




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise to address the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill 2018. I will start with the contribution that we have just heard from the member for Redlands. What an absolute farce. The attack on the member for Broadwater was unwarranted. It is unfair. It is inaccurate. It is false to attack the member for Broadwater. This crisis is a making of the Labor Party and that is clear for all to see, not only in Ipswich but across Queensland. When will Labor ever learn? The incompetence of this Labor government and its steadfast refusal to adhere to date to the principles of transparency, accountability and good governance clearly knows no bounds.

Mr Power interjected.

Dr ROWAN: I hear the member for Logan interjecting, yet sadly for the people of Queensland, and in particular for Ipswich, we have seen this all before. It is almost as if those opposite go out of their way to stick to the same script whenever a new crisis engulfs this government. We all know how it goes. Step 1: an issue begins to surface. Labor says, 'Nothing to see here. Move on.' Step 2: the Liberal National Party proposes a common-sense solution, only to be ignored by Labor. Step 3: the issue then turns to crisis and Labor scrambles for a solution. Step 4: Labor then adopts the LNP's common-sense solution. Step 5: repeat. With the entire process repeating again when a new Labor crisis emerges.

Yet again and true to form the Labor Party followed the same script as the issues surrounding the Ipswich City Council only grew from bad to worse. As concerns regarding the Ipswich City Council were raised last year by the member for Bundamba, what was the response from the Labor Party? 'Nothing to see here. Move on.' In fact, it was worse than that. The former ALP state president, Dick Williams, went so far as to call on the member for Bundamba to resign because, as he put it, it had nothing to do with the greater good of the ALP. Talk about shooting the messenger.

I heard the member for Bundamba's contribution. I pay tribute to her because what she outlined with respect to the vilification, the abuse, the harassment, the bullying that not only she has experienced but many innocent people as well in the Ipswich community have experienced is absolutely disgraceful. Clearly there are systemic failures which are going to be addressed, but personally what she and many innocent people have experienced in Ipswich is absolutely terrible. I have not always agreed with her or seen eye to eye with her, particularly when she was the shadow minister for Health in opposition, but she did pose the question where were the unions? The culture of many of the unions includes harassment, bullying and intimidation. We have seen that in relation to the findings of the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption and what has happened at Oaky North as well. The culture of the union movement to a certain extent is the same culture that has existed within Ipswich City Council.

In my electorate of Moggill I have had a number of residents, particularly in the area of Priors Pocket Road, contact me about industrial estate development application approvals within the jurisdiction of Ipswich City Council. I have, in fact, written to the Crime and Corruption Commission about those matters raised by residents given the range and plethora of issues that are still emerging in relation to the functioning of Ipswich City Council.

The Liberal National Party has been calling for the dismissal of the Ipswich City Council and the installation of an independent administrator since May of this year when it was clear that Labor could not be trusted to manage this sorry saga. Yet it is only now, after scrambling to deal with the fallout, that the Labor government has come around to the same conclusion—in other words, as I mentioned before, step 4: Labor adopts the LNP's common-sense solution.

In that time, under the Premier and her Minister for Local Government, Labor has done all that it can to mismanage this untenable situation that in essence has run for months and was years in the making. We know that, over a long period, Labor has been running a protection racket for its own people. The Labor protection racket must end today and certainly it will end today. For years, there have been concerns surrounding the Ipswich City Council and its ALP aligned councillors and mayors, and for years this Premier and the ALP have done nothing but sit on their hands and turn a blind eye to the allegations plaguing their Labor mates.

For years, the good people of Ipswich have been let down by Labor and Labor has allowed bullying, harassment, alleged corruption, and greedy and dubious practices to flourish. Earlier this year, the Minister for Local Government rushed through parliament new powers that, as the people of Ipswich were assured, would fix the issues in the Ipswich City Council. Fast forward and here we are, yet again, with the Minister for Local Government desperately wanting to rush through further legislation to fix the laws that previously he told us would fix the issues at the Ipswich City Council.

Is there a ministry that the member for Sandgate cannot touch without running into chaos? First we had the 'rail fail' debacle courtesy of the member's tenure as—

Ms Grace: That's so cheap.

Dr ROWAN: It is just fact. I hear the minister interjecting.

An opposition member: They can't handle the truth.

Dr ROWAN: They cannot handle the truth. We had rail fail under his tenure as Minister for Transport and now, under the same member's stewardship of the Local Government portfolio, again we find ourselves in this House trying to clear up Labor's mess. If we did not know any better, we could be forgiven for thinking that the member for Sandgate was also in charge of the embarrassing Commonwealth Games closing ceremony fiasco.

Just last month, after announcing his intention to bring further legislation to the parliament to fix this sorry mess, the minister was quoted as saying—

What the city of Ipswich needs right now is good governance and good financial administration.

It is a sad state of affairs when this state Labor government sees fit to lecture on good governance and good financial administration, yet here we are.

The Crime and Corruption Commission report is a damning indictment on the culture and functioning of the Ipswich City Council. The decision to support the legislation to ultimately dissolve the Ipswich City Council is not one that the LNP has taken lightly. In normal circumstances, the thought of a state government completely wiping the slate clean and removing entirely an elected council is not a thought or idea that should ever have to be considered by this parliament, but these are not normal circumstances. As much as this is about providing certainty to the ratepayers of Ipswich and restoring trust in their local council, it is also about cleaning up after Labor's mess—a mess that was started by Labor, was allowed to grow under Labor and, almost to the very end, was largely ignored by Labor.

In May of this year, when the Premier prematurely declared that enough is enough, she told this House that there were too many charges levelled against too many officials for anyone to have confidence in the management of the Ipswich City Council. That was when there were 12 people facing 66 charges by the Crime and Corruption Commission; now we have 15 people and 86 charges. I say to the Premier that there are too many charges levelled against too many officials of this Labor council for anyone to have confidence in her Labor government to manage this saga, given Labor's extensive connections to the scandal. Let us make no mistake: the failures of the Ipswich City Council are failures of the Queensland Labor Party. The people of Ipswich deserve better from their council, the people of Queensland deserve better from their state government and Labor should apologise to the many innocent victims of their mess as it relates to the Ipswich City Council.

Finally, LNP shadow minister Ann Leahy has foreshadowed some sensible amendments, especially with respect to the transparency of the advisory panel. I encourage all members of the House to support the LNP's amendments.