




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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## **COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (11.52 am): I rise to address the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. Madam Deputy Speaker Lui, I also congratulate you on your appointment to the panel of temporary speakers.

It will surely come as no surprise to the people of Queensland that one of the very first orders of business for the 57th Parliament—indeed, the most pressing and urgent matter of business that must be attended to—is to pass amendments to fix yet another mess that has been created entirely by the Palaszczuk state Labor government. It should also come as no surprise to the people of Queensland, and it certainly has not come as a surprise to the Liberal National Party, that the Palaszczuk state Labor government has sought once again to add amendments to legislation that ought to be presented and debated independently.

Indeed, as the Liberal National Party's Manager of Opposition Business articulated last week, this bill, the COVID-19 emergency bill, is important. There are provisions that are time sensitive, and the Liberal National Party opposition appreciates the need to debate and pass such provisions as a matter of urgency. However, that being said, the amendments in this bill that pertain to the Electoral Act and the Local Government Act should be in separate legislation.

The conduct of the Palaszczuk state Labor government is in no way surprising. However, it is deeply disappointing. It is disappointing, especially as we commence a new term of the Queensland parliament and see that the Palaszczuk state Labor government is continuing its poor legislative processes.

In briefly addressing the broader objectives of this bill, I note that primarily this legislation seeks to extend the operation of all COVID-19 related legislation until 30 April 2021 or to an earlier date to be prescribed by regulation. This is important, as to date there have been a number of regulations made under, or indeed pursuant to, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act. However, such regulations and all secondary instruments enacted are set to expire on 31 December 2020.

This legislation will also insert appropriate transitional mechanisms, which will provide for the ability to return to normal operations in the most effective and efficient way as soon as such COVID-19 related legislation is no longer required. Again, this is important and proper to legislate for, as there are currently no allowances made for transitional provisions in the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act as it currently stands.

I now wish to address in more the detail the amendments contained within this legislation as they pertain to the Electoral Act and the Local Government Act. The disappointment that I spoke of earlier with the Palaszczuk state Labor government's poor legislative processes, particularly in view of legislation that has been passed throughout this year, is a disappointment that is only exacerbated by the fact that the Palaszczuk state Labor government was warned that such negative outcomes would

likely occur. Because of Labor's own hubris and arrogance, on top of its long-held disdain for due legislative process and accountability, the Palaszczuk state Labor government chose to ignore such warnings and press ahead with its poor legislation.

In June of this year, this House debated the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill. Among many changes, this piece of Palaszczuk state Labor government legislation imposed changes on how vacancies for elected councillors and mayors would be dealt with. Specifically, and incredibly, the Palaszczuk state Labor government removed the requirement for a by-election to be held where a vacancy in a mayoral position occurs within the first 12 months after a local government election.

It appears it was clear to all but the Palaszczuk state Labor government that such an amendment would lead to any number of problematic outcomes. Indeed, as Queenslanders, and especially all residents of Rockhampton, now know such an outcome has now occurred, and it is only by virtue of passing this current bill before the House that such an adverse outcome can be avoided and give the people of Rockhampton the ability to democratically elect their next mayor.

This mess was created entirely by the Palaszczuk state Labor government, given that the original legislation presented in June came with an additional 100 pages of nearly 230 amendments, which were circulated for less than 24 hours before Labor demanded that the legislation be passed with no input from the committee system or stakeholders. The Palaszczuk state Labor government cannot say they were not warned. As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for local government said in this House on 18 June when addressing the amendments on filling mayoral vacancies—

What if the departing mayor won with 80 per cent of the vote and the next two candidates had 11 per cent and nine per cent? How could appointing a runner-up be a reflection of the electorate's wishes in those circumstances?

...

The full implication of these amendments has not been realised by the stakeholders or by the public. This is just another rorting of the voting system by the Labor government and it is particularly undemocratic when it relates to the way that mayors can be elected.

Such words by the member for Warrego were indeed incredibly prophetic. As it was reported in the *Australian* newspaper on 24 November this year, the former minister for local government practically admitted to influencing the potential candidates of the then forthcoming state election, saying that the original changes that had been brought in were designed to discourage mayors and councillors from having a tilt at the 2020 Queensland state election. Professor Graeme Orr of the University of Queensland was quoted as saying in that same article—

I think it's a bit of curiosity but the main thing is the shoddy behaviour of and motives of the Labor government ... It's an illustration of how local government is sometimes a bit of a plaything for state governments.

I wish to conclude today with my final words during the legislative debate on the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill on 17 June this year. They were as true then as they now—

On matters pertaining to electoral accountability and integrity, it exists in this legislation entirely in name only. As if to further underscore Labor's complete disdain for any sort of integrity and accountability, it was not until approximately nine o'clock last night that the state Labor government circulated some 100 pages containing 229 amendments to this bill. That is an absolute farce. This bill should be seen for what it is. It is the Labor Party here in Queensland trying to rig the next state election.

The Liberal National Party understands and appreciates the need to ensure that the relevant legislation and legislative instruments to properly address the COVID-19 pandemic must be relevant and robust, and that is why we will not be opposing this legislation today. However, it is again an insult to the people of Queensland and to this parliament that other amendments are being added on to this legislation to cover for the Palaszczuk state Labor government's own failings.