



Speech By
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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL (IMPLEMENTING STAGE 2 OF
BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.20 pm): I rise in this cognate debate to address the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In any democracy and within its associated system of government, and in fact with any public office, transparency, integrity and trust are all fundamental tenets that must be protected. It is an unfortunate reality that in Queensland's recent history these tenets were breached by some governments and certain officeholders as we have seen through the Crime and Corruption Commission's Operation Belcarra report.

Following the complaints, investigation and revelations concerning the conduct of certain candidates contesting the then 2016 Queensland local government elections, it became incredibly important that Queenslanders have their confidence restored in certain local governments and local government representatives, particularly as we approach the 2020 council elections. That being said, it is incredibly unfortunate, and remains concerning, that the reputation of local government in Queensland has been tarnished due to the actions of a small minority of elected representatives. That is why the Liberal National Party will be supporting those amendments contained within the bill that stem directly from the recommendations of the Belcarra report.

As has been articulated in detail by my colleague the Liberal National Party shadow minister for local government and member for Warrego, this legislation aims to implement a number of remaining recommendations of the Belcarra report, as well as certain recommendations from the Soorley report—but that is not all. Concerningly, this legislation also attempts to implement a number of changes supposedly under the guise of integrity, when in reality such changes have no relationship to the Belcarra report. It is incredible, perhaps even ironic, that on a bill aimed at restoring and improving integrity and transparency the Palaszczuk Labor government has apparently chosen to play politics and pursue its own political agenda to the detriment of good government and public governance.

That is the view which was echoed by the Brisbane City Council, the largest local government in Australia, which stated that there are 'significant aspects of the bill that have no relationship to the Belcarra report but instead are calculated to provide significant partisan political advantage to our political opponents within Brisbane City Council'. In fact, Labor's brazen partisan manoeuvre was all but confirmed by the *Courier-Mail* in February this year when it was reported—

The CCC did not recommend overhauling the voting system to bring in CPV, however, nor did former Brisbane lord mayor Jim Soorley's council elections inquiry.

Labor's Brisbane councillors have been lobbying the State to bring in compulsory preferential voting for council elections.

Labor's Council Opposition Leader Peter Cumming previously told *The Courier-Mail* Labor could have picked up two extra wards at the last election if CPV had been in place.

At the proverbial eleventh hour, the Palaszczuk Labor government yesterday had an epiphany and scrapped their plans to introduce compulsory preferential voting for local government elections. This is a humiliating backdown for the Labor Minister for Local Government. This is a great win for democracy. There can now be no excuse for Labor to not support the LNP's bill to abolish compulsory preferential voting in Queensland for state elections. This would be in line with the long-established and accepted Fitzgerald principle.

Quite simply, there remains more than a hint of scepticism to the Palaszczuk Labor government's efforts to restore integrity and transparency to government. Labor's track record when it comes to good local government and local government reform has been nothing short of abysmal. Who can forget the Palaszczuk Labor government's complete incompetence in addressing the serious allegations levelled at the Ipswich City Council where it took 15 people on 86 charges, via the Crime and Corruption Commission, before Labor finally intervened and dissolved the Ipswich City Council last year? The delays and inaction were nothing short of a protection racket for Labor and its Labor aligned council members and candidates at that time.

Specifically, concerning the Ipswich City Council election, the Belcarra report listed damning allegations regarding the perception of a number of Australian Labor Party aligned candidates operating as an undeclared group, given a number of exhibited behaviours including the use of volunteers and questionable donations and management of campaign funds. Whilst Labor did finally act, there were significant delays in the action that they took particularly within this place.

As the Liberal National Party's state member for Moggill, I have seen firsthand the issues stemming from poor local government and public management at Ipswich City Council. Trust and faith in the Ipswich City Council, particularly among some of my constituents, has been and continues to be badly eroded. That is why I believe it is vitally important that trust and integrity is restored to local government following the Belcarra report and why I support the implementation of many of those recommendations that come directly from that report. It remains an incredible shame, however, that Labor seeks to harm this restoration by virtue of its own conflicted political ambitions.

In my remaining time I would like to briefly turn my attention to the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Again, while the Liberal National Party will not be opposing this bill, we must take issue with clause 27, granting prisoners who are serving a sentence of less than three years the right to vote. To say that such a change to the Electoral Act is concerning is to put it mildly. No prisoner should have the right to vote. If you break the law, you forfeit the right to participate in deciding who makes the law. There can be no sound justification whatsoever for such a proposal and fundamental change to our electoral law. Those opposite will argue that this amendment will bring Queensland in line with other jurisdictions in Australia, but that is simply misleading. A simple scan of other jurisdictions shows that this is simply not the case.

Concerns must also be articulated with regard to this bill's intention to change the deadline for postal vote applications from two days prior to the election to 12 days prior to the election. Notwithstanding that the two-day deadline can create inadvertent consequences, the extension of another 10 days is simply excessive. Not only is it excessive, but it goes beyond what was recommended by the Soorley report and again raises questions as to the state Labor government's intent in drafting these two bills and exceeding the scope and recommendations provided in both the Belcarra and Soorley reports.

To conclude, as I have said today, it is crucial, particularly as we approach the local government elections in March 2020, that trust, integrity and accountability are restored to our local government system—a system which has been terribly let down by the partisan and delayed efforts of the Palaszczuk Labor government. Labor has been slow to act and the motivations of many of Labor's actions are at the very least dubious, particularly in the context of Labor's consistent gagging of debate in the 56th Parliament and Labor's record of introducing electoral voting changes for state elections with just 18 minutes notice.