bill until peak disaster season. It is little wonder that the committee did not complete any travel across our vast state. There was minimal time spent in public hearings. Key stakeholders like the Crime and Corruption Commission did not appear before the committee. Sixty-eight submissions were received by the committee. Only two hours and 40 minutes were allotted to hear from the stakeholders and 90 minutes afforded to the department.

This is a comprehensive bill that contains 318 amendments, omissions and/or insertions. It was clear that more time was genuinely needed to properly examine the bill. Not only was that not afforded through the committee process, but what we see when we get here to this House is a total gag and guillotine in relation to this bill. We only have a matter of hours before this debate will finish and the minister is still yet to table any amendments, despite listing off a varied raft of them that extend beyond the local government portfolio.

Mr Whiting interjected.

Ms BOYD: I take the interjection. This record indicates what consideration this holds for the government. It became clear through the process that many stakeholders were at a loss as to why there was even a need for many of these reforms. Indeed, reflecting respectfully, the department was also failing in this category, resulting to the default of government policy in many rationales for change—not because change was required, not because the sector had asked for it, but because the LNP government knew better. I want to acknowledge the committee staff and the many members of this parliament who supported the interrogation of this bill.

I also want to acknowledge that it has been a bumpy decade for the local government sector. The sector's operating framework for integrity, conflicts and conduct for a large part was drafted by an external, independent body. It was imperfect. I want to be really clear on that. It is important to acknowledge this. Our Labor team acknowledges this.

As a result of those unique frameworks, past parliaments worked in a bipartisan way to make improvements, to genuinely listen and understand and to make recommendations that were suited and supported. I cannot help but feel sorrow that for so many of us—many MPs, former councillors, former local government ministers who love and respect the role that local government plays and the good people who give so much of themselves to it; I feel sorry knowing what we know—this is the best the LNP can afford the sector. This bill claims to empower councils, but in practice it weakens integrity, transparency and accountability across the local government sector.

This bill, through committee, has been torn to shreds by the CCC, the OIA and the LGAQ on so many essential provisions. This committee report offered up no recommendations or improvements for change. I sat through every second of its deliberations and there were plenty of opportunities for improvement on the drafting. Even if the government did not shift on the policy elements of this bill, the drafting was identified as unworkable and, in some cases, dangerous.

We have come from a place, from a lightning rod for change, to a bipartisan group toiling to listen and to act cooperatively to build a fairer, stronger, more robust system in this place to this 'fresh start' which seemingly sees it all torn up and a match thrown on it. All of the corruption-fighting experts are telling us that this framework is fraught with corruption risks. How can this minister, Premier and government turn a blind eye to those voices?

The OIA went as far as to write and rewrite clauses that have legal standing. The CCC stated the bill would wind back some of the significant integrity and transparency measures. This would sound alarm bells for most. This bill will increase corruption and integrity risks and wind back governance protections, and I fear for the local government leaders who will be its collateral damage.

Our local government sector deserves better. They work in complex operating environments across our state, each LGA with diverse challenges, unique compositions and immense opportunity. Our state is home to some of the nation's largest councils and some of the nation's most unique. This is the reason that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in so many policy settings.

One of the common claims that came forward in response to concerns around the readiness to implement many components of this bill is that there would be training and guidance materials developed and rolled out, and today the minister spoke about the materials as if they were in a future text, as if the work had not started, had not been completed, as if it was a mystery as to what would happen here in this place. Given we are here debating this bill right now, it is timely to hear from the

government what material is developed and what the plan is to implement its rollout. I know the sector absolutely wants to know. Table that here in the House. At least be up-front about that.

It is wild that right now we have many amendments that the minister just foreshadowed—did not put a numeral on them at all. We are not exactly sure how many, and we are not sure exactly what the nature of them is, but we have this truncated debate where this will get passed tonight and we are still none the wiser what this government is actually proposing. So much for openness and transparency! It is essential that the sector has the confidence and the knowledge to be able to navigate new and different frameworks, and it would only be responsible for the government to detail that and to come good on finally being transparent with this bill.

Government members interjected.

Ms BOYD: I hear lots of interjections from those opposite. If only they were afforded the opportunity to speak on this bill, but once again the backbench has been gagged.

When it comes to conduct breaches, the goose really got cooked with intertwining statutory frameworks. Further, the misconduct provisions in relation to 'honest and impartial' rather than 'honest or impartial' cause confusion, needing both elements rather than either.

The abolition of the conduct breaches leaves serious behavioural issues and breaches of council policy without any clear enforcement pathway. Their response of, 'Oh, well, the community will have their say at the ballot box,' does not actually pass the pub test. Integrity and trust in public life matters. There is a standard that we all want to uphold and protect when we enter public life. There needs to be a workable framework to support that. In no other job would it be okay to be intoxicated while representing your employer at an event, misuse your employer's resources or be threatening or aggressive to people in the workplace and get off scot-free. Frameworks are there to maintain acceptable standards, confidence and community trust. This bill erodes that.

Corruption risks are reduced when everyone looks out for one another. Mayor Samantha O'Toole from Balonne Shire Council provided evidence in her public hearing of instances in the council chamber where councillors supported each other with conflict-of-interest reminders, given their positive duty in this space. It is a framework that works well when constructively used. It prevents oversights from becoming problems for councillors. Mud sticks, and in public life perception is just as damaging, and sometimes more damaging, than reality. It is a risk in our operating environment. The winding back of a corruption safety net is not a good thing. It was established because of integrity failings and real corruption risks. How will the Crisafulli government monitor this? It all remains to be seen.

Decisions are not made around a council table. They are not limited to formal meetings. I know very few councillors who head into a formal council meeting undecided on how to vote on a matter. How is it then okay to prohibit councillors with conflicts of interest from speaking up inside the chamber but okay for them to lobby colleagues until the cows come home in workshops or informal discussions without any kind of warning? The LGMA talked about the real dangers in this retrograde step.

The civic cabinet restrictions made through this bill on the Brisbane City Council limit democracy and information sharing and silence voices in decision-making. They wind back transparency and accountability. One wonders whether it is simply another LNP clause in this legislation that is focused on politics, not people.

The content experts are saying in relation to multiple elements of this bill that the provisions will not work, that this takes us backwards and that this reduces, not enhances. I am deeply disappointed that so many strong expert positions on matters were rejected outright without reason. We learned through the committee that this minister had extensive expert feedback on improvements to protections and they have been seemingly rejected. One is left to wonder if this is a start-as-you-mean-to-go-on situation. This is only the start of legislative reform in local government, and it distinctly feels like a death rattle.

We had such considered and detailed contributions through the committee process, but it is regrettable that so few people were afforded the ability to come before the committee in a public setting. I thank those people who took the time to make submissions. Their effort and the detail were beneficial, and that detail will remain on the public record of how collaborative and earnest bipartisanship had the potential to deliver something better and more secure for the sector.

The timing afforded to this debate demonstrates the LNP government's disdain and disregard of the local government sector. We are still waiting for the amendments. I have talked for 23 minutes and the minister still has not tabled them. We will not have time to afford them proper consideration. This is terrible governance. No-one in the local government sector will benefit from this kind of terrible governance. This minister should do better, and the sector deserves that.

It is essential that we work in good faith with the local government sector to promote, enhance and improve governance and practice. This is an awful standard to set. She should be ashamed. We build trust and confidence and uphold integrity. That is our job. This bill is a missed opportunity in so many respects. It is a crying shame. It speaks to the disregard this minister and this government have for the sector. To them I say: do better.