

**ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY  
AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2019**

**SANDY BOLTON MP**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

On February 4<sup>th</sup> this year, in this House, we spoke of our concerns about the undue influence being asserted on the political process across Australia and in Queensland.

The *Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2019* has the admirable intention to address this, and in many ways, was well on the way to getting there. However, in response to submissions for improvements, a number of changes have been proposed.

This resulted, as of 9.09pm Tues night, being furnished with 229 amendments to the Bill, which in effect has created a different version of the original Bill. Version 1 of the Bill went through an appropriate process of consultation with stakeholders, was considered and reported on by the Committee, and investigated by Members in this house on behalf of their communities. Version 2 with 229 changes, has not, and left only hours for MPs to scrutinize.

In 2019, the Australian Electoral Study reported that 56 per cent of respondents believed that government is run primarily for the benefit of itself, special interest groups, or ‘the big end of town’.

In addition, a significant element of this poor result is the perception that political parties work mostly for their donors rather than the people they are meant to represent.

What has eventuated in the last 48hrs further erodes the trust in our systems, and in our governance. Even though our system may be broken and needs fixing, it is the one that we currently operate under, and we should not be undermining it.

One of the key policy objectives of the Bill is the reform of the financing of electoral campaigning in Queensland. Specifically, the Bill introduced caps on donations and electoral expenditure, to be in place for the 2020 general State election. This was a big positive, and one that has been long held by so many as a methodology to reduce undue influence on decision makers.

However, the amendments submitted has changed these caps that would have been imposed on individual candidates and/or entities in each electorate. This included an increase to the registration threshold for third parties from \$1,000 to \$6,000 of electoral expenditure incurred during the expenditure period for an election. Regardless of the rationale from submitters for a need to increase this amount, again, the greater the amount, the greater the perceived or otherwise influence.

Let's be very clear. In documentation, third parties have been identified as small groups, not for profits and charities. This needs clarification, as in debate, it has been indicated that confirmed entities such as unions are considered third parties. These are neither small, nor a charity.

Stakeholders generally supported Bill V1, though were concerned that entities, such as employee associations or industry groups, with affiliations in many electorates, may become the beneficiary of a cumulative electoral funding, which can be substantial. The amendments received, furthers these concerns, eroding the values of Queensland's electoral system by disadvantaging candidates

independent of affiliations other than the electorate as a whole that they are elected to represent.

There is much in the original Bill that is really good, including limits to election signage and that plastic wrap. In a recent Noosa poll, over 90% wanted election paraphernalia limited or banned all together, so the limits included in the Bill was very welcomed news. However again, in the amendments, this limit has been diluted, now to include additionally 4 signs for associated entities, and 2 for third parties at polling booths. Suddenly, an equitable proposal of 4, could extend to 12 plus depending on how many associated entities and third parties are involved with that candidate, with claims during debate it could be 100?

Queenslanders deserve a balanced electoral system. This is a key feature of our democracy.

In amongst other significant amendments in this Bill, is the introduction of new dishonest conduct of councilor offences, conflicts of interest, and the engagement of advisors by Councilors.

Stakeholders expressed a range of views on these with the LGAQ, for example, submitting that it largely supported the proposed changes to the conflict of interest provisions 'to provide greater clarity and certainty'.

The CCC, however, contended that the current legislation for dealing with conflicts of interest and material personal interests should not be amended saying the current scheme is aligned with the Belcarra recommendations.

Regardless, whatever changes are implemented, it should apply to all elected representatives in all levels of Government, and as we have heard, sadly we have seen over time a small minority that deliberately

port the system and demonstrate the poorest of behaviours. These individuals, as in any profession, will look for ways to get around the rules. And when anyone, in any sphere or profession does wrong, we need to make sure we have the mechanisms to see they are punished accordingly.

Electoral reform is an important and critical opportunity for Queenslanders to reimagine how they interact with our democracy. Fundamentally, electoral systems are about the role of people in shaping parliaments. This Chamber is a reflection of their collective voice.

How I wanted to get up and say that this Bill is another significant step toward a reimagined democracy, addressing the inequities, shortfalls and dishonesties. However, the amendments submitted have forced us to take 5 steps back and ask the question.

*How can we enact reform in any realm, when the processes and systems required to instigate that reform, actually need to be reformed themselves? Otherwise the reform will be as flawed, as the system that promoted, and enabled it.*

Even though I, and no doubt the majority of my electorate, wholeheartedly commend the intentions of the original Bill, it is with the heaviest of hearts that I cannot support this Bill at this present time. I ask that it is returned to Committee, even it is only for a week, for further consideration and consultation as part of ensuring we have captured the voices of Queenslanders and give MPs opportunity to consult with their communities, in order to pass legislation that will deliver its original very admirable intention.

Thank you.