




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 5 March 2026

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EMPOWERING COUNCILS) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (8.01 pm): It is my great pleasure to speak to this bill brought into the House by the Minister for Local Government because, as the bill title says, it is empowering councils. As a nine-year veteran of local government, I am so pleased that this minister is making up for the 10 years that local government were the whipping boys for Labor governments—calling them corrupt, even sacking the Logan City Council and the bad reports in the Gold Coast City council. They just could not help but belt local government. This bill empowers them again. I congratulate Minister Ann Leahy on her wonderful work in this area. Local governments throughout Queensland look upon her as the fairy godmother of local government. She has done a wonderful job. She is well liked. Honestly, they have someone very much in their corner.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Use correct titles, please, member for Mermaid Beach.

Mr STEVENS: In my nine years of local government in the famous Albert shire and then on to Gold Coast City—

Mr Mander: Who was mayor of the Albert shire?

Mr STEVENS: First and last mayor of the Albert shire. Then I moved on to the Gold Coast. In fact, in common with Don Bradman and Walter Lindrum, they had to change the rules to get rid of me.

I do have some experience in terms of local government. It saddened me greatly to see what the Labor government inflicted on councillors in terms of carrying out their duties. I refer particularly to conflicts of interest. Even if you were, say, a member of the Nerang Bulls in Nerang in the electorate of Gaven—they do not like her much but it is in the electorate of Gaven—and you went to lobby for them, you had to declare your interests in terms of doing those things. They were the sorts of ridiculous imposts that the Labor government put on councillors. They were absolutely ridiculous demands that affected their ability to do their jobs as councillors effectively because of the hamstringing nature of declarations of interests. They were even judged by other councillors—it was Caesar judging Caesar—as to whether they had a conflict of interest. That is absolutely ridiculous. It created division among councillors. Obviously enmity prevailed in some sectors, and some people were taken out of the debate for very unfair reasons because of those matters.

I note the hypocrisy of the shadow local government minister in relation to councillors standing down if they want to run for the Legislative Assembly. What a load of rubbish. In fact, Labor icon Terry Mackenroth—he was one of the guys who sacked me way back in the day at Albert shire—was the one who introduced that legislation when he was the local government minister. They are saying that the icon of local government, Terry Mackenroth, got it all wrong. The difference in terms of when the Premier changed this law is that we now have local government elections in the same year we have a state election. What we do not want to see is councillors running in March and then stumping up for an

election on the last weekend in October. This is a sensible, logical amendment that the minister has brought forward. For members opposite to say that it is an unfair impost in terms of by-elections—hopefully, if a person runs for council in March he or she is not using it as a sneaky method to run for state parliament in October. If you are deciding to represent your community—as the member for Theodore correctly said, local government is the government closest to the people—then you should make sure you stay through for that term or, if you are that committed, resign and then run for state parliament.

There are other matters the minister has addressed. One is in terms of training for new candidates. That is a sensible change to the Local Government Act. Obviously, even if you have been through the process already, it is all a learning curve. In fact, I am still learning here in the state parliament after nearly 20 years. Having to go back and listen to the Clerk tell me again how I should be a good member of parliament is just a lot of rubbish. That is a great move forward.

Also, councillors and the mayor are given more powers, particularly in relation to the appointment of senior executives and the CEO. I had a CEO thrust upon me who was totally unbearable. The fact of the matter is that it led to a very difficult time in council. If the councillors of the day had the opportunity, they would have picked something better. This is a great move forward by the minister. I congratulate her on giving councillors the ability to control their own destiny. That is what local government needs. They are representing their local community and they should not be hamstrung or reported to the Independent Assessor, who had a plethora of staff. When I was on the Economics and Governance Committee she kept coming back and saying, 'Oh, I need more staff. I need more complaints officers.' Some of the trivial complaints that she upheld—particularly in the Gold Coast area that I am aware of—were absolutely ridiculous. For the minister to address that issue and give councillors a reasonable amount of say in the direction they wish to go is a great move forward.

Again, I congratulate the minister on empowering local councils. I hope there are more changes to empower councils over the years ahead with her as minister—the fairy godmother. I certainly support this bill.