



Recognising and upholding excellence in local government

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4 April 2022

Subject: Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector

Via Email: review@coaldrakereview.qld.gov.au

Dear Professor Coaldrake

**RE: Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents (OSCAR) response to the:
Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Review.

OSCAR is a non-partisan and not-for-profit umbrella/peak organisation covering resident and community organisations on the Sunshine Coast and Noosa local government areas (LGAs) in South East Queensland.

To introduce our organisation to you and your team I have attached our Mission and Vision statement. Of particular relevance to the: *Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector* are selected elements of our Mission and Vision as below.

These include:

- Advocating to local and state government and the public on policy issues that are of regional significance and of concern to our members;
- Acting to resolve issues of strategic or region wide relevance that are referred by member organisations;
- Representing the member organisations on region-wide matters of interest to the community;
- Maintaining awareness and responsiveness through frequent and regular ordinary meetings and dialogue with member organisations; and
- Practising professional, honest and ethical conduct.

One of the key planks of the OSCAR Vision relates to **Leadership and Governance**

- Leadership and Governance Local government policies, plans and actions will be consistent with achieving social, economic and environmental sustainability.
- Local government decision making will be responsible, informed, ethical, and accountable
- Governance will become open and transparent and residents will have reasonable access to reports and documents.
- Community consultation will become routine and results respected and acted upon. The public interest will prevail over vested interests.

OSCAR's particular interest relates predominately to the local government tier, and we note that this review excludes local government (and their entities). We believe this limitation should be examined with a view to extending the scope of the Review to cover local government and its entities.

Nevertheless, our comments relate to the operation of State Government bodies including the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA), the Integrity Commissioner, the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) and the Office of the Information Commissioner, the operation of which all impact on local government.

In general terms, OSCAR believes that the Queensland Government has a culture and accountability framework that is largely fit for its purpose and generally maintains the public's trust in the decisions of the Queensland Government and its entities.

The current State Government has made significant reforms in integrity matters that impact local government for example: banning of developer donations; ongoing reform of the Local Government Act to improve accountability of councils and the implementation of the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA). As an organisation we have responded to consultation relating to these initiatives.

However OSCAR is of the opinion that more can be done to improve community faith in the public sector.

OSCAR believes there needs to be:

- More control over the operation of lobbyists including a longer timeframe before a public servant or political staffer can become a lobbyist;
- Strict rules about how "confidentiality" conditions can be placed around topics discussed in "confidence" between the Public Sector and lobbyists.
- More protection for "whistle-blowers";
- Reform of Right To Information laws to better ensure the decisions of public servants and Government bodies are more transparent;
- Better oversight of integrity-related entities through a single Parliamentary Committee rather than the existing regime where integrity bodies are overseen by several Committees; and
- Provision of adequate resources to provide timely resolution of integrity-related issues (eg additional funding to the OIA to deal with complaints about councillors).

OSCAR believes that, given recent events relating to the State Archivist, the resignations of the Integrity Commissioner and the Chairperson of the Crime and Corruption Commission, the State Development And Regional Industries Committee inquiry into the Independent Assessor and the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee investigation of the CCC, that the Queensland Government should be adopting a more holistic inquiry into the operation of, and inter-relationships between, the bodies charged with oversight of integrity, transparency and corruption. This is not a task that can be undertaken by any single Parliamentary Committee or a review of any particular organisation in isolation.

OSCAR encourages you, under the powers given this inquiry to extend the inquiry in order for a more holistic inquiry to be undertaken.

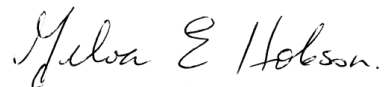
It is important to reject the diminution of the powers of integrity bodies because they may have made mistakes in some recent and well-documented cases.

This is illustrated, as an example, by attacks from groups such as the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Property Council of Australia on the operation of the OIA. Both organisations

have criticised the handling of conflict of interest complaints by the OIA and implied that it has made it difficult for councillors to discharge their duties. OSCAR appreciates their viewpoint but also is of the view that those particular organisations do NOT represent the views of the residents, ratepayers and community members in Queensland.

We would contend that understanding how to handle conflicts of interest should not be that hard for councillors to understand and apply to their conduct and if problems exist then better education would be a more appropriate remedy than weakening the powers of the “umpire”.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melva E Hobson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melva Hobson PSM
President, OSCAR