

NATIONAL QUEENSLAND ANTI-CORRUPTION

'Vindicated' Rob Pyne says he 'made too many enemies' in council crusade

By Tony Moore

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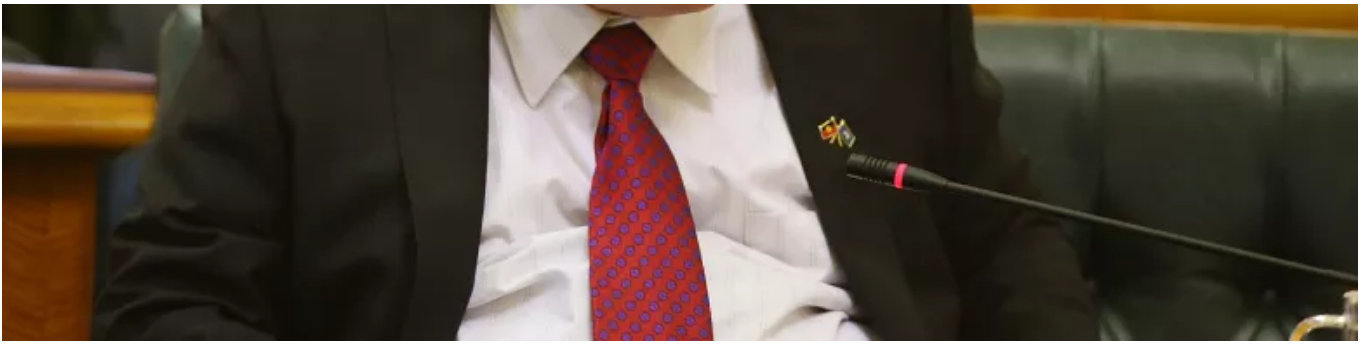
Talking points

- Former Cairns MP Rob Pyne consistently argued for greater scrutiny of local governments in Queensland, to the point of angering his previous party, the ALP.
- He concedes he may have gone too far, but he feels vindicated after the Queensland Government on Wednesday announced a new independent watchdog over local governments in Queensland.

Rob Pyne, the former state MP who campaigned hard against local government complaints, said he felt vindicated after the Queensland government announced funding for an independent body to assess complaints against councils on Wednesday.

Mr Pyne, who was a Cairns councillor before his short-lived stint in Parliament, used his parliamentary position as an independent MP from 2016 to question the behavior of several councils.





Independent MP for Cairns Rob Pyne.

Photo: Chris Hyde

That came after a [well-publicised split from the Australian Labor Party in March 2016](#).

Mr Pyne said he felt "vindicated" by recent events, but conceded he may have gone too far and created political enemies.

“My concern was always that it was time to investigate some systemic problems there,” he told Fairfax Media on Wednesday.

“...I think I acted in a way that politically wasn’t very clever.

"I think my actions did good by creating concern and action and moved things along, however, politically, I created too many enemies.”

The former state MP, Queensland’s first quadriplegic parliamentarian, said he was now on the Newstart allowance.





Former State Government MP Rob Pyne in Townsville.

Photo: supplied

Mr Pyne said the previous system of having complaints sent to the Department of Local Government was inefficient.

“What we had initially was matters being referred to the Department (of Local Government) for investigation and I found that quite unsatisfactory,” he said.

“I think this is a good move.”

Local Government Minister Stirling Hinchliffe announced on Wednesday the new Office of the Independent Assessor would be in place by December.

It will work beside the Crime and Corruption Commission to scrutinise complaints against councils.

The CCC will investigate corruption allegations, while the OIA will assess complaints and investigate official misconduct.

It will refer corruption allegations to the CCC.

After resigning from the Labor Party, Mr Pyne used parliamentary privilege to [release documents critical of Ipswich and Logan councils in state parliament.](#)

Serious charges have since been levelled by the CCC against two Ipswich mayors, Paul Pisasale and Andrew Antoniolli, and Logan mayor Luke Smith.

This followed a lengthy investigation into local governments [in south-east Queensland by the CCC's Operation Belcarra.](#)

The new independent assessor will now judge complaints against Queensland councillors. It will be in place by December 1.

This yet-to-appointed independent assessor will report directly to Mr Hinchliffe.

The person will oversee the new Office of the Independent Assessor, which was announced several weeks ago by Mr Hinchliffe as part of a new wave of scrutiny for Queensland's councils.

The updated Local Government Act establishes the Independent Assessor and the OIA. This body will set up a Councillor Conduct Tribunal to hear allegations of misconduct by a councillor.

It will have the ability to decide on penalties, including referring matters to the CCC.

On Tuesday the Gold Coast City Council's deputy mayor Donna Gates [stood down from the city's planning committee](#) at a meeting of the full Gold Coast City Council.

Last year, Cr Gates remained in the council's city planning committee meeting and [voted on three items involving developers where she had received donations in her 2016 council campaign](#).

At the time, Cr Gates said she was entitled to vote if she declared the donations.

"I have considered my position and believe I should remain in the meeting to vote in the public interest," Cr Gates said on Tuesday.

Cr Gates remained inside the full council meeting in February 2017 and voted for each of the items.

On Tuesday Cr Gates stood down from the planning committee.

Mr Pyne said he was writing a book, tentitively titled *Rob Pyne: A Far Northern Life*.

"It's not finished yet, but the first two chapters are pretty good," he said.

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Tony Moore



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