



RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Hansard Home Page: <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/hansard/>
 E-mail: hansard@parliament.qld.gov.au
 Phone: (07) 3406 7314 Fax: (07) 3210 0182

Subject **FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT** Page

Thursday, 9 August 2007

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT	2453
Local Government Reform Implementation Bill	2453
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT	2453
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Auditor-General of Queensland Report to Parliament No. 5 for 2007 titled 'Results of Audits as at 31 May 2007'	2453
REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS	2453
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report titled 'Twentieth Report on the Register of Members' Interests' dated 3 August 2007	2453
PETITIONS	2453
TABLED PAPER	2454
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	2454
Service Delivery and Performance Commission Report, Department of Communities	2454
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by the Service Delivery and Performance Commission titled 'Report on the Review of the Department of Communities, Disability Services Queensland and the former Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy' dated April 2007.	2454
Service Delivery and Performance Commission Report, Purchasing and Logistics	2454
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by the Service Delivery and Performance Commission titled 'Report on Review of Purchasing and Logistics in the Queensland Government' dated April 2007	2454
Aviation High	2455
Northern Economic Triangle	2455
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by the Department of Infrastructure titled 'Northern Economic Triangle Infrastructure Plan 2007-2012'.	2455
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by the Department of Infrastructure titled 'Northern Economic Triangle Progress Report' dated August 2007	2455
Southport Spit	2456
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Aerial photo titled 'Plan of the Gold Coast Marine Development Project'.	2456
Indigenous Economic Development and Employment	2456
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Queensland Government publication titled 'Queensland Indigenous economic development and employment—making it real'	2457
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development document titled 'Cape York Peninsula & Torres Strait Tourism Development Action Plan' dated July 2007	2457
Export Week	2457

Table of Contents — Thursday, 9 August 2007

Educational and Training Exports	2457
Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security	2458
Royal Queensland Show	2458
Queensland Roars Against Racism	2459
Local Government Reform	2459
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a letter, dated 7 August 2007, from Tom Gilmore to the Editor, Atherton Tablelander titled 'Seize the initiative'	2459
Gold Coast Desalination Project	2459
Queensland Police Service, Internet Fraud	2460
Education	2461
Building Industry	2462
Federal Government Road Funding	2462
Biosecurity	2463
Local Government Funding	2463
ORDER OF BUSINESS	2464
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE	2464
Report	2464
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Public Accounts Committee Report No. 75 titled 'Annual Report 2006-07'	2464
OVERSEAS VISIT	2464
Report	2464
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report on overseas visit to Singapore's Newater Facilities, Pub Waterhub, Singspring Desalination Plant from 30 April to 7 May 2007.	2464
ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF QUEENSLAND	2464
Report	2464
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by the Electoral Commission Queensland titled 'Research Report 1/2007, Queensland Election 2006 Ballot Paper Survey'.	2464
NOTICE OF MOTION	2465
Natural Resources and Water Legislation Amendment Regulation No. 1 of 2007 No. 98	2465
CRIMINAL CODE (ASSAULT CAUSING DEATH) AMENDMENT BILL	2465
First Reading	2465
Second Reading	2465
PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	2466
Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport, Radio Interview	2466
Queensland Food Industry Advisory Council	2466
Western Bypass	2466
Visit to Central Queensland	2467
Traveston Crossing Dam	2467
Redland District Hospital	2468
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	2468
Auditor-General's Report; Infrastructure	2468
Auditor-General's Report; Infrastructure	2469
Local Government Reform	2470
Water Infrastructure	2470
Coalition Leadership	2471
Port and Rail Corporations	2472
Interest Rates	2473
Level Crossing Upgrades	2473
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a Liberal Party poster.	2474
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of an article from the Northside Chronicle dated 21 June 2006, titled 'Clash over crossings'.	2474
Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation	2474
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a letter dated 12 October 2005, from Hon. Lucas to Dr Flegg relating to the western Brisbane transport network investigation.	2474
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Pages from the web site of Dr Flegg, downloaded on 9 August 2007, titled 'Flegg's first 12 months in the job'.	2474
Blackall Range Road Bridge	2475
Health Care for Prisoners, Federal Funding	2475
Road and Railway Bridges	2476
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Transcript from the 18:00 news on ABC 612 Brisbane dated 14 May 2007.	2476
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Transcript from the Drive program on ABC 612 Brisbane dated 14 May 2007.	2477
Indigenous Housing	2477
Pride in Policing Rally	2478
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Document by the Queensland Police Union of Employees detailing rates of pay in the proposed EBA5.	2478
Environment, Federal Funding Cuts	2478
Queensland Emergency Disaster Management Office	2479
Fee-Help	2479

Table of Contents — Thursday, 9 August 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	2480
Further Answer to Question; Emergency Management Queensland	2480
Water Supply	2480
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a document titled 'Gold Coast City Council Local Law No. 10 (water carriers)'	2481
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a document titled 'Gold Coast City Council Local Law Policy No. 10 (water carriers)'	2481
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of her letter to councils regarding the use of town water by water carriers to fill rainwater tanks	2481
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL	2482
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Amendments to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007 to be moved during consideration in detail and explanatory notes	2482
APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL	2483
Third Reading (Cognate Debate)	2483
Long Title (Cognate Debate)	2483
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL	2483
Second Reading	2483
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Minutes of the general meeting of the Calliope Shire Council held at the Calliope Chambers on 15 June 2007	2517
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Document outlining the history of local government areas in Queensland	2519
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copies of various media articles regarding the Maroochy Shire Council	2527
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copies of various media articles and other documents regarding the Noosa Shire Council and proposed amalgamations of local authorities	2530
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of documents regarding results of surveys by Thomas Direct Pty Ltd in relation to proposed amalgamations involving Stanthorpe and Inglewood Shires	2533
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of extracts from the Local Government Act 1993	2534
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of article from the Albert and Logan News dated 10 August 2007 titled 'Logan—where to now?'	2542
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Bundle of documents making submissions relating to proposed amalgamations of local authorities	2560
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Letter, dated 7 August 2007, from Colleen Brady, Secretary, Montville Village Association Inc to Mr Wellington MP relating to iconic status for the Montville/Flaxton area	2560
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Letter, dated 16 July 2007, from P Ruddick, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Capricornia (Australian Electoral Commission) to a certain person regarding their application for electoral enrolment	2572
Division: Question put—That the debate be now adjourned	2583
Resolved in the affirmative	2583
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL	2583
Remaining Stages; Allocation of Time Limit Order	2583
Division: Question put—That the Leader of the House not be heard	2585
Resolved in the negative	2585
Division: Question put—That the motion be agreed to	2585
Resolved in the affirmative	2585
SPEAKER'S STATEMENT	2586
Incorporation of Material in <i>Hansard</i>	2586
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL	2586
Second Reading	2586
Division: Question put—That the bill be now read a second time	2599
Resolved in the affirmative	2599
Consideration in Detail	2600
Clause 1 (Short title)—	2600
Division: Question put—That the member for Warrego's amendment be agreed to	2601
Non-government amendment (Mr Hobbs) negated	2601
Clause 1, as read, agreed to	2601
Clause 2, as read, agreed to	2602
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Transcript from ABC Tropical North Breakfast Program, dated 6 August 2007, with Dr John Rolfe, Prof for Regional Economic Development, Central Qld University regarding council amalgamations	2605
Division: Question put—That clause 3, as read, stand part of the bill	2608
Resolved in the affirmative	2608
Clause 4, as read, agreed to	2608
Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch3, pt 1B)—	2608
Division: Question put—That the member for Warrego's amendment be agreed to	2615
Non-government amendment (Mr Hobbs) negated	2615
Insertion of new clause—	2615
Insertion of new clause—	2616
Division: Question put—That clauses 5 to 22 as amended by the minister's amendments and the schedule as read be agreed to	2617
Resolved in the affirmative	2617

Table of Contents — Thursday, 9 August 2007

Third Reading	2617
Division: Question put—That the bill, as amended, be now read a third time.....	2617
Resolved in the affirmative.....	2617
Long Title	2617
Division: Question put—That the long title of the bill be agreed to.	2617
Resolved in the affirmative.....	2617
SPEAKER'S STATEMENT	2618
Parliamentary Staff	2618
SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT	2618
ADJOURNMENT	2618
Abuse of the Elderly	2618
International Nurses Day	2619
James Nash High School	2619
Scrutiny of Legislation Committee Conference, Wellington	2620
Wide Bay Australia International Air Show	2620
Logan Disability Awards	2621
Aviation High	2621
Ashgrove Electorate, School Projects; Odgers, Ms R; Member for Clayfield	2622
Teenage Adventure Camps Queensland; Palm Beach-Currumbin Lions Club	2623
Mount Archer State School	2623
ATTENDANCE	2624

THURSDAY, 9 AUGUST 2007

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. MF Reynolds, Townsville) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 am.

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. MF Reynolds, Townsville) acknowledged the traditional owners of the land upon which this parliament is assembled and the custodians of the sacred lands of our state.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Local Government Reform Implementation Bill

Mr SPEAKER: I indicate to all members that today is an important day—our last day of sitting for this week. I thank members for their consideration over the last two days with regard to how the parliament has been working. I also want to indicate that the bill before the House today—the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill—is an important one for all parliamentarians. I want to say this, first of all, to members of the government and to members of the opposition: the people who will be speaking on this bill today have a very strong right to be able to speak and to enunciate their clear convictions and feelings with regard to this issue. Sometimes people will feel strongly and will speak strongly. I say to all members of parliament—members of the government frontbench and the government backbench—that you may not like what some of the members of the opposition will say. However, we need to respect their right to speak in exactly the same way, I say to members of the opposition and the crossbenches, that it is important—

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister for transport, if you do not mind! I am actually saying something which I hope is important to the House and I would not want that to be taken away by your comments. Everyone in this parliament has the right to their own convictions. Rather than goading or interjecting at a rapid rate from either side, let us make sure that the local government reform bill can be debated respecting the convictions and the statements of each member of the parliament.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have to report that today I received from the Auditor-General a report titled *Report to Parliament No. 5 of 2007: Results of audits as at 31 May 2007*. I table the report for the information of members.

Tabled paper: Auditor-General of Queensland Report to Parliament No. 5 for 2007 titled 'Results of Audits as at 31 May 2007'.

REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I lay upon the table of the House the 20th report on the Register of Members' Interests.

Tabled paper: Report titled 'Twentieth Report on the Register of Members' Interests' dated 3 August 2007.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Local Government Reform

Ms van Litsenburg, from 11,113 petitioners, requesting the House to not amalgamate Redcliffe City with any other local government and to consider extending Redcliffe's boundaries to surrounding area that border Moreton Bay

North Stradbroke Island, Toll Bridge

Mr English, from 562 petitioners, requesting the House to build a toll bridge to North Stradbroke Island via Russell Island.

Kenmore State High School

Dr Flegg, from 3,757 petitioners, requesting the House to allow students in Mt Crosby, Karana Downs, Karalee and Chuwar access to Kenmore State High School and to plan for the construction of a new high school within this area.

Local Government Reform

Mr O'Brien, from 1,942 petitioners, requesting the House to strongly oppose the forced amalgamation of Douglas Shire Council.

Port Douglas and District Combined Clubs

Mr O'Brien, from 504 petitioners, requesting the House to save the Port Douglas and District Combined Clubs.

North Bundaberg, Traffic Lights

Mr Dempsey, from 281 petitioners, requesting the House to ask Main Roads to install traffic lights at the entrance to the IGA shopping complex on Queen Street, North Bundaberg.

TABLED PAPER

MINISTERIAL PAPER TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following ministerial paper was tabled by the Clerk—

Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure (Ms Bligh)—

- Statement of Reasons as to why the Coordinator-General has delegated to Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd the power contained in section 138(1) of the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971* in relation to the Cedar Grove Weir

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**Service Delivery and Performance Commission Report, Department of Communities**

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.36 am): I table the Service Delivery and Performance Commission's report on the review of the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland and the former Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

Tabled paper: Report by the Service Delivery and Performance Commission titled 'Report on the Review of the Department of Communities, Disability Services Queensland and the former Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy' dated April 2007.

I seek leave to incorporate details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Commission's performance management reviews will cover all government departments by 2010.

It is part of my Government's commitment to delivering accountability and continuous improvement in the public service.

This performance management report supports the ongoing improvement of these particular agencies, their measurement of outcomes, management of contracts with service providers, and implementation of Partnerships Queensland.

Importantly, this review supports the position of my Government to move the former Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy into the Department of Communities.

With the implementation of the machinery of Government changes announced in September 2006, the Department of Communities has already implemented a number of the report's recommendations.

Implementing all of the recommendations and improving alignment of programs and functions aims to deliver better outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders, and improved governance and reporting arrangements.

Mr Speaker, this comprehensive report aims to result in greater efficiency in the use of government dollars and improved outcomes for the community.

Since the completion of the SDPC report, some recommendations have required further negotiation with key stakeholders to ensure alignment with other whole-of-government initiatives.

For example, there is the:

- the Local Government Reform Commission Report;
- Crime and Misconduct Inquiry into Policing in Indigenous Communities;
- a Chief Executive Officer Taskforce on Workforce Capacity and Sustainability; and
- a Chief Executive Office Taskforce on Strong Indigenous Communities.

The Commission will negotiate with the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland on the issue of reporting timeframes.

Mr Speaker, the Commission will also follow up with agencies in approximately 18 months to ensure recommendations have been implemented, and it will provide me with progress reports.

Service Delivery and Performance Commission Report, Purchasing and Logistics

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 am): I table the Service Delivery and Performance Commission's report on the review of purchasing and logistics in the Queensland government.

Tabled paper: Report by the Service Delivery and Performance Commission titled 'Report on Review of Purchasing and Logistics in the Queensland Government' dated April 2007

I seek leave to incorporate details of my ministerial statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

With a whole-of-government approach to purchasing and logistics, the recommendations will ensure my Government maximises purchasing power without disadvantaging suppliers.

Purchasing and logistics are a significant part of delivering Government services, with recent annual spends exceeding \$10 billion per annum.

The changes identified by this report will be implemented through a new Queensland Government Chief Procurement Office.

It will coordinate procurement across Government and ensure agencies are equipped to deliver in the face of this period of unprecedented growth and development.

Agencies' capabilities will be enhanced by better use of technology.

Importantly, suppliers throughout Queensland will continue to be able to provide goods and services to the Queensland Government.

Mr Speaker, Sales and Distribution Services—or SDS—will take on new roles.

These include:

- developing electronic catalogues of commonly purchased items;
- ensuring access to urgently needed supplies in emergency situations like Cyclone Larry; and,
- leading reforms in the storage and movement of goods.

Mr Speaker, to enable SDS to achieve these, I have asked the Minister for Public Works, Housing, Information and Communication Technology to bring transition options to the Government by the end of March 2008.

Aviation High

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 am): Later today I will join my colleague the Minister for Education and Training to officially launch Australia's first dedicated aviation high school. Aviation High is a specialist school which caters for students with a passion for aerospace and aviation careers. Aviation High has undergone much more than just a name change from Hendra Secondary College. It represents a state government investment of \$18 million over four years to 2010 to provide students with a direct pathway to careers in the aviation industry. The school ensures our students are well positioned to take up careers in the burgeoning aviation industry, which employs an estimated 14,000 Queenslanders. Aviation High is the hub for the 17 gateway schools in Education Queensland's aerospace project, which was established with industry partners in 2004. I seek leave to incorporate details in *Hansard* along with a news release announcing details.

Leave granted.

I want to acknowledge the foundation industry partners Boeing Australia, Aviation Australia, Brisbane Airport Corporation, Australian Aerospace and Smiths Aerospace for their continuing support.

The contribution of these industry partners is crucial to the development of relevant curriculum.

Aviation High's 255 students study similar subjects as those offered at other high schools, but with an aviation focus.

Aviation High is equipping young Queenslanders for all kinds of careers in the aviation industry including caterers, flight attendants, pilots, meteorologists, aviation lawyers to engineers.

The school on Widdop Street in Clayfield was selected as the site for Aviation High because of its proximity to the Brisbane Airport precinct and room for expansion.

Enrolments are expected to grow to about 600 students within four years.

Northern Economic Triangle

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.38 am): As members know, Queensland is moving into a significant period of economic development and at the state government's major project conference on 3 August, which I addressed along with the Deputy Premier, I released the Northern Economic Triangle Infrastructure Plan 2007-2012. The plan contains 31 separate strategies and 122 individual actions to drive economic development in the triangle linking Townsville, Mount Isa and Bowen. The triangle is a new economic frontier and this infrastructure plan will help position the region as a future economic hub for minerals processing and industrial development. We have consulted widely with industry and local government on this plan. It details short- and medium-term initiatives that will help us achieve our long-term vision for massive industrial development in northern and north-western Queensland. I table a copy of the plan and a sister document about progress to date for the information of the House.

Tabled paper: Report by the Department of Infrastructure titled 'Northern Economic Triangle Infrastructure Plan 2007-2012'.

Tabled paper: Report by the Department of Infrastructure titled 'Northern Economic Triangle Progress Report' dated August 2007

At the major projects conference I also announced that the state government would push ahead with plans to boost coal exports by doubling the capacity of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal, north of Bowen. I welcome the decision by the Coordinator-General to allow the proposed stage 3 expansion of the coal terminal to proceed, providing certain conditions are met. The \$770 million stage 3 expansion would double annual coal throughput at the port to 50 million tonnes. The stage 3 expansion of Abbot Point is contingent on the construction of the 69-kilometre northern missing link project connecting the Goonyella and Newlands rail systems. Coal producers have confirmed that they remain committed to that project going ahead. The transport minister, the Treasurer and I have been working on that to ensure that it happens. This is another example of the Queensland government getting on with the job of developing critical infrastructure to deliver coal to world markets.

Southport Spit

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.40 am): The Southport Spit has been earmarked for world-class marinas. The state government has earmarked more than 10 hectares of prime land on the Gold Coast at The Spit at Southport for world-class tourism developments and marinas. The new marinas could host up to 30 superyachts and 350 smaller vessels.

The city wants world-class marinas, but it also wants to keep public space and recreational areas at the northern end of The Spit. So we are redefining the Gold Coast Marine Development Project to ensure that we get the balance right between these competing demands.

In line with the government's election commitment of August 2006, the redefined project does not include a cruise ship terminal on The Spit, nor will there be any marina development in the Marine Stadium area. The proposed project has enjoyed widespread support on the Gold Coast. Developers like it. So do the green groups. I acknowledge their public support for this, as do my team on the Gold Coast. What we have here is a win-win situation that is good for the Gold Coast and good for Queensland.

We have also committed more than \$500,000 to prepare a Marine Infrastructure Master Plan to cement the Gold Coast's position as one of Australia's great marine hubs. The Marine Infrastructure Master Plan will cover the area from the Southport bridge to southern Moreton Bay, including the Coomera and Logan rivers upstream to the M1 Motorway. Our marine industries are booming and we want to help the industry manage the growth and continue to expand and create jobs and wealth for Queensland.

I table for the information of the House a plan of the Gold Coast Marine Development Project, which I would hope all members would take some particular interest in.

Tabled paper: Aerial photo titled 'Plan of the Gold Coast Marine Development Project'.

Ms Keech: Hear, hear!

Mr BEATTIE: It is good for tourism. I take that interjection from the minister for tourism.

Indigenous Economic Development and Employment

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.42 am): As I reported to the House earlier this week, last month at the government's historic community cabinet in Yarrabah we signed two agreements vital to the future of our Indigenous communities. The first was the Indigenous Partnership Agreement, which commits the state government and each of the 15 communities that have so far signed to take responsibility for some major changes. The Indigenous Partnership Agreement is about real change, with the government and the communities working together to provide better services in return for changed behaviour and greater responsibility by community members.

I also signed a landmark agreement with the Queensland Resources Council to boost Indigenous employment and enterprise in the booming resources sector. We also announced an historic shift in the way land tenure issues are managed in Indigenous communities to help improve housing and business opportunities.

Today I am pleased to announce another series of initiatives and practical projects—all part of our efforts to improve the lives of people living in Indigenous communities. The first of these, Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Employment—Making it Real, is another practical step in line with the task we set ourselves under the Indigenous Partnership Agreement. It focuses on delivering Indigenous economic development, jobs and enterprise by assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to engage with the real economy and mobilising support of the corporate sector.

In practical terms, we expect this package of initiatives to boost local jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in delivering government services; in business enterprises related to tourism, the arts and on country; and in the private sector, in industries such as mining. The land tenure reforms will enable Indigenous people to pursue sustainable business opportunities on their land and to attract investment to support economic growth. They also open the door to home ownership.

The second initiative, Looking After Country Together, is a new framework to improve Indigenous access to and management of traditional land and sea country. It aims to deliver increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to traditional land and sea; stronger Indigenous involvement in the management of traditional land and sea; and stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in, and influence on, broader natural resource planning and policy development.

I am also pleased to release a draft Cape York and Torres Strait Tourism Development Action Plan for consultation. As part of this plan the Queensland government will appoint tourism development officers in Cape York and the Torres Strait.

I table for the House a document titled *Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Employment—Making it Real*.

Tabled paper: Queensland Government publication titled 'Queensland Indigenous economic development and employment—making it real'.

I also table for the House the Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait Tourism Development Action Plan.

Tabled paper: Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development document titled 'Cape York Peninsula & Torres Strait Tourism Development Action Plan' dated July 2007.

I seek leave to have the rest of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

In practical terms, we expect to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in natural resource management, and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity to better manage their own land and become more involved in managing State land.

A real example is the funding provided for the 2007-08 year for 20 Indigenous ranger positions—real jobs to care for country. This is the first phase in delivering on our election commitment to fund the creation of up to 100 Indigenous rangers to support the ongoing management and protection of wild rivers throughout Queensland. We will be working with local communities to decide where these positions will be distributed.

We want to support sustainable Indigenous tourism opportunities and see them thrive. Projects like the Mapoon Aboriginal community's turtle conservation project have the capacity to become significant income and employment generators in local communities right across the Cape and TI.

As members know The Cape York Peninsula Heritage Bill 2007 enables Indigenous people to pursue sustainable economic development while protecting Cape York's unique natural and cultural heritage.

The Government and the Aurukun community are working in partnership to ensure that the community is ready to take advantage of the significant employment and other opportunities that will flow from the major bauxite project.

I have also given in-principle support to welfare reform trials in Cape York designed to foster economic independence and reduce welfare dependence, subject to a genuine partnership with the Australian Government, the local communities and the Cape York Institute.

These initiatives complement our ongoing commitments to skilling and business development, and will be further driven next month by a Ministerial Roundtable with leading Queensland employers.

We will continue to work co-operatively with Indigenous leaders and their communities to bring about real change and economic prosperity.

Export Week

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 am): Export Week will be from 22 to 26 October and will celebrate many business and industry success stories. I urge members to be supportive of it. To achieve that, I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

As part of this year's annual celebration, our Trade and Investment Commissioners will be in regional Queensland to provide advice and training on how to get more local goods and services onto world markets.

In Brisbane, there will be a visiting delegation from the South Carolina State Government exploring opportunities for collaboration.

There will be a Middle East Opportunities Breakfast, and a Queensland-Pacific Trade Update.

I am especially looking forward to hosting two key events: A lunch celebrating the success of our New Exporters and, of course, the annual Premier of Queensland's Export Awards night.

Award categories this year include agribusiness, minerals and energy, tourism, art and entertainment, education and IT.

The awards have attracted 189 applications, which is great, Mr Speaker.

I am also delighted to welcome a new award—the Richard Joel Young Export Entrepreneur Award. It will be presented to an export business owner under the age of 35.

Export Week 2007 demonstrates my Government's commitment to enhancing export opportunities and assisting businesses expand their global markets.

This is the Smart State on the Move, Mr Speaker.

Educational and Training Exports

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 am): My government is committed to expanding Queensland's reputation for high-quality educational and training exports to the Middle East. I am pleased to report that the Southbank Institute of Technology has become the first Queensland TAFE to break into the emerging market by reaching a landmark agreement which the United Arab Emirates Academy at Abu Dhabi. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*. I encourage other industries to follow suit.

Leave granted.

Under this agreement, the Southbank Institute will provide business training to students at the Academy for the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, the United Arab Emirates largest oil producer.

The initial contract is valued at around \$100,000, but the Institute is hopeful the relationship will blossom and lead to more contracts in the future.

Queensland education institutions have been very active in the Middle East and other export successes have included:

- the incorporation of Queensland school curriculum in an international school in the United Arab Emirates;
- familiarisation tours for 60 of Abu Dhabi's top high school students in 2006 and 2007; and
- a joint venture arrangement between the University of Queensland and the Sohar University in Oman.

My Government, through Queensland Education and Training International has led two trade missions to the Middle East in 2006 and 2007, visiting the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

In 2006, more than 1,300 students from the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia enrolled with Queensland institutions to undertake their studies.

My Government will continue to work to strengthen Queensland's education and training industry, and the newly established Trade Queensland offices in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, will assist Queensland education and training providers to win new export business in the Middle East.

Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 am): My government recognises that terrorism no longer has international boundaries in today's society. We understand that investment is needed to effectively prevent and manage these security threats. That is why my government is providing \$1 million to support the recently established Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security. The centre is a cooperative alliance between Griffith University, the Australian National University, the University of Queensland and Charles Sturt University and will be based at Griffith University at Mount Gravatt. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

It will be headed by Professor Lorraine Mazerolle, a distinguished scholar with expertise in policing issues.

Mr Speaker, with my Government's support, this alliance beat other rival bids to secure \$10m of Federal funding to establish the Centre right here in Queensland.

Research undertaken by the Centre will help to explain the motivations and dynamics of people at risk of radicalisation and terrorist activity, the situational circumstances of terrorist events, and the nature of emerging crimes that challenge contemporary society, including terrorism, drugs, computer technology and new and critical technologies, techniques, and finance arrangements.

As a result, Queensland will have the practical knowledge of national and international policing and security experts on our doorstep, as well as cutting edge technologies such as web-based crime mapping.

As a collaborating partner, the Queensland Police Service will work with other state policing organisations, the Australian Federal Police and security organisations to develop integrated, evidence-based responses to major security threats that are of deep concern to the wider community.

This means that our police service will be one of the most informed and responsive teams in the world.

We will be able to build better police community relations, more effectively police "at-risk" communities, and provide a best practice service delivery model with integrity.

The Centre will be officially launched in February 2008.

Royal Queensland Show

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 am): As we all know, the Ekka starts today. As we do every year, my cabinet will hold its Ekka community cabinet on Monday, giving ministers an opportunity to talk to the people working in these industries and hear first-hand the issues that they are facing. Indeed, I was at the Ekka this morning for a number of media engagements and it is looking great. I know there have been some issues about the flu, but the doctors I spoke to this morning basically said that there is no more danger than there has been in previous years. We encourage people to go to the Ekka. Obviously, if they are sick and they are at the contagious stage, we do not encourage them, but I encourage people to continue to support the Ekka. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Ekka brings the city and bush together and is a wonderful celebration of our great State, with thousands of people from all corners of Queensland coming together to participate.

It is also an opportunity to showcase innovation and knowledge across a range of rural and urban industries

As I said, my Cabinet will hold its Ekka Community Cabinet on Monday, giving Ministers an opportunity to talk to the people working in these industries and to hear first-hand the issue they are facing.

Mr Speaker, Government departments and agencies will again have a strong presence at the Queensland Government Pavilion with a focus this year on encouraging Queenslanders to be more aware of the simple actions they can take to save water and reduce greenhouse gases.

ClimateSmart House at the Ekka is a compact showcase of eco-efficient design, effective use of sustainable materials and advice on saving energy and water around the home.

I encourage showgoers to pay a visit to the Pavilion, and wish the RNA a very successful 2007 Royal Brisbane Show.

Queensland Roars Against Racism

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 am): On 5 October the Queensland Roar Football Club will take on the Wellington Phoenix at Suncorp Stadium. We will continue to support their campaign. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

This will be the second game in the important Roar Against Racism Campaign, and a chance for Queenslanders to again give racism the "red card".

The event is part of the Queensland Multicultural Festival, and I extend an invitation to my fellow Members to join this important campaign and show that racism will not, and cannot be tolerated in the Smart State.

The first game was held on July 1 when Queensland Roar took on the South African team, SuperSport United.

More than 11,500 people roared against racism that day, in support of cultural diversity.

The inaugural TransLink 'Roar Against Racism' Cup went to The Roar, who led four goals to one.

This three-year Queensland Roars Against Racism campaign is using a variety of special events, like these, to promote community harmony.

Local Government Reform

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.47 am): I want to draw the attention of the House to an article by Tom Gilmore, a former National Party minister, in the Atherton *Tablelander* in relation to local government amendments in which he says—

The Queensland government has both the constitutional and legal jurisdiction to do whatever it pleases in respect of local government boundaries and all indications would suggest that the amalgamation of the four town tableland shires is now inevitable. Clearly, it will then be our responsibility to accept the decision and so move forward in the best interests of everyone in our community.

I urge everybody to follow what Tom Gilmore has said, because I think it makes a lot of sense. I think everyone knows that Tom Gilmore was well respected in this House. He may well have been a National Party minister, but he was well respected.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 7 August 2007, from Tom Gilmore to the Editor, Atherton *Tablelander* titled 'Seize the initiative'.

Gold Coast Desalination Project

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (9.48 am): As I advised the House on Tuesday, the Gold Coast desalination project is moving ahead rapidly and construction is on track for completion in November 2008. Many of my cabinet colleagues and I saw progress firsthand a week ago.

In parallel with the physical construction work, I am also pleased to advise the House that I and the government take the issue of corporate governance of projects like this very seriously and so do the companies we have established to deliver our water infrastructure projects.

The Auditor-General has today tabled a report commenting on the corporate governance arrangements for infrastructure projects, particularly the Gold Coast desalination project. The Auditor-General conducted an initial assessment of this project in February this year shortly after the state became a shareholder in the Gold Coast City Council's project in late 2006.

As acknowledged by the Auditor-General, SureSmart Water, the special purpose vehicle established to carry the project forward, inherited all previous contract arrangements from the Gold Coast City Council. That initial February assessment identified several concerns with the governance of the project and, as presented in table 2.1 of the report, returned a score of three for the six areas assessed against the UK Office of Government Commerce standards.

A score of three indicates that improvement opportunities exist to implement best practice and is far from satisfactory. The Auditor-General has subsequently conducted a reassessment of the desalination plant project as at 30 June 2007. The reassessment returned improved scores of two for all six areas assessed presented in table 2.2 of the report. This reflects the Auditor-General's finding that the management board and shareholders of the project company have been acting to implement the recommendations since the initial audit in February. The Auditor-General concluded his discussion of infrastructure projects by commenting—

I am encouraged by the process to date in implementing the recommendations made in the audit management letters to the individual entities.

I am pleased that the Auditor-General is playing an active role in reviewing the governance of infrastructure projects. There is no time for complacency given the importance of these projects, especially to water supply initiatives in south-east Queensland. I am also pleased to acknowledge the Auditor-General's opinion that there has been a noticeable change in project governance and management systems over a very short period. SureSmart Water has established an audit and risk committee and has now appointed three highly credentialled independent board members. Reporting and risk management processes have been enhanced both at a corporate level and within the construction alliance. The role of the independent auditor has been strengthened, and both the company and the alliance have appointed new financial, technical and operational staff to support the project.

Members will note in reading the report that the Auditor-General makes a number of more general comments about special-purpose vehicle companies and identifies this structure as a potential area of governance weakness for government. I can also advise today that the Department of Infrastructure will establish a dedicated unit to assist and guide special-purpose vehicles delivering infrastructure projects. This special unit within the Department of Infrastructure will operate in a similar way to the Office of Government Owned Corporations within Treasury in relation to that sector. The department and the special purpose vehicles will continue to work positively with the Auditor-General to identify and manage corporate and project risks.

The Auditor-General has also raised some concerns with regard to the Shared Service Initiative, particularly in relation to user access management, controls over user testing and application controls used by shared service providers to manage transactions for clients. I acknowledge the issues raised by the Auditor-General but believe they need to be viewed in context. The Shared Service Initiative is a project of unique scope and complexity in Australia. Shared service providers are working hard to deliver the initiative with secure processes and controls. Substantial work has already been undertaken to establish processes and controls for the new systems and to improve these areas for legacy systems that continue until the new systems are fully rolled out. Much of this work occurred in 2006-07 and will result in improved controls being in place for 2007-08.

Finally, I note that the Auditor-General made some comments about agencies not having appropriate asset impairment frameworks. Again, I acknowledge that some improvement can be made in this area across government, but I think it is important to note that asset impairment is a relatively new concept for public sector agencies. Treasury is presently developing measures to assist agencies to cost effectively account for potential impairment of assets.

Queensland Police Service, Internet Fraud

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.52 am): The internet is playing a larger part in our day-to-day lives than ever before, with many people using computers to make banking transactions, talk to their friends online and even buy and sell items through marketplace web sites such as eBay. As with all transactions, consumer protection is vital, and the Queensland Police Service is at the forefront of protecting consumers online.

Today I wish to inform the House of a world-first partnership involving the Queensland Police Service and eBay, which aims to simplify and bolster consumer protection for customers using their online auction site. To give this partnership context, eBay advises that it currently has 230 million members and hopes that this initiative can be replicated by other policing jurisdictions in Australia and around the world. In the past, if a consumer had a complaint when an item they purchased on a site like eBay did not arrive or was not what was described, they often made their complaint straight to the police. In many cases, police found that if the consumer contacted their online auction site or the seller directly their complaint could have been handled easily without police involvement. So the Queensland Police Service has implemented an initiative with eBay and other auction sites which it is believed will settle around 70 per cent of disputes without police becoming involved.

If police receive a complaint they can now direct the complainant to eBay's dispute resolution processes which can be found on its web site. They can also check the terms of sale, deal directly with the seller, raise a dispute with eBay or file a dispute with PayPal if they used that online payment method. If the dispute cannot be settled, the person making the complaint can then report the matter to the Queensland Police Service and can find out how to do this on the police web site.

Queensland Police have already charged one person this year with offences arising from a complaint, and there are 29 other complaints being investigated. Of note is the fact that 18 of these complaints are against just four individuals. Not all of these complaints have come from Queensland residents, and this is another aspect of this initiative which displays the Queensland Police Service's leadership in protecting consumer rights online. If a person is not happy with the dispute resolution process, they are directed to the Queensland Police Service's web site even if they are from interstate. Once Queensland police receive a complaint which relates to another jurisdiction, they will pass that

complaint onto police in other states. Effectively the Queensland Police Service is acting as the coordinating authority in Australia for complaints about online marketplace transactions. As part of these investigations, eBay will provide Queensland police with an information package including victim details, complete background information on the person under investigation and advice on what may be required for any search warrants. This initiative is so successful that police in other states are directing consumers to the Queensland Police Service web site to undertake the dispute resolution process.

The Queensland Police Service is committed to protecting the rights of consumers who use the internet to purchase items through marketplace web sites such as eBay. By directing them to eBay's dispute resolution, police will spend less time reviewing frivolous complaints and will only become involved when serious claims need to be investigated.

Education

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (9.56 am): The level of federal government intervention in state business that we are experiencing is unprecedented. In education, it has imposed on state education systems endless rounds of testing under the threat of withdrawing Commonwealth funds from schools, both public and private, and now it wants to meddle in Queensland's successful school based assessment system for the senior years. Without any consultation at all, the federal government announced in its budget papers this year that the next funding agreement for 2009-12 will include a requirement to introduce externally moderated assessment for year 12 students. Limited detail was provided and concerns were raised with me by all sectors of the education community in Queensland that we are moving back to the Dark Ages of sudden-death exams at the end of year 12.

I wrote to the federal education minister seeking confirmation that it was not her intention to make Queensland conduct subject-specific external examinations as a condition of federal funding. We do, of course, have a core skills test, which is an excellent assessment of aptitude and capability across a range of domains for students and provides a moderating effect for the assessment of subject-specific outcomes. I sought information about what evidence, if any, the federal minister had that moving to subject-specific external exams would benefit Queensland. The ACT education minister also wrote to the federal minister expressing similar concerns.

Imagine my surprise when I received a letter from the federal minister last week that in no way acknowledged my concerns. In fact, it could hardly be called a letter. It was a circular. The only difference between the letter to me and the letter to the ACT minister was that my name and the state's name had changed at the top of the letter. The ACT minister received almost exactly the same letter as I did. There was no acknowledgement that the benefits and effectiveness of our school based assessment system had been highlighted by prominent researchers, no recognition that our system provides multiple opportunities for students to perform to their potential, no response to the fact that Queensland's education sectors and the community, all of them, have a high level of confidence in the current system of school based assessment, and no evidence that the federal minister even read my letter.

Let me give the House a couple of examples that indicate how literate the federal education minister is. Paragraph 4 of her letter to me states—

External assessment of students' knowledge, skills and understandings in a subject provides an objective measure of student performance, helps to maintain the integrity of the assessment process ...

The letter to Mr Barr in the ACT states—

External assessment of students' knowledge, skills and understandings in a subject provides an objective measure of student performance, helps to maintain the integrity of the assessment process ...

Mr WELFORD: And so on.

Ms Nelson-Carr: Blah, blah, blah.

Mr WELFORD: Blah, blah, blah. Over the page, it says—

I am aware that currently Queensland operates a system of externally moderated school-based assessment in the senior years of schooling over a two-year period ... but does not currently have any form of external assessment of subject-specific content knowledge for all students achieving Year 12 certification.

To Mr Barr, she wrote—

I am aware that currently the ACT operates a system of externally moderated school-based assessment in the senior years of schooling ... but does not currently have any form of external assessment of subject-specific content knowledge for all students achieving Year 12 certification.

I go right down to the last paragraph of the letter to me, where it says—

I look forward to the cooperation of state and territory education ministers in the implementation of these important Budget initiatives.

To Mr Barr, she wrote—

I look forward to the cooperation of state and territory education ministers ...

This is the federal education minister who goes on and on and on about the state of literacy in our schools. The state of her literacy is the extent to which she can photocopy. That is about as good as her literacy extends to. She has no idea what she is doing. If the federal government continues in this way, there will be virtually no role for schools because the Commonwealth will be putting itself in the place of schools, in the place of teachers and in the place of everyone else. I just wish the federal education minister had some respect for all the school sectors, for the parent communities who support Queensland's assessment system and for our professional teachers who do a great job.

Building Industry

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (10.01 am): Homeowners and renters across Australia are going to be hurt by the interest rate rise yesterday, which will drive up private rents and put more and more pressure on social housing. Despite promising to keep interest rates at record low levels, the Howard government has now presided over five interest rate rises since the last election.

A government member: How many?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Five. There have been five interest rate rises since the last election, and this highlights the dishonesty of Mr Howard and his government and why the people of Australia will square him up whenever he has the guts to go to an election.

There is no doubt the interest rate rises will put pressure on our building industry here in Queensland. Despite the Howard government's interest rate rises, under our government's sound economic management the Queensland building industry has performed well, even while there has been a building industry downturn in the rest of the nation. The Building Services Authority monitors building activity trends both nationally and locally. Queensland is maintaining its status as the economic powerhouse, with the building industry leading the way in the residential sector with record numbers of starts.

During 2006-07, the BSA insured 93,166 residential construction work projects, exceeding its forecast of 86,000 by more than eight per cent. To 30 June 2007 the total value of insured construction was \$10.3 billion, with new home construction making up \$8.8 billion and alterations and additions being \$1.5 billion. We can imagine how popular that increase yesterday was for the people who draw their living out of this industry. This time last year the BSA had insured residential construction work to the value of \$8.6 billion across 85,023 policies. New home construction has increased over the last year and now represents 46 per cent of residential building work contracts. Again, imagine how welcome that news was yesterday for that group of people after Mr Howard broke another promise.

The average contract value of both alteration and addition projects and new home constructions reduced slightly, with an average alteration and addition cost of \$28,858 and an average new home construction cost of \$222,241. As more licensees enter the Queensland market, it would seem that pricing is becoming more competitive. That will take a downturn as a result of yesterday's announcement. The Queensland building industry has never been stronger, but the main challenge it faces is the interest rate rises of the Howard government—a government which we all know will be out of power soon.

Federal Government Road Funding

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.04 am): Nowhere is the federal government's lack of infrastructure investment more evident than on Queensland's roads. It is evident in north Queensland, where mayors from Sarina to Cairns have united to request \$2 billion in urgent upgrades to the Bruce Highway. It is evident in Brisbane, where Canberra refused to contribute a cent to the Gateway upgrade, even though it is National Highway, and where the Liberal lord mayor says at every opportunity that the federal government is not doing enough for roads. And it is evident on the Gold Coast, where residents are crying out for a vital upgrade of the 23 kilometres of the Pacific Motorway from Nerang to Tugun.

Tenders could be called within weeks for the first part of the urgently needed \$1.5 billion upgrade of the Pacific Motorway if the federal government makes funding available. Main Roads has completed planning for a revamp of the \$36 million Nielsens Road interchange and the bulldozers are ready to roll once Canberra matches the dollars Queensland has on the table. The fifty-fifty contribution that we have been seeking from the federal government for more than two years is a small return on the more than \$3 billion in fuel taxes Gold Coast motorists have pumped into Canberra's coffers over the last decade.

I note the member for Moncrieff, Steven Ciobo, is planning a protest meeting in an attempt to derail state government planning for an upgrade of the M1. Mr Ciobo has been in parliament since 2001 and, like Mr Howard, he is tired, he has no new ideas, he has no solutions, he cannot find the money for infrastructure on the Gold Coast and he repeatedly dodges federal government responsibility.

Every single year, Gold Coast motorists pump \$330 million in fuel tax into Canberra's coffers. But this tired, worn-out federal government and its tired, worn-out local member cannot come up with their share of the money for this vital road. Mr Ciobo should be calling a protest meeting about Peter Costello's failure to give the Gold Coast a fair go, especially given the federal government is putting \$160 million a year over 10 years in funding into the same road in New South Wales.

Canberra has not committed funding to a major Gold Coast road project since 10 March 2003. That is four years, four months and 30 days of nothing from Canberra for Gold Coast roads. Rather than spending taxpayer funds on a plebiscite on council amalgamations, perhaps Canberra should hold a plebiscite of Gold Coast motorists about whether 100 per cent of the federal government fuel tax should be spent on their roads. The state government spends twice what it collects in registration on roads, but the federal government returns a minuscule 20c in the dollar it collects in fuel tax to roads.

I do not imagine that Mr Howard has got the guts to put that issue to a plebiscite but Queenslanders do have a vote they can exercise in the next few months. I urge them to keep the appalling lack of road funding from the Howard government at the top of their mind when they get a chance to have their say at the federal election. The saddest thing about the last 10 years is that the federal government has squandered Australia's best economic boom time since the war and has not invested in infrastructure to pay for the efficiencies we need when times change and the cycle inevitably goes down. In contrast, the state government is spending its money.

Biosecurity

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.07 am): Biosecurity is an issue this government takes very seriously. It is crucial to national and international markets that our primary industries and fisheries maintain their richly deserved clean green status. It is very obviously not such a priority for the federal colleagues of those on the other side of this House. The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has been informed that the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service is reducing and proposes to eliminate the provision of the Australian government anti-smuggling subsidy to Queensland. This subsidy was used to encourage clients to import high-risk plant material through government operated post-entry plant quarantine facilities. It was meant to deter the smuggling of new plant material into the country in order to overcome the high cost of plant quarantine.

The importation of plant material for propagation is one of the most likely entry pathways for emergency plant pests. Has the devastation to the Emerald community caused by citrus canker been forgotten already? So it seems, in Canberra at least. AQIS is proposing to progressively reduce funding to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries for the state's Eagle Farm post-entry plant quarantine facility, from \$110,000 in 2005-06 to zero by June 2009. This is despite the fact that the majority of functions currently being performed at the facility at Eagle Farm are the direct responsibility of AQIS. The facility is projected to run at a loss of approximately \$171,000 in the 2006-07 financial year.

This is not the only situation in which the federal government has left the Queensland department of primary industries hanging out to dry. With fire ants the federal government, despite agreement being reached nationally and approved by a scientific advisory body, left Queensland \$1.712 million short over a two-year period—a decision that could risk the success of the eradication program. Queensland growers also should not forget the federal government's contribution to the battle against sugarcane smut. Their contribution—nothing, absolutely nothing. Queensland, meanwhile, has funded the entire response at a cost of more than \$15 million. Once again the Queensland government has been forced to pick up the slack.

Local Government Funding

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (10.10 am): The Beattie government is committed to allocating significant funds to our councils to ensure that they are equipped to provide their communities with the infrastructure and services that they require. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Commonwealth.

I have previously challenged the member for Warrego to speak with his colleagues in the federal government and match the Beattie government's commitment to council funding, in particular to infrastructure programs for the Torres Strait and mainland Indigenous communities. Apparently, that dialogue has so far failed to materialise in results.

This government has committed \$56 million to the Torres Strait major infrastructure program. By contrast, the federal government has come to the table with a comparatively inadequate \$12 million. This government's \$56 million commitment was made with the expectation that the Commonwealth would match the funding on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Clearly that has not happened and the people of the Torres Strait have been short changed to the tune of \$44 million.

Similarly, the Queensland government has \$100 million on the table for the mainland Indigenous program for environmental health infrastructure. That is a substantial funding commitment and we would also expect the Howard government to honour its commitment to match it on a dollar-for-dollar basis. But what has it come up with? A total of \$30 million—short changing Indigenous communities on the mainland by \$70 million.

When it comes to the crunch, the federal budget for local government has failed Queensland and failed local government. It is important to remind the House that the Australian Local Government Association's formal request for a \$250 million infrastructure fund was denied outright by the federal government in its last budget. The Prime Minister and the federal local government minister, Jim Lloyd, had a chance to lift local government out of the doldrums but the federal government ignored them.

Funds going to local government from the federal government again declined this year to represent only 0.75 per cent of the total tax revenue. In stark contrast, in Queensland we have allocated a record budget of \$788.1 million in funding to assist local government for this financial year.

The federal government has no intention of acting in a responsible or serious way in providing our councils with even adequate levels of funding. If it were serious, and not just obsessed with its rapidly dwindling re-election prospects, the Commonwealth would be actively providing funding that the communities require and deserve, not just funding political trickery.

Mr SPEAKER: That concludes ministerial statements.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.12 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That the House be entitled to meet after 10 pm tonight following a dinner break between 6.30 pm and 7.30 pm.

Mr SPEAKER: The motion has been seconded by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services.

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Report

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (10.13 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Public Accounts Committee Annual Report 2006-07. I take this opportunity to thank all of those who assisted the committee with its work program during the year. I also thank the other members of the committee, particularly the deputy chair, the member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, for their input and support and the committee staff for their assistance during the period. I commend the report to the House.

Tabled paper: Public Accounts Committee Report No. 75 titled 'Annual Report 2006-07'.

OVERSEAS VISIT

Report

Mr GIBSON (Gympie—NPA) (10.14 am): I lay upon the table of the House the report of my travels to Singapore.

Tabled paper: Report on overseas visit to Singapore's Newater Facilities, Pub Waterhub, Singspring Desalination Plant from 30 April to 7 May 2007.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF QUEENSLAND

Report

Hon. KG SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (10.14 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Electoral Commission of Queensland, Queensland Election 2006, Ballot Paper Survey.

Tabled paper: Report by the Electoral Commission Queensland titled 'Research Report 1/2007, Queensland Election 2006 Ballot Paper Survey'.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Natural Resources and Water Legislation Amendment Regulation No. 1 of 2007 No. 98

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (10.14 am): I give notice that I shall move—

That the Natural Resources and Water Legislation Amendment Regulation No. 1 of 2007 No. 98 tabled in the parliament on 5 June 2007 be disallowed.

CRIMINAL CODE (ASSAULT CAUSING DEATH) AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (10.15 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the Criminal Code. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (10.15 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The bill which I present today amends the Criminal Code Act 1899 by introducing a new offence of unlawful assault causing death and by increasing the sentence range available for crimes committed against section 544, accessories after the fact to crimes.

The purpose of this bill is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to respond to community concern that our current Criminal Code is no longer adequate to cover modern-day crimes, such as the growing rate of alcohol induced violence, particularly amongst the younger population. The recent acquittals of Jonathan James Little and Ryan William Moody are but two, high-profile examples of the Criminal Code's inability to hold violent offenders to account for their actions.

Members will recall that earlier this year Jonathan Little, 21, stood trial for the murder of 26-year-old David Matthew Stevens. It was admitted during the trial that in the early morning of 4 December 2005 in the Brunswick Street Mall, Brisbane, Little punched Stevens in the face knocking him to ground. Little then delivered a serious kick to Stevens between the neck and shoulder, apparently 'lining him up like a football'. Stevens later died in hospital as a result of a brain haemorrhage.

Ryan Moody, 23, was charged in January 2005 with the manslaughter of Nigel Lee. It was admitted that in the early hours of the morning on 6 January Moody and Lee engaged in an altercation in a taxi queue near Caxton Street, Paddington. It was admitted that during this tussle Moody delivered a forceful punch to Lee's face, shattering his nose and knocking him to the ground. A short while later, Mr Lee tragically passed away as a consequence of the injuries suffered.

Due to the shortness of time, I seek leave to incorporate the balance of my second reading speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Despite the evidence against Little and Moody, both young men were acquitted of murder and/or the alternative charge, manslaughter. In both cases, s 23 of the Criminal Code—the accident defence—was relied upon, with Little and Moody both claiming that they should not be held criminally responsible for the accidental deaths of Stevens and Lee, respectively. Mr Speaker, it may be that both Little and Moody did not intend to kill either of their victims. It may be that they thought their actions were justified in the intoxicated circumstances, albeit that they did not foresee the fatal consequences. However, Mr Speaker, the tragic reality is that one punch can kill. One punch can kill. Both Little and Moody could have walked away.

Community expectations and concern have called for the introduction of this new offence. The Queensland Coalition considered amending s 23 to limit its application in certain circumstances, however, it was recognised such might cause legislative uncertainty. The Coalition believes the initiative it has taken in drafting this offence will best address the unacceptable void currently existing in the Criminal Code.

Turning to the second purpose of this Bill—the amendment of s 544 of the Criminal Code, Accessories after the fact to crimes—the proposed amendment is motivated by strong judicial statements that the sentence range currently available for s 544 crimes is "absurdly low". Mr Speaker, through you, I direct Members to the comments of the Chief Justice of Queensland, the Hon. Paul de Jersey CJ, in *R v Shales* [2005] QCA 192 at page 7, and of his Honour Fryberg J, in *R v Thomas*, unreported, Supreme Court of Queensland, Ind 67/2007, 19 March 2007 at pages 2-3 concerning the current inadequacy of s 544. This Bill recognises that the sentence range currently available for s 544 crimes is, indeed, "absurdly low", and gives Courts greater discretion in sentencing accessories after the fact to crimes.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Shine, adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport, Radio Interview

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.18 am): It is clear that Labor federal candidates all over Queensland are starting to panic. It is clear that there has been an effort in this parliament this week to try to support Labor candidates who know that they are going to get wiped out because of the tidal wave of public opinion that has been engendered by their state colleagues. I will not discuss the legislation.

Mr SPEAKER: In actual fact you are discussing the legislation. Go to another topic, if you could.

Mr SEENEY: There was an interesting radio interview in Brisbane yesterday where the minister for local government was interviewed by 4BC. He made a comment that I think should be of interest to every member in this House. He stated—

... I think we all understand what human nature is and I suppose ultimately I'm a politician and it takes one to know one.

There was a whole range of callers to the radio station following that interview. The interviewer, John Miller, stated—

What he's clearly said is that most politicians, indeed, most of us, can only ever be driven by a desire to advance our own cause, primarily driven by the Gravy Train, not any desire to serve our communities.

I wonder if his Labor colleagues agreed with the minister that that is what drives all of us in this place and that is what drives all people who serve, no matter their political level, across the state. The minister did not quite get the welcome he expected. The interviewer said—

Well thanks Andrew, you arrogant prig!

That is with a 'g' not a 'ck', although either would do just as well. There was a flood of callers and I will not repeat their comments because they are quite unparliamentary. It indicates the extent to which the public reaction against the minister, the Premier and the agenda that is being pursued by the government is sweeping Queensland. It is interesting to see the government trying to protect its federal colleagues, but Kevin Rudd's worst nightmare is Andrew Fraser and Peter Beattie.

Queensland Food Industry Advisory Council

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (10.20 am): I rise to inform the House of the creation of the Food Industry Advisory Council, which is a joint initiative of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations. On behalf of both ministers, I chair the council and report directly to them on issues raised by council members.

The Food Industry Advisory Council has been established as a high-level partnership between food industry leaders and the Queensland government, and it is supported by the departments of primary industries and fisheries and state development. The council has been established to provide guidance for the development of profitable and innovative food industries in Queensland with a strong and positive focus on the whole supply chain for the industry from producers right through to consumers and exporters. The council will have a strong focus on addressing those challenges to industry that prevent the state accessing innovation and value-added production. At present only 0.4 per cent of exported food from Queensland is elaborately transformed so the council will have a strong focus on improving export opportunity.

The members of the committee are committed to making a difference to the food industry and donating their time and energy to the council. They will forge strong and beneficial relationships between food industry enterprises, government departments and R&D agencies. The Queensland food industry will reap the rewards from this significant strategic alliance.

The Food Industry Advisory Council will be very a successful and dynamic forum supported by both government departments collaborating to drive economic benefits for Queensland's food industry. I take this opportunity to publicly thank the members of the Food Industry Advisory Council for their enthusiasm and commitment to the council's success. I would also like to highlight both Minister Mickel's and Minister Mulherin's passion for the Queensland food industry and for the success of this council. I thank them for entrusting me with the important role of chairing this council.

Western Bypass

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (10.22 am): The western suburbs of Brisbane have been debilitated for years by hopelessly inadequate transport infrastructure. I see that the minister has released the terms of reference for his western Brisbane transport network investigation, an investigation that is long overdue. Those terms of reference have a few specific recommendations but do not address the whole range of debilitating transport issues in the western suburbs. We certainly support the consideration of the northern link. In relation to the western Brisbane bypass, I note the change in rhetoric from a 'bypass

through western Brisbane' to a 'bypass of Brisbane'. Let me deliver one message from the tens of thousands of people who have made their homes along the inner corridor: if you are going to build a major highway you have to plan it beforehand. The tens of thousands of people who live there are not going to have a new road corridor imposed upon them without previous warning. I do welcome the inclusion of the 'bypass around Brisbane' because that would be timely planning.

There are so many things that should be in these terms of reference. I have given the minister a submission. I ask him to read that submission. The Western Freeway is the biggest scandal in the western suburbs. It will not be helped by a ring-road. It needs to be specifically addressed. There are cyclists riding along the Western Freeway because even after the millions of dollars that the government and the Brisbane City Council have spent on cycle infrastructure there is no physical way of getting from the south of the freeway to the north without cyclists taking their lives in their hands. Residents have contacted me about it and I promised to raise it here in front of the minister. If you are going to build cycle infrastructure, you have to have a safe passage, otherwise the cyclists have to ride down the freeway.

Visit to Central Queensland

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (10.24 am): I want to take this opportunity to provide the House with an update on my visit to the central west Queensland region in my role as parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Communities. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit a number of central western Queensland councils and enterprises in Longreach and Barcaldine on Monday, 25 June and Tuesday, 26 June where I presented cheques for a range of initiatives including Blueprint for the Bush, Country Week and Queensland's 150th anniversary celebrations. The warm reception that I received from the region was enhanced by the chance to see firsthand such worthy local organisations and initiatives receiving financial support from the Queensland government.

The total amount of Queensland government funding received for the projects included on my itinerary totalled over \$800,000. Cheques were presented to the Remote Area Planning and Development Board, the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Wanpa-Rda Matilda Outback Education Centre at the Australian Workers Heritage Centre as well as several local councils.

All these organisations are doing exceptional work in promoting investment opportunities and lifestyle benefits of the central west and in attracting more people to visit and or, indeed, settle in the area. The initiatives which received funding all broadly fit under the Blueprint for the Bush, which aims to address population decline and provide a much needed boost for rural areas. A highlight of the visit was an inspection of the multifunctional child-care centre, which was a shining example of integrated service delivery based upon strong collaborative planning and negotiation.

I also want to thank officers from the Queensland Police Service's Stock and Rural Crime Investigation Squad who kindly travelled many kilometres to the Longreach station to brief me, highlighting their outstanding commitment to a demanding job. I learnt a great deal from all the local people I met with and look forward to continuing to gain a firsthand understanding of the issues of concern to Queenslanders living in the bush. Most of all, I look forward to continuing to help the minister and the rest of the government with the Blueprint for the Bush initiatives commitment to encouraging greater economic prosperity.

Traveston Crossing Dam

Mr FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (10.26 am): When it comes to environmental policy the Beattie Labor government is as steady as a two-legged cat on a sailing ship.

A government member: Better than you at the moment.

Mr FOLEY: I resemble that comment. It appears that the Beattie Labor government is suffering from multiple personality disorder. With one personality it goes to great lengths to restrict the harvesting of timber whilst going ahead with the Traveston Dam, which seriously endangers rare fauna and flora and will ruin some of the finest arable farmland in our state and cause untold misery to the people of the Mary Valley as well as ruining fishing in the Great Sandy Straits. I am very disappointed with some of Queensland's green groups. People like Dr Aila Keto seem to be missing in action on this particular issue. The green groups have been deafening in their silence on this particular issue. It leaves me to wonder: do the green groups only champion environmental causes when they happen to coincide with Labor Party policy?

I call upon the government again to scrap the Traveston Dam and really give itself some serious environmental credentials.

Redland District Hospital

Mr WEIGHTMAN (Cleveland—ALP) (10.27 am): I rise to inform the House that last week the Minister for Health came down to my electorate to open a brand-new 12-chair renal dialysis unit at the Redland District Hospital. The opening of this unit was part of a \$15.3 million redevelopment underway at the Redland Hospital. Having this unit open and operational will have a great impact on the lives of the people of the Redlands who access this service. In the past they have had to travel to the Princess Alexandra Hospital three days a week for five hours of treatment. Two of my constituents from Stradbroke Island, who were there when the minister visited, both said that having the unit at Cleveland had improved their quality of life because in the past they had lost a whole day each time they had to travel to and from the PA Hospital. Having the unit at Cleveland halved that time. Time is important to these people.

During the opening of the unit, the minister announced that 15 new nursing staff have been recruited and trained to work in the unit, and recruitment was ongoing to allow additional dialysis sessions to be introduced. This is extremely important, particularly in view of the fact that the number of Queenslanders diagnosed with severe kidney failure is estimated to be at 13,400. Unfortunately, that figure is growing at the rate of six per cent per year.

The Beattie government is also providing an extra \$6 million this year for health service districts to fund chronic kidney disease management strategies and to access renal surgery and additional renal services. I would like to take the opportunity to offer the people who are using the new facilities at the Redland Hospital my best wishes, especially my long-time friend Trevor Clarkson who was present on the day that the clinic was open. Trev's upbeat approach to life is an inspiration. I would also like to thank the minister and the Beattie government for providing these services to the people of the Redlands and neighbouring areas. It is greatly appreciated.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Auditor-General's Report; Infrastructure

Mr SEENEY (10.30 am): My first question is to the Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure. I refer the Treasurer to the Auditor-General's damning report which was tabled in the parliament this morning. In particular I refer the Treasurer to the section that looks at the provision of infrastructure and issues that the Auditor-General has raised. I will quote some of them briefly. He raised issues of noncompliance with State Purchasing Policy, noncompliance with minimum documentation standards, a lack of policy documents and inappropriate project governance. The minister will recall some months ago in this place I asked a question about the terms that had been coined by the contractors who said that the projects were built using 'invoice tendering' and 'do it and charge pricing'. Does not the Auditor-General's report this morning confirm that those projects are costing Queenslanders a lot more money than they need to because of the government's abysmal financial management practices?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am very happy to have an opportunity to talk more about the Auditor-General's report into, particularly, the desalination project at Tugun which is the one in this report that he does highlight a number of concerns about in relation to governance.

Mr Horan: He should look into the recycled water pipeline.

Ms BLIGH: I know you do not support it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind members on my left, particularly the person who asked the question, the Leader of the Opposition, that a serious question has been asked. Give the Minister for Infrastructure the time now to answer the question.

Ms BLIGH: As I said, I thank the member for the question. Members will recall that the desalination project at Tugun was initially proposed as a drought-proofing project for the Gold Coast by the Gold Coast City Council. I applaud the Gold Coast City Council for its foresight on this project.

When the extent of the drought became obvious in the Brisbane area the Gold Coast City Council agreed with the state government to expand the capacity of that facility so that it could also provide water beyond the Gold Coast and into Brisbane. What this report that has been tabled today does is examine the governance of the project while it was the sole company or the sole responsibility of the Gold Coast City Council and after that time.

What the Auditor-General found—and I am happy to put this on the record so that members are aware of the full extent of some of the early problems with the project—was, firstly, that documentation prepared by the Gold Coast City Council to support the appointment of the alliance contractors was not of a high standard. The scope of the independent reviewer's role in the tender evaluation process to appoint the alliance contractors by the Gold Coast City Council was not best practice. I draw the attention of members to page 20 where they will see that the Auditor-General goes through a number of areas where there were some very serious failings in, as I said, the early stage of that project.

The Queensland government became a shareholder in that company at the end of November last year. From that time the audit report indicates that the governance arrangements have got better and better and that the concerns that the Auditor-General had have now been largely addressed. I can give my commitment and that of the government that we will continue to work with the Auditor-General to make sure that every single project meets what I expect to be high governance standards.

In relation to any insinuation in the member's question that the desalination plant that is being built at Tugun is in any way over budget, I can assure the member that that is not the case. Not only is the desalination project on time but it is under budget. I congratulate the contractors, I congratulate the workers down there; they have been smart about the way they have procured materials and they are under budget.

I know that those opposite do not support the desalination plant. I know that they do not support the recycled water pipeline. We know that because they voted against it. Today they have taken another opportunity to undermine great Queensland projects.

Auditor-General's Report; Infrastructure

Mr SEENEY: My second question is also to the Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure. It also refers to the damning Auditor-General's report that was tabled in the parliament this morning. I refer the Treasurer to the section that deals with the governance of public sector companies where the Auditor-General also has some damning comments to make. I will quote again a very short part. The Auditor-General found—

... that there was a lack of effective governance for several of the entities reviewed ... These included unclear boundaries about what entities had been delegated, a lack of clarity in the relationship with Ministers and portfolio departments and a lack of accountability for the exercise of power.

Is this the sort of corporate governance we can expect from the minister when she becomes Premier?

Ms BLIGH: I do note the member's continued assertions that there is no prospect of him becoming Premier. I thought he wanted to be here. But of course there has always been a little bit of confusion over there about who would be the Premier. We are aware of that. I think the prospect of Dr Flegg becoming Premier is getting less likely as time goes by.

Mr Mickel: I told him to bulk-bill. I told him to bulk-bill.

Ms BLIGH: When you are one of Queensland's richest men bulk-billing does not come naturally.

Mr SPEAKER: Deputy Premier, can I also indicate to the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations, in the same way as I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, that a serious question has been asked and a serious answer is coming, I presume, from the Deputy Premier. Please allow her to answer.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. This is a very interesting question. Increasingly governments of all political persuasions at all levels of government have gone down the path of establishing special purpose vehicles for the delivery of major infrastructure projects. It is actually a way of bringing in private sector expertise and technical expertise quickly for a dedicated purpose on a major project. This government has taken that opportunity to grab that private sector expertise in the delivery of these projects.

I have had a long conversation with the Auditor-General about this issue. He has a view that we need to have some concern about private sector people who come and work on public projects who may not have had a long history of public sector requirements and the need for a different order of documentation and accountability. I think that is a fair enough observation by the Auditor-General but it is not an observation that would convince me that the government should abandon special purpose vehicles and abandon the opportunity to grab private sector expertise.

However, as I outlined to the House this morning, these are things we need to keep a watchful eye on. To that end the Department of Infrastructure will be establishing a special purpose vehicle unit that will have a broad oversight role in the relationship that government has, particularly in the governance arrangements of all our special purpose vehicles.

I would have thought that the Liberal and National parties in Queensland would actually be standing here saying that we need more special purpose vehicles. I would have thought that the parties that champion enterprise, the parties that claim to be the champions and advocates of private sector expertise would want to see more of that sort of thinking in governments around the country. These structures are delivering our water infrastructure, they are delivering our major projects and they are delivering them on time, on budget and, in many cases, under budget. I would just encourage the Leader of the Opposition to become more familiar with these projects.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Glass House, could I welcome to the public gallery today teachers and students from the Sunnybank Hills State School in the electorate of Stretton, which is represented in this House by the health minister, Stephen Robertson.

Local Government Reform

Ms MALE: My question without notice is to the Premier and Minister for Trade. Could the Premier advise the House of any better alternative use for the taxpayer funds that the Prime Minister is offering to spend on pointless referenda?

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I certainly can, but before I do I acknowledge the comments that you made earlier about the local government debate today and say I agree with you. Today is a very historic day for Queensland. This legislation is about building stronger councils to deal with our growth. It is a very important day.

Let me come to the question. Everyone knows that the Prime Minister's increasingly hysterical lunges into state government areas of responsibility are based on desperation and bad poll results. The Prime Minister knows that he needs to hold on to seats in Queensland and Queenslanders have been good to him over the past decade. It is not too late for him to try to be good to Queenslanders in return.

Over the last few weeks the Prime Minister has been popping up around the country—in marginal seats I should say—funding everything from timber mills to public hospitals outside all established practice and funding mechanisms. If we are going to see more of John Howard and his seemingly endless bag of tricks, let us give him a bit of guidance as to how to spend Queensland taxpayers' money in Queensland. Let us deal with his most marginal seats since that seems to be the indicator. Let us deal with Bonner, which is held by just 0.5 per cent. What he could do there—and I call on him to do so—is fund the duplication of the Gateway Bridge because it is, after all, part of a federal highway; or he could follow up a suggestion from the federal member for Longman, which is the fifth most marginal seat, and build a new tech college in the Caboolture region. In Blair, the third most marginal seat, he could get on with funding a desperately needed upgrade to the Ipswich Motorway. I think everyone would agree with that. Up north in the seat of Herbert, the fourth most marginal seat in the state, every single day our public hospitals are forced to care for around 468 people who should not be there. Rather, they are people who should see a GP—have access to a doctor—and they are also patients who belong in nursing homes, not in a ward. What he could do is actually fund these patients appropriately in nursing homes. Townsville Hospital is among one of the hardest hit, looking after around 40 patients per day. So let the Prime Minister fund our nursing homes properly and let him put in place general practitioners in general practices to free up the pressure on our accident and emergency wards in this state.

Still in Herbert, the Prime Minister could spend some time helping to solve one of the great threats to the Great Barrier Reef by funding efforts to improve water quality. The Prime Minister could turn his attention to doing the right thing as well by dental patients right across the state, because in 1996 his government cut \$20 million from public dental health in this state. We have tried to fill the gap, but the demand is overwhelming. If he wants to put money into something, let us put it into dental care, particularly for pensioners and senior citizens in this community. People living right around the Queensland coast could benefit from prime ministerial intervention to fast-track the tsunami warning system. We know that there was a warning this morning. I am happy to table the rest. Let the PM fund Queensland properly.

Water Infrastructure

Miss SIMPSON: My question is to the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure. Minister, given that properly planned water infrastructure is the best way to guarantee timely, environmentally sustainable and cost-effective water supplies for Queensland's future, I ask: will the state government investigate a gas-powered desalination plant utilising the future Gatton to Gympie gas pipeline?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am just wondering where she would like the desalination plant to be. Is this a call by the member for a desalination plant on Bribie Island, or is it a call by the member for a desalination plant in the seat of Kawana? Where would she like the desalination plant to be? Where is it that she would like it to be?

Mr Lucas: It's got to be near saltwater as well as gas!

Ms BLIGH: Yes. If you want to desalinate, you need to have some sal, and that means you need to have it close enough to water for it to be cost-effective. The member for Maroochydore is part of a team—loosely described—which consistently and persistently has voted against every single piece of water infrastructure that is currently being constructed for the south-east corner. Then those opposite came in here during the budget session and said—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Southern Downs, I ask you to desist from those comments, which are unparliamentary.

Ms BLIGH: So they voted against the water infrastructure. Then they came in during the budget session and condemned us for finding ways to fund the water infrastructure, and now they are suggesting that we should be building some more water infrastructure in an unspecified place for an unspecified purpose. These people could not run a raffle! They are just beyond repair.

Let me go back to the Auditor-General's report, because it is very instructive I think—very instructive—in relation to the desalination plant on the Gold Coast. The questions were not asked by any of the Gold Coast members, and I wonder if any of the Gold Coast members were consulted before the brains trust on the front row decided to ask further questions about this this morning. Frankly, this Auditor-General's report is a damning indictment of the ability of the Gold Coast City Council to manage a project of this size and of this scope. In the context of a bill that will be debated later in this House, it is a timely reminder—a very timely reminder—of how difficult it is for local government to oversee projects of this scale and this magnitude. When you have a large state government department like—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, we did. We took it over, and things got better from the moment we took it over!

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition—

Ms BLIGH: That is when it started to get better. That is when it got better! We took it over all right!

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I am talking to you. You are too busy talking across the chamber to hear me. If I am on my feet, please respect the chair.

Ms BLIGH: I take the interjection from the Leader of the Opposition, who is calling out that we took over the project. You bet we took it over! This document is a record of the improvements that began from the day we took it over—the day we took it over! That is when governance started on this project. It just shows how hard it is for even large local governments to deal with projects of this magnitude. When you have a large department like the department of transport, it does this all of the time.

Time expired.

Coalition Leadership

Mr FINN: My question without notice is to the Premier, and I ask: does the coalition's current woes have any implications for the Premier's allocation of resources?

Mr BEATTIE: They could, and that depends whether there is a coalition or not, and that is the real difficulty, because as Premier, members would understand that I have to allocate public funding appropriately. My difficulty though is to work out, firstly, whether they are in coalition and, secondly, whether the National and Liberal parties are available to work together, because to have a coalition they have to be able to work together. I have to say that I am quite concerned to read this morning's press, because the *Gold Coast Bulletin* says—

Simmering tensions over the performance of Queensland Liberal leader Bruce Flegg are expected to explode next week when the conservative parties gather to address the cause of this week's disastrous parliamentary sitting.

The *Courier-Mail*—just to make sure that there is some objectivity in this; both major dailies have addressed this issue—says—

Besieged Bruce Flegg has been told he should quit as Liberal leader for the good of the Coalition.

But interestingly—talk about egos out of control—just listen to this. The article continues—

The *Courier-Mail* has learnt State Nationals' MP Rob Messenger asked staff to leave a joint partyroom meeting yesterday morning before slamming Dr Flegg over his constant fumbings.

But this is not finished. It continues by stating that Mr Messenger, a well-known supporter of the government—no, I jest, it does not say that here. What it actually says is—

Mr Messenger told Dr Flegg he should resign to save the Coalition from disaster.

It goes on—

Several other Nationals MPs joined in the verbal roasting of Dr Flegg before leader Jeff Seeney was forced to call for calm.

I have to say, Bruce, we do not know whether you will be here when we meet again next time or not. But I do want to say if you go we will be very disappointed and very sad, because, Bruce, I have done everything I can to support you. I want you to know the government is right behind you, but it gets very difficult when the Leader of the Opposition says, as he did last night in the news on comments of reports that there is more infighting within the Liberal Party, 'I have to work with what I have to work

with.' If that is the sort of support a leader gives his deputy, Bruce, my only advice is that it is sad. It is very sad. I wish you well. It is on your right that you are getting that sort of disloyalty, but on your left it is no better. In fact, all around you it just does not look good. The article in the *Courier-Mail* continues—

But the tension in the Coalition is unlikely to spark an immediate move against Dr Flegg with MPs preferring to wait until after this week's Parliament sittings to call a leadership spill.

The numbers in the Liberal partyroom remain locked at four each for Dr Flegg and rival Tim Nicholls with the Liberal leader surviving with his own vote. But efforts are being made to convince Dr Flegg's supporters that his time is up.

It is understood Queensland Liberal president Warwick Parer recently spoke about the leadership issue with deputy Liberal leader Mark McArdle ...

Bruce, watch Mark!

Port and Rail Corporations

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier. I refer to the minister's decision to almost double the dividend stripped from the port and rail corporations despite skyrocketing borrowings within those corporations. Minister, isn't this just a ruse to indirectly shift even more debt from the government sector to those corporations whilst those corporations are forced to borrow even more to fund activities?

Ms BLIGH: I am at a loss to understand the premise of the question. There has been no doubling of the dividend take from GOCs.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, now I understand the premise of the question. I thank the member.

Mr Lucas: You would be doing a better job if they made a loss.

Ms BLIGH: That is right. The way the GOCs provide a dividend to the government is that after they have invested in asset maintenance and after they have paid their employees and after they have met all of their operational costs the government takes an 80 per cent share of the dividend—and it should. That is what they are there for: to generate revenue for the state budget to run hospitals, to run schools et cetera. The reason their funds have increased, the reason we have increased the percentage, the reason we have an increased dollar amount coming is that the GOCs are doing better. They are earning more money. They are generating higher profits and, therefore, 80 per cent of more gets more at the end.

As the minister for transport said, we could bring them back down to that lower level by insisting that they operate on a much poorer basis, but I can tell the member that that will not be the economic strategy of this government.

I know that you are having a bad day, Bruce, but I cannot for the life of me think what would have engendered this question. Are the GOCs performing better? You bet they are. We are seeing more capacity through our ports. What happens when you put more coal through the ports? You have more port fees. When you have more product—more freight, more coal on the rail track—you get more in returns. When we see generators generating more electricity, they earn more in returns.

Mr Lucas: Ninety-four to 153 million tonnes per annum under this government.

Ms BLIGH: That is right. In a five-year period, there has probably been the largest increase in capacity anywhere in the country—ever—in the history of Australia. So when we have that sort of increase in capacity, yes, the companies that run them, shocking as it may seem to the shadow treasurer, actually do better. They get a better return.

These assets belong to the people of Queensland and I unashamedly expect them to run as effectively and as profitably as they can so that they can return a reasonable dividend to fund the services and to fund the infrastructure that Queenslanders need. They are not only returning a better dividend with all of their operating costs; they are doing it, as the member rightly pointed out, at a time when some of them are taking on very large debt to expand their capacity further. So they are meeting new borrowing costs, they are expanding their capacity. Of course, I regret to inform the member for Moggill that, over time with expanded capacity, they are going to do better. So next year we might even get more money out of them when they do even better.

Dr Flegg: You've just been talking about next year's figure.

Ms BLIGH: Then the year after, and the year after, and the year after that. We are never going to see them go backwards.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Ipswich, I welcome another group of teachers and students from Sunnybank Hills State School, which is in the electorate of Stretton, which is represented in this place by the Minister for Health, Stephen Robertson.

Interest Rates

Ms NOLAN: My question, too, is to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier inform the House of the effect of yesterday's interest rate rise on ordinary Queenslanders?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Almost three years ago John Howard went to an election and conducted his campaign almost exclusively on the basis that he would protect ordinary working Australian families from interest rate rises. Yesterday, we saw the fifth interest rate rise. What does that mean in terms of the tax cuts that were given in the last budget? Let us have a look at what Peter Costello has done to take with one hand while he was pretending to give with the other.

When the tax cuts were brought down, those on a median income got an extra \$57.68 a month in their hand. An on average \$250,000 loan, the latest interest rate increase equals \$41.66 a month. In real terms that means that those people now have an extra \$4 a week in their hand. So once they have paid the extra cost of the interest, if they received tax cuts they have an extra \$4 a week in their hand—that is if they were on an average loan of \$250,000.

Of course, we know that there are many Queenslanders and other Australians who are now borrowing above that level. So if people have a \$310,000 loan—remembering that the median house price is now about \$325,000—they are \$1.50 a week ahead. If they have borrowed up to \$350,000, then they are actually \$4 a week behind. At the time of the delivery of the federal budget we heard Peter Costello crowing about tax cuts, but those tax cuts have now all but disappeared out of the pockets of Australian workers with this interest rate rise.

The Housing Industry Association estimates that we now have 300,000 Queenslanders who are paying more than 30 per cent of their income in housing costs. That means we have 300,000 Queensland families and households who can only be described as in housing stress. When you hit that 30 per cent mark—when 30 per cent of your income is going on housing costs—then you are under an unreasonable level of pressure. As the HIA's managing director, Ron Silberberg, said, 'The rate rise was the last thing Australian households need.'

There is an urgent need for governments to show some leadership on housing affordability. We should remember, as we listen to the debate on interest rates, that interest rates are only one aspect of housing affordability. There are many, many other policy levers that the federal government could be using right now to affect housing affordability, and they have refused. It is hands off the levers that could relieve the cost of housing for Australians and for Queenslanders. So the federal government is not only failing to control interest rates and not only failing to run the economy in a way that would keep interest rates low; it has failed comprehensively to invest in public housing, it has failed comprehensively to work with the states to deliver better social housing outcomes, and it has failed comprehensively not only to work with the states but also to work with the entire church and community sectors, which could have made a difference.

Level Crossing Upgrades

Mr NICHOLLS: My question is to the minister for transport. In recent years there have been several tragic level crossing accidents and many near misses. Is there a dedicated funding program for level crossing upgrades? How many level crossings have been upgraded in the past 12 months? How many will be upgraded this year?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question, because he sorts out an item of dispute between the Leader of the House and me. I have been wanting to get asked a question on this all week. So I thank the honourable member for his question, because the state government—

Ms Spence: You gave it to him, didn't you.

Mr LUCAS: I gave it to him. The state government takes rail safety very, very seriously. In fact, the state government's rail safety crossing matrix is accepted in Australia as the standard by which other states assess their actions.

There are 1,817 public level crossings in Queensland, 534 of which have flashing lights and 201 of which also have boom gates. Another 1,774 are occupational private level crossings. Being a state that has cane farms and other farms, this is a major issue. Each of the 3,591 railway level crossings on the QR network has some form of protection ranging from signs, to flashing lights, to boom gates. Between 1999 and 2006, we spent \$14 million on improvements to level crossings. Our forecast expenditure from 2006 to 2013 is \$20.2 million.

This year the budget has allocated over \$150 million over 15 years for grade separations. We are spending \$85 million on the Acacia Ridge overpass, with the federal government putting in \$25 million. Of course, we have also significantly increased penalties.

I am really pleased that the member for Clayfield is interested in level crossings, because I know that as a Brisbane city councillor he took a great interest in the matter. I had a look around some old stuff relating to Wynnum and I saw that the can-do Newman team, when it ran for office the last time, had made a few promises about level crossings. There was one for Kianawah, in that it would build a flyover for the Lindum level crossing within four years. That was its promise—not make the state government do it, but the council do it.

But it is better than that. It also promised to build one at Bald Hills and one at Geebung. Of course, nothing has happened that I am aware of with respect to them.

Ms Bligh: Where's the hard hat now?

Mr LUCAS: I do not know. The hard hat has been put away. The hard hat is for the party room for the hard heads. But it is very interesting to note that the member for Clayfield was in charge of the council's finances. So what happened? The *Northside Chronicle* stated—

Liberal finance spokesman Tim Nicholls said last year's budget provided \$150,000 for planning and design of Telegraph Rd level crossing, but its construction was deferred in this year's budget.

It appears upon assessment of priorities the work on Robinson Rd-Newman Rd crossing in Geebung and Lindum Rd in Lindum had a higher priority.

What sort of priority did it have? The member knows the maths. It is why he is not the leader. Zero and zero are the same number. I table the indictment of the member for Clayfield and his failure to deliver as part of a Brisbane City Council Liberal team.

Tabled paper: Copy of a Liberal Party poster.

Tabled paper: Copy of an article from the *Northside Chronicle* dated 21 June 2006, titled 'Clash over crossings'.

When he was reported recently in the *Wynnum Herald* talking about the Kianawah Road upgrade, he did not acknowledge in any respect the council's responsibility for the promise that it made. He was part of the team who made the promise. Why would anyone trust him if he ever got the leadership or, worse still, was over on this side of the chamber?

Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation

Ms JONES: My question is also directed to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. I note in his one-year anniversary media release that the Leader of the Liberal Party says a major achievement was convincing the government to include the Brisbane Valley Highway as part of any western bypass considerations under the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation. Could the minister inform the House how long the Brisbane Valley region has been part of the study, and when members would have first been advised of this?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The honourable member has been assiduous in ensuring that the issues are as broad as possible in relation to the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation and that all options are fully explored. Despite my raising it a number of times, I note that the member for Moggill still has not asked me a question in this place about the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation.

South-east Queensland is growing very rapidly and not just in Brisbane but also in the south-west corridor, on the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and the like. This study is about addressing our transport needs not next year or the year after that but 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 years into the future. It is very true that planning—and this is why the federal government is way out to sea on this—is the critical aspect of appropriate transport infrastructure rolling out. The Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation will investigate travel demand, how it can be met by public transport, roads, walking and cycling. It will look at longstanding questions such as: do we need a western bypass? If so, where? If where, when?

Very interestingly, I see in that famous document 'Flegg's first 12 months in the job' one of the great achievements of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is that he forced a major backflip by the Beattie government to ensure that the Brisbane transport study considers the need for a bypass of Brisbane through the Brisbane Valley. He forced a backflip! I had a look at the correspondence that I might have sent around the place and I found a letter dated 12 October 2005. That was in fact a letter to Dr Flegg, the Leader of the Liberal Party. I table those two documents.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter dated 12 October 2005, from Hon. Lucas to Dr Flegg relating to the western Brisbane transport network investigation.

Tabled paper: Pages from the web site of Dr Flegg, downloaded on 9 August 2007, titled 'Flegg's first 12 months in the job'.

In that letter I stated—

One of the many considerations of the WBTNI will be whether there is a need for a western bypass of Brisbane, and if required, where such a major facility should be located.

By necessity, the study area will be large. It is generally defined as the area west of the Brisbane CBD including the western suburbs, and extending west to include the Brisbane Valley Highway, north to include Caboolture, and south to include the Warrego Highway-Ipswich Motorway.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr LUCAS: The Deputy Premier is right to be puzzled about this. I suppose it is not really so much Dr Flegg. He has gone back in the past and retrospectively changed it. It really is pretty much 'Dr Who'. It gets much worse than that because Liberal Party supporters looking for some leadership from the state Liberal Party are very entitled to say 'Dr Why'. Or, worse still, the Leader of the Opposition, who day after day gets bombarded by the fumbblings in the Liberal Party, to say 'Dr What The'. The final word has to go to the member for Clayfield because he is 'Dr When'.

Blackall Range Road Bridge

Mr WELLINGTON: My question is also directed to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. During the last parliamentary session I spoke about the Blackall Range Road bridge over the railway line near Woombye in my electorate. I understand that this single-lane bridge is currently under repair at the moment but cannot be replaced until a new rail corridor to Nambour is identified. When will the new corridor be identified? And who is responsible for the safety of this dangerous single-lane bridge?

Mr SPEAKER: The 'doctor for transport'.

Mr LUCAS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We are 'Dr Yes' over this side—yes to infrastructure. I thank the honourable member for his question. It is a one-lane bridge with give-way signs controlling access on both sides. It is about 45 metres long and it has about 2,000 vehicles a day on a council controlled road. The bridge is a QR bridge but the road on it is a Maroochy Shire Council responsibility. I know that it is very keen to do some upgrading or resurfacing on it and there is some major work that QR will do to the bridge in October-November this year. I think it is most likely that it will do that resurfacing job after that to save ratepayers money.

Much of our capital program is being invested on the Sunshine Coast not only in roads but also in rail. The Caboolture-Landsborough work is well underway. There are two phases. Stage 1 Caboolture-Beerburum is about \$300 million for 14 kilometres of new track in the corridor. We expect that to be completed by mid-2009. It will deliver new and faster services, reducing travel times by 30 per cent. We have already spent \$50-odd million on that. The bulldozers have completed 240,000 cubic metres of bulk earthworks. That is about half the earthworks needed for the project.

Foundation work for rail continues, with 49 piles driven and completed, and 18 rail culverts completed. So that is well underway. Stage 2 is in preliminary planning. Under that stage, 17 kilometres is expected for completion in 2012-13 and that will deliver another 30 per cent reduction in travel times.

The member for Nicklin spoke quite a bit about the need to continue further from Landsborough, and I am pleased to announce today to the House that we have appointed Arup Consulting Engineers to undertake the study into the Nambour-Landsborough track upgrade to provide and improve alignment and duplication of the track 22 kilometres long. We have allocated a million dollars this coming financial year for the initial study and land acquisition. Consultation on the early phases will start next month and will include newsletters going out to residents in the area. We expect to have it completed by mid-2008. It is about planning for the future.

The member for Gympie has also spoken to me about ultimately doing the planning from Nambour to Gympie, and I take his point in relation to that. I think that is also something that is important. We have not done that yet but it is something that is important. I thank the honourable member for continuing to argue this case. We have now appointed the consultants to do the study. This is about planning for the future. What a great place it will be to be on the Sunshine Coast when we can catch those trains going at very high speed. We have the fastest passenger rail system in Australia, and I am very proud of it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Inala, it is with pleasure that I welcome to the public gallery today the Queensland Country Life Miss Showgirl finalists for 2007. I look forward to hosting them for lunch today. We welcome you all to the gallery, especially on this tremendous opening day of the Ekka.

Health Care for Prisoners, Federal Funding

Ms PALASZCZUK: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I was shocked to learn that the Commonwealth does not meet its obligation in contributing to a person's health care whilst they are in prison. Could the minister please outline to the House if this is really the case?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Inala for the question. I think it is great that members of the government are still interested enough in my portfolio to ask questions, because obviously the opposition has lost interest. This is an important issue. I am not surprised that the member for Inala is shocked—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Ms SPENCE: What did he say?

Mr Beattie: He said, 'Don't go away; hang around.'

Ms SPENCE: Oh, good. I look forward to a question from him. I have not had one all week. I am not surprised that the member for Inala is shocked that the federal government does not contribute to the cost of prisoners' health care. In fact, it is quite shocking. Prisoners are the only Australians who are not eligible for any Medicare benefits or any pharmaceutical benefits at all.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Ms SPENCE: The total cost of prisoners' health is borne by the state government. When you consider that prisoners have poorer outcomes than the rest of the population because of their background and their past lifestyle choices they are—

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr Beattie: Stop being rude.

Ms SPENCE: Mr Speaker, I find the member for Burnett's constant interjections every time I am on my feet boring, repetitive, childlike and insufferable. Nevertheless, I will continue with this answer. Last year we spent \$2.5 million just on pharmaceuticals for prisoners in this state.

Mr Messenger: They've got plenty of those.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett.

Mr Beattie: Bruce Flegg ignores you and so do we.

Ms SPENCE: I think what would be most embarrassing for Dr Flegg would be having to listen to policy advice from the member for Burnett.

I will return to prisoners and pharmaceuticals. What have we done? Last year I raised this issue at the corrective services ministers conference. All of my state colleagues agreed. We wrote to the Commonwealth minister, Tony Abbott. We also referred it to the health ministers conference. They also wrote to the health minister, Tony Abbott.

It is not good enough that the Commonwealth government is renegeing on its responsibilities to help the states with Medicare costs for our prisoners. On any given day we have 5,600 people in Queensland's jails who are being discriminated against. They are the only Australians who are not entitled to any Medicare or any pharmaceutical benefits from the federal government. This state government will continue to pursue Mr Abbott and John Howard on this disgraceful issue, because we are concerned that the rising health costs for prisoners are making this situation untenable, and I will continue to pursue this matter.

Road and Railway Bridges

Mr JOHNSON: My question is directed to the honourable Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Reports following the Mississippi River bridge collapse revealed that for more than a decade authorities were aware of cracks in the structure but did not believe it presented a long-term problem. The similarity with the minister's reports regarding the Riverside Expressway and ramps is concerning. Minister, can you guarantee that all the road and railway bridges across the state—particularly those across the Burdekin, Burnett, Fitzroy and Haughton rivers—are inspected regularly and are structurally safe under all operating conditions?

Mr LUCAS: The first thing I will say is that I can guarantee that we spend a lot more money on our road network than opposition members did when they were here, and the proof of the pudding of that is in the eating. This government's track record—and indeed my view in relation to putting safety ahead of everything else—speaks for itself.

Mr Seeney: I'd give you 100 to 1.

Mr LUCAS: I was criticised by the Leader of the Opposition when Main Roads took the precautionary position of closing the Captain Cook Bridge and Riverside Expressway after a rotation in the beam occurred there. That is the way this government conducts itself, and I got criticised from the Leader of the Opposition for overreacting. That is what you did.

Mr Seeney: When?

Mr LUCAS: Okay, I will tell you.

Mr Seeney: When did I do that?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition! You know you can't respond.

Mr LUCAS: On 612 ABC Brisbane on 14 May 2007, the Leader of the Opposition said, 'Had the proper monitoring been done, Paul Lucas wouldn't have had to panic the way he did.' I will table that one.

Tabled paper: Transcript from the 18:00 news on ABC 612 Brisbane dated 14 May 2007.

I will give the Leader of the Opposition another one for his trouble as well. We do our homework, unlike the opposition. This is from 612 ABC on 14 May, where the Leader of the Opposition said—

The right response was to do the monitoring and do the maintenance properly in the first place. There's no excuse for a minister to be put in a position where he can try and justify what was a panic action.

Tabled paper: Transcript from the Drive program on ABC 612 Brisbane dated 14 May 2007

It is not only in relation to the Riverside Expressway that we take those precautions. We tabled every piece of maintenance record and made it available to opposition members and anyone else who wanted to have a look at it—every single piece of it. Our bridges are regularly inspected.

In relation to a number of the ones that the opposition member asked me about, all bridges over the Burnett have been inspected by structural engineers within the last five years. They had annual inspections as well. For Burnett it was in November 2002; for Kennedy it was in August 2007; for Burdekin it was in September 2006. Main Roads advises that all are structurally sound and safe. Program maintenance for each of these bridges has been built into ongoing maintenance programs. For example, last March one of the 40 major truss bearings in the Burdekin River bridge was replaced. Approximately \$4 million has been spent on this bridge over the last four years.

We have top engineering people in Main Roads, and the member opposite has acknowledged that before. The instruction is that whatever money is needed is made available in order to have the best possible maintenance regime, but Main Roads decides the maintenance schedule, not me. Our record speaks for itself. We will always err on the side of caution and our record in relation to the Riverside Expressway shows that. We are happy to be open and transparent about this. The opposition is not.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Ipswich West, I welcome to the gallery today students and staff from Serviceton South State School in the electorate of Algester, which is represented in this House by Karen Struthers.

Indigenous Housing

Mr WENDT: My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology. Minister, Mal Brough has this week committed to spending nearly \$600 million in the Northern Territory on Indigenous communities. Minister, I am worried about what impact Mal Brough's abandoning of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement will have on housing in remote Indigenous communities in Queensland.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for the question.

Mr Seeney: What was the question?

Mr Horan: He just said he's worried.

Mr SCHWARTEN: He said, 'Am I worried?' I am very worried about you.

Mr SPEAKER: Let us just clarify that there was a question in that regard from the member for Ipswich West.

Mr SCHWARTEN: And can we start the time again, Mr Speaker?

Mr Wendt: There was.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The question was, 'What impact will Minister Brough's abandoning of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement have on housing?'

Opposition members: Ha, ha!

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is what he said.

Opposition members: Ha, ha!

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am pleased those opposite think it is a laughing matter, because I certainly do not. The reality is that this is a very serious matter. I know those opposite laugh at Aboriginal people and care nothing about their circumstances. They are just like Mr Brough. The reality is that this most serious matter—where the state is now spending \$80 million-odd on housing in Aboriginal communities against the \$20 million from the federal government—is going to simply get worse.

I am amazed that \$600 million could be poured into a political campaign in the Northern Territory—and it is nothing more than that—but there is no mention of the plight of Aboriginal Queenslanders, especially those who have an unmet need of about \$800 million in the communities that Mr Wendt and I visited this year. That is to say nothing of the plight of Aboriginals who live in places like Mount Morgan and who are about to be evicted because the Commonwealth government has thrown them asunder.

That amazes me, because at the same time John Howard is out there throwing money at councils for referenda that will yield nothing. This is a dishonest move to try to convince Queenslanders that they can change something through that process. If John Howard has money to spend, perhaps he should give \$30,000 for a start to the Mount Morgan council for the rates that are owed there. What about that council? What about the councils up in the cape? John Howard is calling on us to manage their affairs, and each one of those costs \$300,000 for this department and this government. What about those? Are they entitled to a share of the federal pie and this money that is going to go direct to councils?

John Howard wants to spend that money on referenda—waste it on referenda—that will go nowhere. If he wants to help councils in Queensland, why doesn't he put it into these communities where it will go somewhere? There are a number of councils which can be assisted in that regard, but we know that this is nothing but a cheap, political exercise on his part.

Time expired.

Pride in Policing Rally

Mr MESSENGER: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Minister, despite the fact that the majority of Queensland police believe that you and the Premier have played political games with their profession and are personally responsible for the crisis in policing, you have indicated that this Sunday you and the Premier will attend the Queensland Police Union's Pride in Policing Rally. Minister, will you take a positive message to the rally and give a guarantee that you will support legislation which will ensure that offenders—the thugs and the cowards—who are found guilty of seriously assaulting our police officers serve at least three months in jail?

Ms SPENCE: I am pleased that the member for Burnett finally got around to asking me a question about police this week. Firstly, I would like to remind the member that it was this government that actually changed the law last year to treat assaults on police more seriously than they were formerly, and we put that in the Criminal Code. In future people who assault police—even those who are biting or spitting at police—may be liable for a penalty of up to seven years imprisonment. We changed the law because we do want to send a strong message out there to the general public that we will not tolerate any assaults on our police officers.

I talked yesterday about the fact that it was this government that only last month allowed the Police Service to introduce a trial of tasers. That is a serious step in terms of our law and order agenda. The reason we went down that path is that we were concerned about attacks on police. We were concerned about the fact that capicum spray is simply not effective for many offenders if they are in a drug induced state, so we introduced this trial of tasers.

The Police Union has brought this issue up again because it has been in the process of enterprise bargaining negotiations with the government. It is quite justified that it would want to put these issues on the table. But I think we have to get this into perspective. We have been engaged in really very tough talks with the Police Union over the last few months, and more particularly over the past couple of weeks, and I would particularly like to thank the Premier and the Deputy Premier for their negotiations with the Police Union.

The Police Union is a hard bargainer; it always has been and it always will be. It had a very big offer on the table. It has had to compromise significantly to accept the government's offer. But we, on the other hand, have had to put a lot more money on the table than we intended to satisfy the Police Union. What we have offered I think is a very, very good deal. The Police Union itself put out a memo to all police officers. I want to table this memo today so that all members of parliament have access to it.

Tabled paper: Document by the Queensland Police Union of Employees detailing rates of pay in the proposed EBA5.

What it has done is compared their pay rates to the pay rates of New South Wales police officers on most pay scales. And on most pay scales our police officers are going to be paid as well as, if not better than, New South Wales police officers in the future. We have made a very good offer to our police and I would encourage all police officers around Queensland now to really get a grip and understand this offer—it is a complicated offer—before they go to a ballot in a few weeks time.

Environment, Federal Funding Cuts

Mr WEIGHTMAN: My question is to the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism. In light of the Prime Minister's recent drunken sailor-like spending in marginal coalition seats, can the minister advise if any of areas of her portfolio have suffered cuts in Commonwealth funding in recent years?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I thank the member for the question. Queensland has five World Heritage areas that have been recognised as being of state, national and international significance. Excluding the Great Barrier Reef, the state has contributed more than \$100 million to these areas in the past five years. During the same period the Commonwealth has contributed less than \$20 million—less than a fifth of what the state puts in.

In fact, I read today that the Commonwealth government is marketing these particular World Heritage areas to Japanese tourists. If members take the Great Barrier Reef, for example, how much does the Commonwealth depend on the Great Barrier Reef for its Treasury coffers? I think it would go into the millions and millions of dollars—at least \$60 million. I find this extremely hypocritical given its massive funding cuts.

Fraser Island in Warren Truss's electorate is a good example of just how much the Commonwealth cares about these precious areas. In 2001-02 Fraser Island received \$700,000 in project funding from the Commonwealth government, but with the introduction of the Natural Heritage Trust No. 2 this plummeted to a measly \$8,000 the next year. The same approach is also true for the acquisition of properties under the National Reserve System. Under this system the Commonwealth was initially providing about \$14 million per annum as funds that could match state funding to purchase land for national parks. However, in the last and current financial years the National Reserve System budget for the whole of Australia has been a mere \$6 million per annum and there is no indication that this amount will be increased in the future.

Mrs Reilly: A disgrace.

Ms NELSON-CARR: It is a disgrace. This is in spite of the fact that two independent reviews of the National Reserve System Program, one by the Senate and the other by the Commonwealth Environment Department, both concluded that the National Reserve System Program is one of the most cost-effective conservation initiatives and both reviews recommended substantial increases in funding.

It is considered that the program needs \$59 million Australia wide and that even that would be barely adequate when compared to the current acquisition budget allocation for the Queensland government of \$67.5 million. Queensland leads Australia in terms of the size of our national park estate and the high level of representation of biodiversity contained in our national parks. The Commonwealth is just not doing its fair share for conservation, nor helping to protect our unique environment. Looking after our precious World Heritage areas and the National Reserve System are quite clearly just two more areas where the Commonwealth has reneged on its responsibilities.

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome to the public gallery today teachers and students from the Robina State School in the electorate of Robina which is represented in this House by Mr Ray Stevens.

Queensland Emergency Disaster Management Office

Mr DEMPSEY: My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. I refer to the recent relocation of the Queensland Emergency Disaster Management office from Bundaberg to Maryborough. What studies, research and cost-benefit analysis were undertaken to justify this service being withdrawn from Bundaberg?

Mr ROBERTS: I am not familiar with the particular detail of that issue but I am happy to get back to the member. In the short time that I have been the minister I have had the opportunity to meet with many people who are involved in our disaster management system. I am tremendously impressed not only with the professionalism and enthusiasm of those people but also the level of planning that is undertaken to address disasters and emergencies throughout the state.

Decisions are made from time to time to reallocate resources and ensure that appropriate resources are allocated to the most effective areas to ensure that our disaster management response meets the needs of Queenslanders. Indeed, as I have said, one of the most impressive activities that are undertaken on a regular basis which involve our disaster management response at both the local government level—in the areas which the member has referred to—and the district level, which is predominantly based on our Police Service, and also at the state level are disaster management exercises which test the response at all levels. Over the next 12 months another three disaster management exercises will be conducted throughout Queensland to ensure that our preparedness is at the absolute maximum to cater for events.

With respect to the specific issue that the member has asked about, I undertake to get back to him with more detail on that. Again, I have the utmost confidence in both the preparation and the planning that our disaster management personnel and system undertake to protect the people of Queensland in times of need.

Fee-Help

Ms van LITSENBURG: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts. I note that the federal government is intending to introduce Fee-Help to assist full-fee paying diploma and advanced diploma VET students. Can the minister tell the House if and how this initiative will assist Queenslanders in paying for their course fees?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for her question. The member for Redcliffe has a very keen interest in TAFE and in our Skills Plan. I appreciate the time that she takes to address these issues in the House—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr WELFORD:—which is more time than the Opposition Leader takes to address any of these issues in the House. The skills shortage is a major issue in Queensland and indeed around the country but the opposition seems to be oblivious to it. Our government, of course, is committed to providing vocational education training pathways to ensure that we do have appropriate skills to address the skills shortage.

I am very disappointed that the federal government and the Senate Standing Committee on Employment Workplace Relations and Education has recently advised me that it is ruling out the possibility of Queensland TAFE students receiving Fee-Help to ease the financial burden of their studies.

The federal government announced that Fee-Help would be extended to TAFE students doing diploma and advanced diploma courses but under the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill that the federal government has introduced it will only give Fee-Help to VET students where the VET provider is a corporate body.

For those who are not aware, Fee-Help is supposed to provide full-fee paying VET students with equality with university students so that students can pay back their fees after they complete their course. The effect of the federal government's bill, however, is that because Queensland TAFE institutes are government agencies and not corporate bodies as such—they are a public provider—the bill excludes students from Queensland TAFE courses from having access to Fee-Help.

Our government made a submission to the Senate standing committee and I made submissions to the federal minister, Mr Robb, suggesting that the definition of a VET provider in the federal government's legislation include all TAFE institutes, whether they were separate corporatised bodies or government agencies. If the amendment to the bill was rejected, then we suggested that there at least be a phase-in period of, say, three years to allow us time to reform the corporate governance of our TAFE system so that our students could have access to Fee-Help just as students in other states do. But the Senate committee has evidently ruled out both of these valid suggestions. I am very disappointed that, notwithstanding my personal submissions to the minister at the ministerial council to which he showed some inclination to respond favourably, this seems to have been rejected.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Further Answer to Question; Emergency Management Queensland

Hon. N ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (11.30 am), by leave: I have further information in response to the question raised by the member for Bundaberg. The Emergency Management Queensland Bundaberg area office has been relocated to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's regional office in Maryborough. The Emergency Management Queensland Gympie office has been relocated to the Emergency Management Queensland regional office and Rural Fire Service office in Caloundra. The relocation of these Emergency Management Queensland offices will create a more collaborative approach to emergency management and a more efficient utilisation of resources. The centralisation of the three EMQ offices will maximise service delivery to the community and improve disaster management services by encouraging a more effective use of resources to help manage major operations.

Emergency Management Queensland staff will have ready access to business support services at the new locations to boost their access to human services, human resources, finance and information technology services. Staff will also benefit from high-speed internet access and networked modern office equipment.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the Deputy Premier, I confirm the advice that was given earlier in the day by the Leader of the House. I advise honourable members that the House can continue to meet past 6.30 pm this day. The House will break for dinner at 6.30 pm and resume its sitting at 7.30 pm.

Water Supply

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (11.30 am), by leave: Before making my ministerial statement, I advise the House that the unemployment figures have this morning confirmed Queensland's continued strong jobs performance and our unemployment rate remains steady at 3.5 per cent.

Mr Schwarten: Where is that in relation to the rest of Australia?

Ms BLIGH: Of course, we are still way ahead of the rest of the country, and I thank the Leader of the House for the interjection.

Mr Schwarten: So interest rates are going up and we're getting employment down.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, interest rates are going up. The federal government is not able to control the economy and the Queensland government again shows our credentials on employment.

I am sure other members in common with me were disturbed last night when the Channel 9 news highlighted a water action that is simply wrong and very worrying. Last night Channel 9 news detailed that some water carters are taking precious potable water from the Brisbane city system and then onselling it to residents to put into tanks. This water is from within the town supply area. The carters, as I said, are then pumping what we regard and should regard as liquid gold into residential water tanks. This is simply unacceptable and this government will not allow it to continue. Like all south-east Queensland residents struggling to watch every drop and to reach Target 140, I am extremely concerned by the Brisbane City Council claims that this represents 'a loophole' allowing residents to avoid watering restrictions.

I have therefore sought urgent advice overnight. I have now received that advice and I am pleased to advise the House as follows. Let me make two things clear. Firstly, any town water put into a rainwater tank, whether it comes from a tanker or a tap, is already subject to outdoor watering restrictions. It is a breach of the level 5 water restrictions to use such water to hose the garden or for any other reason. The government's tough new penalties of up to \$1,050 for serial offenders will apply to householders who fill their water tanks from town water supplies. However, I recognise that there are enforcement challenges for councils once the water is in the tank.

This brings me to the second fact which all members should be aware of. Councils already have the power to place conditions on the use of town water taken by water carters. Section 433 of the Water Act 2000 provides that it is council which approves permits for the taking of water from a fire hydrant. More importantly, councils already place conditions on the basis on which water may be taken. Local laws are already in place in the likes of councils such as Noosa, the Gold Coast, Kilcoy and Logan to name a few. I table for the information of the House the relevant Gold Coast City Council local law and policy, which clearly restricts the activities of water carriers.

Tabled paper: Copy of a document titled 'Gold Coast City Council Local Law No. 10 (water carriers)'.

Tabled paper: Copy of a document titled 'Gold Coast City Council Local Law Policy No. 10 (water carriers)'.

These conditions have the strength of local laws under the Local Government Act and there are significant consequences for water carters who ignore the conditions established for a permit by councils. On the Gold Coast, for example, they can be penalised by up to \$3,750 for each and every offence and, more significantly, may be stripped of their permit. All councils should already be enforcing local laws to prohibit this behaviour and ensure that water carters are explicitly restricted from using the town water from a fire hydrant to top up rainwater tanks, swimming pools or storages. This is basic common sense.

In summary, there should be no reason why councils are allowing water carters to fill rainwater tanks in residential areas. Councils which are allowing water carters to do this are simply not meeting their responsibilities under the Water Act. To ensure that all councils are aware of their powers and responsibilities under the Water Act, I have today written to the mayors of all councils in the drought-affected area of south-east Queensland. I have urged these mayors to ensure that they immediately act to impose these common-sense conditions on water carters who take town water. I table a copy of the draft of my letter which is being forwarded to the mayors of drought-affected south-east Queensland today.

Tabled paper: Copy of her letter to councils regarding the use of town water by water carriers to fill rainwater tanks.

I will just read from that letter in one respect. I alert those councils that councils already place conditions on the basis on which water may be taken and such conditions should clearly include an explicit requirement that town water drawn from a hydrant should not be used to fill a rainwater tank, a swimming pool or any other storage device at a premises which is connected to the reticulated town water supply.

Given the critical nature of our region's water security, I cannot allow this situation to remain unaddressed. I have also further indicated in my letter to councils today that, if councils will not act to address this issue as a matter of urgency, I will ensure that the state takes new legal measures to compel councils to fix the problem which, as I have already demonstrated, is within the considerable powers already available to them under the Water Act and the Local Government Act. Specifically, I will request the Queensland Water Commission to consider a special restriction which will apply to councils supplying water from fire hydrants and/or the water carters which are taking this water.

If there is any doubt—any doubt whatsoever—about the current legal effectiveness of such a restriction, the government will move to create new powers under the water supply emergency provisions of the Water Act 2000 so that I can direct councils to do the right thing. It is, in my view, unnecessary for the state government to take such action. I would like to believe that all councils will meet their responsibility to administer the supply of water to water carters in a manner which fully recognises the very difficult situation we face with the current drought—the worst in recorded history.

Mr Schwarten: I can't believe the audacity of the water carters.

Ms BLIGH: It is remarkable to me that anybody operating a water-carting business would so flagrantly—so boldly and so audaciously—flout the regulations. It is a terrible insult to all of the householders of south-east Queensland who are working so hard to save water that anybody operating a water-carting business would so flagrantly flout the regulations.

Mr Schwarten: Pull the truck up in front of your house and pump the water out of the mains. It is unbelievable!

Ms BLIGH: That is right. It is not a laughing matter, however. We take it very seriously. I will act to make sure that councils who fail to act will be directed to do so.

I can further advise the House that the Beattie government may well be in a position to expand the capacity of the Tugun desalination plant at the Gold Coast. I can advise the House that it is anticipated that the desalination plant will have approximately \$30 million of savings in its budget, which is possible to use to upgrade in a way that could potentially boost the output of the Gold Coast desalination plant by a further 47 million litres a day.

As I outlined to the House earlier this morning, the plant is still on time and on budget. The plant is forecast to commence producing water in November 2008. The \$30 million savings can be used to increase the size of the \$1.2 billion plant's inlet tunnel and outlet structures and to develop a business case covering the potential boost in capacity from 125 megalitres a day to more than 170 megalitres a day.

Can I just explain that the size of the inlet and outlet tunnels must be decided now and they must be ordered now in order to meet the time frame. We will be allocating these funds to buying a larger inlet pipe. However, as I am sure members are aware, it is not simply a matter of the size of the inlet tunnel. It is also a matter of the capacity of the advanced water treatment plant to treat that additional water.

That decision will require further expenditure and that decision will also require a 12-month lead-in time. That decision can be made in February next year when we have been through the following summer and can determine whether or not, on the basis of the rain that has been received or not received, it makes financial sense for us to expand the capacity of the advanced water treatment plant at that time and expand the capacity of the entire project. If we are lucky enough to get very good rain in summer and it is not necessary to expand capacity of the plant for next year it will be open to this government in the future or any government at another time, because of the decision we are taking about the size of the inlet pipe, to expand the advanced water treatment plant and thereby expand the entire project.

The final cost of securing that additional 47 megalitres will have to be modelled as part of the business case which is expected to be finalised by February. If the upgrade is to proceed, our decision today is about being proactive so that by February we can make a decision whether to proceed or not. Since the start of design and construction late last year savings are anticipated from improvements and innovation in design, enhanced construction work practices, early lock-in of contracts and material supplies, savings developed through competitive subcontracting and improved productivity in tunnelling.

These gains have been achieved through smart work and hard work. I congratulate the companies. In addition, continued dry weather—meaning minimal delays—is, as luck would have it, working in our favour. The desalination project is on time and under budget. I can advise further that if the upgrades proceed we are investigating how that water could then be circulated within the Gold Coast system. Some of this water could be used in the Gold Coast area and take pressure off the Hinze Dam. There is quite a lot of work to be done, but the decision will enable an enhanced capacity for this project further drought proofing south-east Queensland.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (11.42 am): I seek leave to table amendments to be moved during the consideration in detail stage of the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill currently before the House.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Amendments to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007 to be moved during consideration in detail and explanatory notes.

I circulate for the benefit of all members amendments that I will move during the consideration in detail stage of the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill during today's debate. The amendments provide for a number of clarifications and I draw the attention of the House specifically to the amendments proposed which will provide for councils that take action to conduct a poll or referendum about local government reform to be dismissed. These amendments confirm the ability of the minister of the day, through this parliament, to dissolve a council that acts against the Local Government Act. We have a clearly expressed view that the conduct of referenda is a waste of public money. They have no bearing on the outcome of the independent boundaries commission determination. There are no referenda at a state and federal level. This confirms that there will be no referenda at a local government level. Democracy requires independent boundary determination, not unconstitutional chicanery from a desperate Prime Minister. I commend the amendments to the House.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Third Reading (Cognate Debate)

Question put—That the bills be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Long Title (Cognate Debate)

Question put—That the long titles of the bills be now agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 7 August (see p. 2273).

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (11.44 am): It is with a heavy heart today that I rise to speak to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. This is disgraceful legislation. I am so disappointed that we have got to this level in this state. This legislation takes the 'local' out of local government. It confirms that the democratic standards that we have had in Queensland for so long are slipping. It is the start of a dictatorial regime that will be to the detriment of this great state.

This legislation is based on false figures. This legislation is based on mistruths. This legislation is based on deliberate deceit. This legislation is based on government spin. I would like to run through some of the processes that have led to this legislation we have before us today. Local governments around the whole state were doing enormous amounts of work to help them improve their ability to continue on into the future. They started up the Size, Shape and Sustainability process, the SSS process. That process was designed to improve their financial ability and their service delivery and the long-term benefits of local governments in all communities in Queensland.

Local governments—like many other industries, such as primary industries—are always looking at ways to improve their lot, to improve their viability, to look to the challenges ahead. That is exactly what local government was doing. There was bipartisan support across the political spectrum—Labor and the conservatives—for this. There was support for this amongst the local governments themselves. They commenced that process a very short time ago.

The Premier keeps running around saying that they have had two years to do this. The minister has said that they have had two years to do this. It has not been that long. In fact, the minister only signed off on this in about February 2006. That is not very long ago at all. There has not been two years for them to work through this process. There were delays. Most of the delays were with the government departments themselves. All these things do take time. There is no reason to rush. There was great community support for this.

All that changed on 19 April when we saw the first real steps towards a dictatorship. Today that is being enshrined in legislation. Unfortunately, we have a minister who is against local government. He has deliberately deceived councils. He worked behind their backs—

Mr FRASER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I find the remarks of the member entirely untrue and offensive and ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. Minister, you have successfully united the majority of councils in Queensland against you—congratulations on that great achievement!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order!

Mr Hayward interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Kallangur! Member for Warrego, please address your comments through the chair. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: The important message that I have been asked to pass on to this parliament today is that the majority of councils do not trust you at all in relation to any of these matters. Even the ones that have supported amalgamation do not trust you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrego will address the chair, not the minister directly.

Mr HOBBS: They do not trust you with this legislation. That is a significant message that you really must take on board. I do not think any other minister that I am aware of has ever achieved that distinction.

The Premier says and you say that there are people out there who are happy with this. On the radio the other day in western Queensland you were asked about how many councils would—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Warrego, if you are talking through the chair, then you will not refer to the minister as 'you'. You will refer to him as the 'minister' in the third person. Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: The other day the minister spoke about this issue on the radio and was asked how many councils support this legislation. He named a few mayors—it might have been about six or seven—but he forgot to name the other 150 who are opposing it, and very strongly opposing it. So this has all been government spin. People are angry out there. I wonder why people would drive 1,200 or 1,400 kilometres to Barcaldine for a march. Why would they do that if they are happy with it? They came from miles around. This legislation before us today is the result of this government's intention to change local government. The people have a different view as to the way it should do that. Why was it that throughout Queensland there was a Red Friday where towns were painted in red and people wore red?

A government member: And they desecrated cenotaphs!

Mr HOBBS: They did not desecrate cenotaphs. Why did they do that? Were they pleased with what the government was doing? No, they were not. They were not pleased at all and we found that across the whole of Queensland people's anger was getting worse. We also found that the message was not getting through in metropolitan areas, perhaps because the urban media felt that it was not affecting those areas as much. But slowly bit by bit and finally as the hammer crunched down on them on that Friday recently when the boundaries came out, people in the metropolitan areas found out that they were also tangled up in this.

There was a march on parliament attended by nearly 8,000 people. When those at the front of the march arrived here, some people still had not even left South Bank at that stage! That is an indication that people are opposed to your legislation we are debating today, Minister. Why did they come? Why did they march? They marched because they are opposed to what you are doing. I have also attended other marches in relation to this legislation that you have brought to this House today in Port Douglas and Gayndah and Barcaldine. There were other meetings around the whole state too numerous to mention. Petitions have been signed as well. There are 16,000-odd signatures on paper petitions and 9,500 e-petitions, and this is from a government that is saying, 'This is what people want. This is good for them. This is what they're going to have.' I would have thought that there would have been a little bit of understanding in government circles that in fact this legislation does not have significant support. Some 30,000 submissions came in against amalgamation from Noosa. Queensland is protesting against this dictatorial legislation. Even Kevin Rudd has been involved in it as well—I will deal with that later on—but he was too weak to get a result. Minister, are you fit to actually carry this legislation through?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: Though you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think it is important that we understand that. This morning the Leader of the Opposition mentioned some quotes about the minister, and I will not go into that. I will give other ones such as someone saying that the minister is far too arrogant. That is what people were saying on the radio. Andrew Fraser was on 4BC today and people have said that he sounded much like a fascist from the Nazi Party. Someone else said, 'Local government minister Andrew Fraser was very rude whilst on 4BC today.'

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That language is unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. Another caller said that the minister for local government was very rude whilst on 4BC today and the compere said that Fraser needs to learn some humility and compared the minister to Zimbabwean PM Robert Mugabe. Someone said that Andrew Fraser is a pompous, arrogant man. Minister, I am not saying that. The people are saying that. Is there something that we are missing in this?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, there are heaps of them. Do you want me to table them, which I will not, but I would if you want me to but I do not need to because I think you have been embarrassed enough. But, Minister, even an old mate of yours, Bob Ellis—one of Labor's most celebrated and high-profile supporters, and, Minister, you might be able to confirm or deny this—called you an 'unctuous, handsome Queenslander' and said that 'I have had dealings with him before and I'm beginning to dislike him'. Unctuous, for those who do not know, means oily, greasy or slippery. Minister, maybe you can confirm whether you are the person he is talking about, because—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr FRASER: I rise to a point of order. I am happy to confirm that and also say that Mr Ellis said that I was tall. I will let the record decide.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr HOBBS: As a matter of fact, I saw that. I was also told it is writer's licence and he also said he saw you standing in the corner expressionless. I think I've got you! Absolutely, Mate! There you go!

Let us move on. Let us talk about Kevin Rudd in relation to this legislation. There was some thought at one stage that Kevin Rudd could come in and perhaps convince the Premier to change his mind. Yes, they had a discussion and, yes, they did a deal. The deal was that they will go ahead with council amalgamations but what they will do is make sure that council employees do not go across to WorkChoices. They made a deal that in fact council employees would be locked into state awards and could not go across to federal awards so he could pick a fight with the Prime Minister to help him in the election. You are using council employees and councils in this federal election. That is pretty weak.

Why doesn't the Labor Party listen to the ASU, which is Queensland's largest government union? A lot of the unions were very quiet at the start. I wondered why they were quiet. Why were they prepared to burn employees in towns like the Mitchells, the Miriam Vales, the Taras and the Surats? Why were they prepared to burn them and not make a noise? It was because, as we have now found out, of the deal about WorkChoices. But now suddenly there is a lot of pressure on the unions and they are coming out and making some noise. The ASU has come out and said—and it represents about 8,000 white-collar local government employees throughout Queensland—that it believes that about 5,000 of its members will be affected. So it has suddenly cottoned on and realised that the government really has not told it all of the facts, and that is very important.

In the very strong view of the ASU, the commissioners should recommend no changes to local government boundaries and in the event that boundary changes or amalgamations are recommended by the Local Government Reform Commission it should not be done unless there are compelling reasons to do so and the change is supported by the local communities. Change on the scale that is contemplated is expensive, time consuming and disruptive to the communities concerned. It is insufficient for the government to argue that local government boundaries have not substantially changed from 100 years ago. Minister, the ad that you had on the TV had Bradman and Phar Lap and you keep on saying wherever you go—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Please—

Mr HOBBS: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, you talked about the fact that we had to modernise local government boundaries. But in fact do you know what we have got? We have actually gone back to roughly the same number we had in 1876. We had 65 divisional boards in 1876. So we have gone back to that! We have not modernised! We have actually gone backwards! So, Minister, you have taken us back to before Phar Lap and those other things in those ads with this legislation today.

The structure of local government in Queensland is different from that in other Australian states or, in many instances, in other countries. A report commissioned by the ASU and the AWU in South Australia on the process of local government reform in that state also included the impact of previous changes in other states, including Victoria. The report noted that newly amalgamated councils experienced the loss of key staff; problems with different administrative computing, financial and bookkeeping methods; a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of newly merged workforces; asset duplication in relation to plant and equipment; industrial relations problems; divided loyalties among staff; staff insecurity and loss of productivity owing to stress; confusion within the communities served by the local councils; a loss of faith by communities in their local councils; and difficulties making new technologies meet their hybrid potential to deliver services. The report goes on to state that in Victoria the net job losses may have been in the order of 11,000. Local communities in Queensland simply cannot afford a repetition of that experience.

If local government reform is to have any real, ongoing benefit and be sustainable politically in the long term, the ASU believes that a cautious, staged approach which has the support of local communities offers the best chance of success. I am sure many other people throughout this state and nation would agree with that view. So why will the government not even listen to them? It will not listen to the people, it will not listen to the councils and it will not listen to the communities. The government is not listening to the ASU. It is a bit difficult when a government will just not listen.

We were told that this legislation is apparently drawn from the report of the Local Government Reform Commission. But alas, hardly any of this legislation arises from the recommendations of the commission. A lot of members will be surprised to hear that. We were told in the briefing that the Local Government Reform Commission was only about maps. But this legislation is not about maps; it is about real changes which are hidden away within it by this minister. There are many problems with this legislation.

Mr Hoolihan: Where?

Mr HOBBS: I am pleased the member is interested. I will tell him. There are so many problems. The drafting instructions provided to the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel were seriously flawed and there is cumbersome detail included in the clauses, and in clause 5 in particular. As a result, that will lead to a large number of amendments to the legislation. This legislation contains many clauses that were not included in the recommendations of the Local Government Reform Commission. These include clauses stating that the minister has the final say on the actions of the council before and after

the changeover date. Also, the minister can remove local transition committee members at any time. So the minister can sack them as well, even though they are elected as councillors. Also, the interim chief executive officer can override council CEOs and can direct staff to do whatever they want. So all of those things that we were told in all of those regional meetings were wrong. They were fibs. They were serious, serious untruths. I went to all of those regional meetings the length and breadth of Queensland. The minister got up and said things, the DG got up and said what was going to happen, yet we come in here and open the legislation and find that it is different. I suppose we have come to expect that from this government.

The councils will be in caretaker mode from the moment this legislation is passed through to March. So they cannot make any major policy decisions. We were told that the councils would carry on as normal. At numerous meetings of the Local Government Association and at regional meetings the minister said that the role of the council will continue on until the March 2008 election. That was also untrue.

The councils will not be able to either sack or employ a CEO. So the rumours that were going around that the government was going to appoint these people were obviously true. Councils cannot make decisions about amounts over \$150,000, or one per cent of what is contained in their last annual budget. They have already approved their budgets, yet they cannot make decisions about that sort of money. It is ridiculous. Councillors will not be able to determine their rate of pay or whether they are full- or part-time. The remuneration tribunal will have the final say on councillors' pay and this will have budgetary impacts. We have no problem with the remuneration tribunal. It is a matter of how it works. But we do not know how it works and, if this legislation is any guide, who knows how this remuneration tribunal is going to work?

There will be personal fines imposed on mayors and councillors of \$1,125 for holding a referendum whether or not it costs the council anything. We have councils out there that have already put in place the process. The ballot papers are out. What is the government going to do with those? I think the horse has bolted. That is the way I understand it. But also, what is wrong with people having a say? Is the government so frightened of the outcome? There is not a lot of money involved. In many instances referendums for a lot of those shires could cost \$5,000 or \$10,000. At the end of the day, they are getting a significant input from the community so that we have some real idea of what people think. What is wrong with people having a say?

This legislation has the potential to change the way industrial relations works within councils. I mentioned that before. Councils will have little freedom to be able to define their own industrial relations future. We are seeing a really dictatorial way of this government trying to assist Kevin Rudd in the forthcoming federal election. I will tell members that a lot of people out there are going to send Kevin Rudd a very, very strong message about local government amalgamations. That will come straight back to the fellows opposite. They should wait and see. The people are a wake-up to what they are trying to do.

As I said, councils will have little freedom. The local transition committees will have to develop and implement new industrial arrangements under strict government controlled guidelines. So when the minister said out there that councils will be able to run their own businesses up until March 2008, that the transition committee will be there only to oversee how things are going and will put in place a plan for the implementation of the new regional council, that was simply all untrue. Unelected union officials will have a disproportionate ability to affect the outcomes of any IR initiatives and will be able to lock the new councils into the outcomes.

I am not sure what it is going to be—it is a moving feast from day to day—but basically we have three union officials on the interim committee, we have two councillors from each council that is being amalgamated and one person from the community, if that community wishes to have one, and the interim CEO. The minister can sack all of them any time he wants to. So what a set-up!

Through these arrangements, the government and the unions will have a chance to bring all council employees in Queensland under their preferred IR model. Given the current strong opposition to the federal WorkChoices legislation, it would be surprising if the new staff employee model did not reflect this opposition. I have mentioned that before.

New sections 159YU and 159YX clearly outline that local transition committees and any employment subcommittees will be bound to work under frameworks yet to be established by the state transition committee. All of this has been rushed through so fast that the government has not even put in place the mechanisms or understands how it is going to work. It is a matter of sucking and seeing from day to day. Further, the operation of the subcommittees will also be bound to work under yet another to be established set of guidelines published by the chief executive. The government still has not made up its mind.

In effect this means that how council employees will be transitioned and employed after the 2008 elections can and most likely will be controlled by the state transitional committee and the chief executive, possibly by regulation. Of chief concern is that these defining regulations and guidelines are still unknown at this time and are of course subject to change at any time.

Under this bill, membership of a local transition committee can consist of up to three union representatives, all of whom will then sit on the employment subcommittee. When we look at division 9, state intervention powers, we shudder in fear at the power of the state minister. The minister will have the power to control and direct councils. The minister will be able to replace local transition committees. The minister will be able to direct council employees. I hope he can send a few of them out to fix the roads. The minister will be able to determine the allocation of assets, property and employees. All future local council businesses will be subject to the minister's consent and direction.

I think we do have a dictatorial arrangement that is coming in here. Why on earth do they want those powers anyway?

Mrs Sullivan interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! Member for Pumicestone, you will need to cease interjecting. Return to your seat if you would like to add to the debate.

Mr HOBBS: Can't we trust local communities? We have had 150 years, 120 years in some cases and certainly 100 years in other areas of councils that have been able to look after their own areas. Now the minister wants to take over and run the whole show. Something is not quite right here.

The new provisions of this bill go far beyond previous ministerial powers to sack a council and appoint an interim administration officer. The minister will have unprecedented powers to direct the future actions and directions of local councils in Queensland but will not be answerable to either ratepayers or elected councillors. The provisions are a fundamental attack on the role, responsibility and autonomy of democratically elected councils. It is no wonder the Prime Minister got involved. He said that local councils were being jackbooted. He said he thought that perhaps the Premier was drunk on power, and I think he might be right in saying that the Premier, the minister and the government are drunk on power. Fancy putting this legislation through. It is an absolute disgrace.

In future, the minister or chief executive will be allowed the final determination over any or all council businesses. Do not forget that this is not just until the new council is elected; this is for the next three or four years as well. It cannot get any worse than this. Anyone out there who was waiting to see what was in this bill will be horrified when they read it.

The provisions of this bill do not apply during the transition period but will apply once the transition to the new boundaries and councils is completed. It effectively disenfranchises ratepayers by allowing the minister or chief executive to direct local councils as the minister sees fit, with no right of appeal or redress. Previous elected councillors were answerable to ratepayers and held accountable at local council elections. Under the new sections proposed for the Local Government Act, every decision or action taken by an elected council will ultimately be subject to final ratification by the minister. I think the minister might have a few late nights if he has to sign all the stuff that is going through local government. Further, the minister will be able at any time to direct a local council to act in accordance with his future directions.

That is a thumbnail sketch of what this legislation is all about. I have a letter here from Mayor Phil Bougoure and in that letter he states—

What's happening to Democracy

Just today I was listening to ABC Radio when they reminded everyone that this week is the 62nd Anniversary of the dropping of two atomic bombs which brought to an end the war in the Pacific, which also made sure that Australia remained a democratic nation and we hoped that democracy would continue to be the way of life in Australia.

This is also the week that Mr Beattie and Mr Fraser have chosen to take away that democracy that so many of our mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters have died for.

Did Mr Beattie or Mr Fraser ever experience that telegram boy standing at the front door in tears to deliver a telegram saying—I'm sorry. The telegram would be to advise you that your loved one had been killed in action.

I would appeal to all backbench members of the State Parliament to use your democratic right and vote against this bill and allow all Queenslanders to continue to enjoy the democracy that their forebears fought and died for.

If this bill is not defeated may you all live with this injustice until the day you die.

That is signed Philip Bougoure, Mayor of the Tara Shire. I think that sums it up pretty well.

Mr Hayward interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The member at the back might want to laugh at what our forefathers fought and died for—democracy—and it is being taken away.

Let us look at the real reason the government is doing this. The reason the government gives is sustainability. The government is saying that it must merge councils because they are going to go broke. Every time the minister gets up—and even again yesterday—he keeps on saying that if we do not do this councils will go broke. No councils have gone broke in Queensland in our history and it is unlikely that councils will go broke. There are mechanisms in place. Treasury has to approve all loans. For any councils that do get into financial trouble for various reasons, there are management procedures in place.

I asked the minister in estimates how many councils were refused loans over the previous two years, and he said that there were five loans refused. Those five loans could have been for one or even two councils. I am not sure how many councils that was for, but only five loans were rejected by Treasury and yet we have to go through this mass amalgamation. I understand that those five loans relate to two councils. There are always going to be councils that have financial difficulties for various reasons—sometimes it is just the economic cycle that they are in. One good example is Jondaryan. The mayor, Peter Taylor, told me they had to borrow \$14 million for a sewerage works program. The grants had not come through. They would not have done it without the grants, but the grants had not come through at the time, so therefore they were assessed as having a bigger loan than they normally would have. But by the same token, once that work is done they are right for the next 15 to 20 years. With any snapshot done at a point in time there will always be councils having some issues in relation to finances but they will be different ones over different years, and they come out of it. It is like business. You borrow money when you buy a business and you sail a bit close to the wind for a while, and then you come out of it and away you go. That is the normal business cycle.

Aramac shire is a good example. Aramac shire is in the soundest financial position in the history of the shire. It is debt free; it just adopted a budget close to \$21 million and it has \$7 million in cash reserves. The Barcaldine shire, which it is amalgamating with, has a debt of \$1.6 million and a budget of \$7.5 million. A funds transfer is going on. Toowoomba City Council is a good example. There will be eight shires merging into one—seven outside shires. Toowoomba has 80-odd per cent of the debt and that is the case in many instances. It is the same thing with Cairns shire and Port Douglas shire. The debt levels from those bigger communities is enormous. A lot of these smaller shires have cash reserves put aside, as they are supposed to, and yet they aren't viable?

I mentioned Tara shire and Mayor Phil Bougoure a little while ago. They have nine million big ones in the bank and the minister says that they have to be amalgamated. There is no truth in what he is saying. There is no truth in it at all. It is just a fictitious argument that is being put up.

I return to the Aramac shire again. The Aramac shire does things that the bigger councils probably cannot do. The Aramac shire is fully funded in this year's budget to construct a new doctors surgery—that is basically a state government responsibility but if they do not do it nobody will—a new ambulance station and accommodation, four new aged-care homes and \$500,000 towards affordable housing for young people in the shire. It has a contract to seal Torrens Creek Road, of approximately \$18 million, which will put Aramac shire on the inland highway from Townsville to Melbourne.

This is the soundest financial position Aramac has been in, yet the minister wants to amalgamate that shire. There is no logic to it. When I was mayor in my hometown of Tambo—well, I was a chairman in those days—we put in place a process whereby money was put aside all the time to maintain the water mains and do repairs. Tambo is the most financial shire in the whole west. It has no debt and several million dollars in the bank, yet the government wants to amalgamate that council. Why? Because it is not financial? Something does not add up here, Minister. The question we ask in relation to people in the Aramac shire is this: how will that debt-free council with nearly \$21 million in the budget this year have improved financial sustainability if it is merged with a shire with a debt of \$1.6 million and a budget of \$7.5 million? How will those people be better off? Those people will be worse off.

I also have here a media release from Tanya Mansfield from Booringa. She said—

Workers from Booringa Shire Council in the state's south-west have written to the Minister for Local Government seeking assurances with regard to the government's promise of three years security of employment for all staff affected by the Local Government Reform Process.

The Shire of Booringa, which is 27,828 sq kilometres and provides employment to 82 workers has been recommended for amalgamation into the Roma Regional Council with the Warroo, Bungil, Bendemere and Roma Town Councils.

In their letter workers have expressed concerns that a condition of ongoing employment may be that staff relocate or commute to the designed regional centre of Roma which is equivalent to commuting daily from the New South Wales town of Byron Bay to Brisbane.

That is what the minister is asking them to do. He is asking them to relocate. Obviously those jobs will not be there in the administration area. There will be jobs in the workshop and the field for sure and they will put a couple of extra administration staff in the workshop, but there will not be much activity in those administration areas until eventually all the bureaucracy builds up. Tanya's media release continued—

Workers are also seeking assurances that the services and facilities they provide within the community including roadworks construction and maintenance, works depot, administration, youth and community development services, aged care facility, allied health and tourism facilities will continue to be operated from Mitchell.

Staff Spokesperson Tanya Mansfield said that, "We all have family and financial commitments. Any job losses will lead to bank foreclosures and family breakdown. In particular staff who reside on rural properties are supporting their families, feeding livestock and making bank repayments during this time of drought. Job losses will have devastating effect on both town based and rural employees."

The roads in our area are not of good standard and there is an abundance of wildlife along the roads. We respectfully ask the Minister to publicly say that as a father of two young children, it would have no impact on his family life if he had to commute the equivalent of Byron Bay to Brisbane daily.

The original letter which was transported for signing to the roadworks camps in the far reaches of the shire had been marked with the red dirt from the hands of the workers. The letter was forwarded to the Minister for Local Government the honourable Andrew Fraser today.

Workers will be taking leave and travelling to Brisbane on Friday to march in unity with community members, and other Shires to protest against forced amalgamations and raise awareness of the devastating effect this will have on small communities.

That is another example of what is really happening. As I said before, there has not been a lot of thought put into this. There has been no cost-benefit analysis done of this whole exercise, there has been no professional economic study, there has been no professional social impact study and there has been no academic study done that says that this is the way to go. In fact, the government commissioned Alan Morton from Morton Consulting to look at all the reports on amalgamations that have been done around Australia and the world to tell the government the benefits of amalgamations. He came back and said that there are none—there are no benefits. In fact he said that rates will go up. That is what he told the government. The minister has all those things there to tell him that what he is doing is wrong.

I have some figures here and I am not sure how they add up, so maybe the minister can confirm that later. In a press release the minister put out on 7 August, he said that he was providing a \$27.1 million funding package. That is fine, and I presume the \$12 million that was allocated as a staff support package is added on to make \$39.1 million. The interesting thing is that the bill today has a figure of \$36.22 million, so in three days the minister is already \$2.88 million behind and he has not caught up with that. I suspect it will cost the minister millions of dollars to implement this stupid process he is putting in place. It is so complicated.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! Member for Warrego, I think that was unparliamentary language. Will you rephrase that, please?

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. The minister said it would cost \$27 million this year to implement this reform. What about next year and the year after and then for the next five years? It will cost millions of dollars. It will cost the minister hundreds of millions of dollars in the end to try to cobble this monster that he has here together. Let us talk about some of the academic people who in fact have done some work on this.

Mr Hayward: Unlike you.

Mr HOBBS: I will read some of this for the honourable member. He might listen to some of the advice from these people and he might be surprised. Mark McGovern is a man who does a lot of work with local government and understands it. He said—

... there is no real case for the changes apparently envisaged by tyro minister Andrew Fraser.

Review of the various documents shows no basis in economics or finance for the local government "reform process" currently under way in Queensland.

Sadly, much commentary reveals poor understanding of economics and finance compounded by a failure to appreciate the details of analysis.

This is a man who has some idea about what is going on in the local government field. We have a brand-new minister out there running around trying to take over the show and this man says, 'You've got no idea, mate.' Mark McGovern continued—

For some unknown reason the remedy for "the distressed" is now to be applied to all councils.

There were two councils that were what is called 'distressed', and I think there were 43 in the 'weak' category. I will deal later with how the government changed the categories to try to trap more councils into that area. Mark McGovern said—

For some unknown reason the remedy for "the distressed" is now to be applied to all councils. This is, at best, an amazing failure of logic. It is the sort of mistake sometimes seen in the works of a thoroughly confused undergraduate.

Congratulations, Minister, that is what he said to you—you are a thoroughly confused undergraduate. Mark McGovern continued—

It is important to note that the three reports noted appear generally competent and professionally written. Much of the material is beneficial but improper use and misrepresentation is a problem.

The minister knows that he has done that. The financial issues of councils will not be solved by amalgamation. There are federal issues in relation to the amount of funding they get across Australia and also the cost shifting that this government keeps pushing on councils all the time. We even saw the situation where councils had to do the fire inspections. It cost them \$10 million over five years because of an increased workload plus public liability insurance, so councils have been lumbered with an enormous amount of work. I think it is \$30 million a year that has been pushed on to councils from state and federal governments in cost shifting. That is from the report by the Productivity Commission and it is there for all to see. They are the pressures that are on the councils. Amalgamation will not help. If two or three so-called unsustainable shires are put together, all the government will do is create one bigger unsustainable shire.

Mr Fraser: What did McGrath Nichol say will happen if you don't amalgamate?

Mr HOBBS: I will deal with that later on, Minister. Mr McGovern makes many other comments. A more recent statement from Mr McGovern was—

... the increasingly ridiculous State 'Local Government Reform' initiative continued. Increasingly revealed economic and financial evidence, including from once suppressed government documents, underlines the folly. How long can denial of realities continue? How long can an obsolete and so manifestly failing agenda be given credence in George Street?

There is heaps of stuff in there that is interesting reading. Let us have a look at the McGrath Nichol report. This company are international receivers and administrators. They had the job of looking at these so-called weak councils that the government said will fall over and it had to move otherwise they would collapse financially. This company looked at those councils and found there was no chance that those councils would fall into receivership in the foreseeable future—which was a two to 10 year time frame. They also said that of all of those councils they had examined there was enough lead time, had there been issues, for them to trade their way out of it, which they had supervised on numerous other occasions.

Interestingly enough, they also reported that those councils had better financial ratings than some of our major companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. On the one hand we have a minister who says that the councils are going broke and on the other hand we have a professional person who has looked at the books—not an undergraduate, as Mr McGovern said—and found that the books were okay. Somebody is not telling the truth. I wonder who it is. I think McGrath Nichol would have a bit more credence than the so-called undergraduate that Mr McGovern talks about.

What is also stated in the report is that, yes, there are issues. No-one has denied there are sustainability issues in local government. Nor do we dispute the fact that there are sustainability issues in primary industries and other industries. We try to look for ways to do it better. However, the minister argues that because councils went into the Triple S process they admitted they were dead and he might as well bury them. All they were doing was looking at ways to improve their lot. They were doing that. Resource sharing is the answer to better sustainability of councils. The representation can at least be kept. Now the 'local' has been taken out of local government. It is now regional government.

Returning to the issue of the financial situation, what the government has said in relation to those councils going broke is totally untrue. I have already covered the Morton report. If the minister is so sure that what he is doing is correct why is it that he has to sneak in and out of town? I know I cannot hold the Toowoomba *Chronicle* up, but let me read to members the front page—

Mr Fraser: If it was so sneaky why were they there the whole time? The media were there the whole time—all the councillors, all the mayors.

Mr HOBBS: You sit down, mate. It is my turn to talk and it is your turn to listen.

... Andrew Fraser snuck into Toowoomba yesterday to face questions about amalgamation. His visit was kept quiet and councillors from the eight merged shires only heard about their 2.30 pm appointment hours earlier.

Mr Fraser: Not true.

Mr HOBBS: The media were there because the minister told them to be there at the time. That is why the media were there. But nobody else knew about it apart from those councillors. The minister did not have the courage—no ticker, mate—to get out there and front the people.

Mr Fraser: Don't call me mate.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! Member for Warrego?

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. At the end of the day the minister snuck in and snuck out. What did the minister do when he went to the Sunshine Coast? He snuck up there. He kept on saying that the media were there, but he told the media to be there when he arrived. The minister did not tell the other people to be there and he did not have the courage to put in the paper that he was turning up because he was frightened. That is the reason. The Premier, along with the minister, is always saying this, and this is the Premier's quote on 4BC—

What you're hearing is over 700 politicians who will lose their jobs don't like it, but a majority of Queenslanders do.

Guess what? A significant poll was conducted by a reputable group. The question was whether they supported the council changes recommended in their area. The result was that 53.8 per cent opposed it. That is across the board. Another question was: is a referendum necessary? The result of that was that 58.9 per cent said yes. Everyone is saying we should have a referendum. They are all saying, 'Hang on a minute, we don't like what you are doing,' and the government is soldiering on. People have long memories and they will certainly not be forgetting this.

Another interesting point is that the government is saying that councils' budgets are very bad and they cannot manage their financials. One only has to look at the Auditor-General's reports of yesterday and today to see that the government has been knocked for a six. The Auditor-General is scathing of what has been done. I note that the Treasury department advocates that a cost-benefit approach be adopted with accountable officers having discretion to decide what supporting systems are required to provide them with information to ensure their obligations in this regard are adequately met. The minister did not even do a cost-benefit analysis of this whole local government amalgamation set-up. When one thinks about it, local government is worth \$86 billion. Queensland Rail is worth \$10 billion. It is a huge organisation and a cost-benefit analysis has not been undertaken. The Auditor-General's report today is scathing about the government. This section I think is particularly interesting.

Mr Hayward: We will decide.

Mr HOBBS: I am sure you will. The Auditor-General stated that the impression gained during the audit was that not only was the performance information reported to parliament of limited relevance for external stakeholders but also this performance information was not used extensively by the government and departmental officers responsible for resource allocation and monitoring activity.

In other words, the stuff being put in the budget was rubbish. Of course the Auditor-General has picked it up. The Auditor-General also mentioned the fact that the performance information should be balanced, address the department's key activities and report both the good and the not-so-good achievements. All these things that the government has done are simply not true.

I asked the Deputy Premier a question the other day about my own home town of Tambo. I referred her to the fact that as a result of the QTC analysis and the forced council amalgamation the local bank is reassessing whether it can continue operations, the Post Office has raised concerns about the loss of business in town and the banks have already started lowering property valuations. It is happening out there now. The minister talks about the fact that the councils will be big and can negotiate with the mining companies. We have no mining out there; there are vast grazing areas. The town has done a tremendous job over the years to maintain employment. We used to be a shearing town. The shearers are gone but we have a sawmill now. There has been an enormous amount of work done by Tambo Teddies and others to try to keep jobs going. Councils in towns such as Tambo often buy locally and may spend up to \$2 million a year locally on fuel, tyres and hardware. That money bounces around town. If one multiplies that by the economic factor of five, there is \$10 million that bounces around those towns each year and is distributed out, through the private enterprise structure, to the tyre shop, the cafe, the hardware store, the shops and the fuel depots. When that stops what happens?

It is the multiplying factor. It would be like taking out a significant portion—say, a third—of the revenue from Brisbane. Say the wharves were all closed down, what would happen? People would be out of work and the schools would be reduced. The Deputy Premier really had no idea. I thought she was half smirking about the whole thing and thinking how silly it was. The reality is that it is very serious.

Generations have spent years and years trying to build up these areas. We used to have future search workshops to try to find ways to improve business. Tambo Teddies came from one of those workshops. The Charleville abattoir came about as a result of barnstorming when we asked, 'What on earth are we going to do? What have we got out here in this region? We have mulga trees, livestock and kangaroos and so forth.' So they built an abattoir and it worked. But if the government takes the councils out of those towns there would be a serious shortfall in funding and then there would be social problems. Someone somewhere has to pay. It is ridiculous.

Let us look at the Torres Strait. The government is proposing to wipe out 17 councils and replace them with one. Yet all those councils up there have a job to do. In a way they are our unpaid coastwatchers. They look out for immigration issues and disease outbreaks. When a cyclone comes who is going to be there? The government is taking the whole heart and soul out of those communities. They do not deserve that. They have had 50 to 70 years of local government, of self-determination. The government is taking away the right of Torres Strait Islanders to look after their own communities. It is disgraceful, and it does not have to do that. All the government has to do is put in place a system. It can keep the councils there but it can have one single accounting process, and the people are happy for that to occur. But this government is not interested. It is the old dictatorial, jackboots, 'Get in there,' sort of attitude.

The minister keeps on talking about the fact that when electoral boundaries are drawn there is no appeal. However, there is an appeal against electoral boundaries, but there is no appeal provision for this. The minister has taken away every right of appeal. The real reason the government has done this is that it wants to divert attention away from the economic crisis, the water crisis and the infrastructure crisis. It wants to take over south-east Queensland's water. I believe there is another sinister motive behind the scenes and that is that the government wants to make sure that those council boundaries are put in place before the redistribution of state electoral boundaries so it can try to rot the electoral boundaries. That is what it is trying to do. Members opposite know that as well as I do, because the electoral boundaries—

Ms DARLING: I rise to a point of order. I take offence on behalf of the government at the member thinking we are going to rot electoral boundaries. There are no rotters on this side of the House.

Mr HOBBS: I say bingo, gotcha. I have hit the nail right on the head.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr HOBBS: That is what I say the government is doing. People might not know—but I will tell them—that electoral boundaries are drawn on council boundaries. That is why there is a rush to get this done. There is no reason why this council reform could not be done in three or four years. Why rush it? Why not go about it in a professional way? Who on earth would want to rush out there and try to amalgamate all these councils and create all this confusion in record time? The government has given no time for the community to have a real say. I think something smells here and I think it might be a little fiddling with the electoral boundaries. It will be saving a few backsides over there. That is what the government is doing. Do you smell a rat?

Mr Springborg: Lots of rats.

Mr HOBBS: I think so, too. There are other issues. I think the Premier believes that local governments are a training ground for conservative politicians. That is another reason, which he has mentioned before, and he wants to change that. Therefore, we can assume that the government has made a purely political decision that will have a purely political solution. The political solution will be that when we come to government we will give people the right to de-amalgamate. We will allow councils to do that. They need to hold a referendum. I encourage all councils to conduct a poll through the Australian Electoral Commission, as allowed by the Prime Minister. If their community tells them quite clearly that they do not want to be amalgamated, we will allow them to de-amalgamate. But the next opportunity people have to express their views is the federal election. They should send a strong message by not supporting Kevin Rudd. They should send a message to Beattie that we do not want enforced council amalgamations because it is no good for the communities. The regional areas will deteriorate. Look at what will happen to all of those Torres Strait Islander councils. The government has destroyed them.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.45 pm): It is indeed an honour today to rise in this place and speak in favour of the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. All of the legislation which we pass in this place is important and all of it deserves and receives due consideration. But today is truly an historic day. As a member of a government which prides itself and, indeed, exists for the purpose of reform to make our society a better place, I am indeed proud to be here on this day to debate this bill which will truly, profoundly and, I think, very welcomely change Queensland for the next hundred years.

Unlike the refuseniks on the other side, I do not shy away for a second from the importance of reform, from the necessity of change. There are people on the other side of the House whose forebears must have been those who opposed Federation—and there were some, of course. They opposed the amalgamation of Brisbane. They opposed the Snowy Mountains scheme. There are people in our history who opposed the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Their descendants sit on the other side of the House today proudly opposing this reform because they oppose change per se. They may have some slightly darker motives, which I will deal with in a minute.

Today I would like to very much congratulate the minister, Andrew Fraser, who has done a fantastic job in bringing in this reform. It has perhaps been some of the best and worst of politics that we have seen in our time here—the best in terms of a government pushing on regardless of cost to itself, and there will be costs. There are members on our side of the House who will suffer some electoral pain in doing the right thing. The minister has brought this bill to this House and has done so with great courage under ridiculous personal attacks. I have noted some of the slurs that have appeared attacking his capacity, being called an academic and all sorts of dreadful slurs like that. That is the sort of stuff that has been thrown about.

I am very proud that the minister who has brought this bill into the House holds degrees in commerce and law with honours—in fact, first-class honours. He was a university medallist. There is no shame in that. In fact, I think it adds greatly to our quality that we have people with such true intellectual capacity and the capacity to bring in measures of common sense. Again, the barnyard rabble who deride people for having had the temerity to study and succeed is nevertheless part of the deritus of history.

This government has brought forward a bill which reflects what is happening in this state and in this nation. For a hundred years the population of this nation has been on the move while the boundaries of Queensland have sat still. I point out that 85 per cent of the population of Queensland now live on the coast. This bill simply recognises that we must govern for the world not only as it is but as it will be. Again, if there is one single distinguishing feature between those on the government side and those who will be voting against this bill it is that we are governing for the future of Queensland; they are governing for the past. They are governing for the world as it was and are unprepared to consider that we should move forward.

The seachange effect is real; the movement to the coast is real. What this bill does, and for me why this bill is so important, is that it brings the powerhouse which is the coast and puts it back in touch with its hinterland.

We have had a hollowing out of the hinterland in Queensland going on now for 50 years—that incredibly valuable food bowl which supports us and absolutely needs to be tied back together so that the people of our hinterlands and the people of growth areas are part of the one area. That economic strength will be to the great benefit of those people in areas like Tiaro and Woocoo. In my part of the world Hervey Bay has had extraordinary growth and Tiaro and Woocoo and Maryborough to a degree have moved much more slowly. The unifying of those areas will give the greatest opportunity to take the growth that is happening on the coast and make sure the people in the hinterland do not miss out.

That is where the refusal of those opposite to accept the wisdom of what is going on in this bill is at its saddest. In opposing this legislation they are in fact condemning those people whom they like to pretend that they support to missing out on the reality of the growth. It is simply the worst base politics. I have no doubt that the National Party opposes this simply because it wants to keep those areas which it purports to represent separate from those areas on the coast where the growth is happening and where the Liberal Party has greater inroads to be made.

The real gumbies in all this are those in the Liberal Party for going along with this sort of hoo-ha and allowing the National Party to try to keep this state divided. That is what they want to do. This is about unifying Queensland, placing us to go forward for the next 100 years. If we were to turn our backs on this I would think we should be justly ashamed of ourselves.

Very rarely in this job do we get the opportunity to be here at one of the pivotal moments in Queensland's history and be part of it. By and large the things that happen on the ground today in Queensland are as a result of decisions that were taken long ago. A year ago, five years ago or 10 years ago acts were passed, policies were put in place, funding was put forward. What is happening on the ground today is as a result of the decisions of the giants on whose shoulders we stand. But today we get the opportunity to make that significant contribution. I think all of us on this side will look back at our political careers when they are over and say, 'I'm proud I was there and I'm proud I supported that bill.' I commend it to the House.

Hon. CA WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Water and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (12.52 pm): The reform of local government in Queensland is necessary reform. It is necessary reform in order for us to realise Queensland's potential. In particular, it is necessary reform for the people of north Queensland to realise their potential. It is about seizing opportunities and it is about creating a better future for our children and our children's children. It is an opportunity for the new regional councils to become economic powerhouses in their own right.

In north Queensland we will see a number of local councils merge. In my electorate the city councils of Townsville and Thuringowa will be amalgamated. On a personal level, I can understand the reservations and nostalgia initially expressed by some residents about Thuringowa merging with Townsville. That has been occurring for over 100 years. What many people do not know is that most of the suburbs that currently make up the city of Townsville were in Thuringowa. The Thuringowa divisional board came right into where Castle Hill is located in the city of Townsville over 100 years ago. The Townsville showgrounds were located in Thuringowa. Indeed there is mention of the people of Townsville being most upset at being charged an axle tax to go to the show when it was located in the divisional board of Thuringowa.

Our city has been evolving over the last 100 years. This latest change is a logical and natural progression. The last change occurred in the early 1990s when the southern area of Thuringowa was placed in the city of Townsville. The suburb of Alligator Creek, which honourable members may know, was placed in the city of Townsville from Thuringowa. This is a logical progression. It is a logical move forward. The decision of the independent reform commission was the right one. It is vital that we now move forward in Townsville as one strong and united city.

The member for Warrego was referring to some polling that was conducted. I have received some polling from the LGAQ which, as we know, is not supporting this process. What does that poll show for Thuringowa and Townsville? It shows that almost 52 per cent of residents support amalgamation of the twin cities. Less than 30 per cent said that they oppose it. Importantly, 73 per cent of residents in the LGAQ's own survey called on the state to implement the findings of the independent commission. Not one survey respondent opposed the proposed name of Townsville City Council. Also for members' information, 65 per cent said a referendum was a waste of money.

We are an energetic, confident city which has seen an astonishing amount of growth in recent years. We are bursting with growth and development. All indications are that this growth shows no sign of slowing down. Indeed, we can confidently predict significant economic expansion and urban development for many years to come. By amalgamating Townsville and Thuringowa we are creating an organisation of a scale and capacity capable of managing the entire region and its urban growth.

The new Townsville City Council will more effectively be able to: promote and support major economic development initiatives emerging in the region; plan and coordinate the delivery of services and infrastructure for the expected growth; develop an integrated approach to natural resource management; and ensure sound environmental management. It will also have enough clout and political leadership to engage with the state and federal governments and major companies on any given issue, particularly in relation to the expected growth in the region.

This larger and better resourced local government will be better equipped to deal with large-scale economic developments. It will be a large, diverse, regional city, home to a major army base, a large university, a major hospital linked to the university, a large airport used commercially and by the defence forces, a number of smelters or refineries and one of the largest sea ports in Queensland.

Townsville will be the major centre for north Queensland where all major educational, health, commercial, government, retail and financial services are located. It will realise the dream that Townsville has had for over 100 years of being the capital of north Queensland. It will boast major transport linkages in the region with Townsville being the centre for all main road and rail networks. While our region already boasts these assets, the amalgamation will reinforce Townsville's reputation as the largest service centre in tropical Australia. Even in a simple sense the amalgamation of Townsville

and Thuringowa makes sense. Some 65 per cent of people employed in Thuringowa work in Townsville city. Outsiders essentially recognise the brand name for the area as Townsville. Ask anyone where the Cowboys play and they will say Townsville. That is incorrect. They currently play in Thuringowa. It will be Townsville after 15 March.

There are no natural barriers between Thuringowa and Townsville. In the past, there have been many joint arrangements between the two councils in matters such as planning, water, waste management and transport. Residents of neither community benefit from the additional costs and delays incurred in this doubling up. Over the next 20 years development in residential, commercial and industrial property is expected to continue across the entire Townsville region. Further development in sea, air, road and rail transport infrastructure, processing smelters and refineries and tourism is also anticipated.

It is time for us to embrace the amalgamation and move forward as a united force. North Queensland has changed remarkably over the past 20 years. I am proud of our community in Townsville and its ability to move with the times. I am looking forward to supporting that same community through the continued growth and exciting times ahead.

Townsville we know holds the future of the north in its hands—one united, confident voice that can take on not only the government here in Brisbane but also the government in Canberra that for 10 years has ripped off the residents of the north. Indeed, it is interesting to note that in the last 10 years since John Howard came to power the residents of north Queensland have paid over \$2 billion in petrol taxes to his government. What has been our return on the Bruce Highway, the National Highway? The member for Gregory, I am sure, will agree that it has been absolutely nothing. It is a pitiful road, one of the most dangerous sections of highway in Australia. A united voice, a united Townsville standing up for the 165,000 residents of north Queensland will be able to say to Canberra, 'We're standing up for the north.'

Congratulations to the minister. This is a very courageous bill. Congratulations to the members on this side for being courageous and voting for this bill. I know that we are doing the right thing in developing stronger local governments across Queensland. In the future that may well be a problem for our governments—that is, that we have stronger local governments fighting for their rights.

In conclusion, I congratulate both councils—Townsville and Thuringowa. They are both led by very capable mayors. The upcoming contest will deliver a very good council to a united city—a united council and a confident city that will lead the north and lead northern Australia well into the next 100 years.

Sitting suspended from 1.02 pm to 2.30 pm.

Hon. GJ WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (Minister for Mines and Energy) (2.30 pm): This important local government reform legislation before the House is about the future; it is not about the past. It is about the long-term future of Queensland—not the next five years but the next 25 years, the next 35 to 45 years and beyond. It is not about the past. It is about building a stronger network of regionally based councils throughout Queensland for a growing Queensland. This issue of consolidating the strength of all of our existing local councils into more effective regional based structures is an issue that is close to the heart of many Queenslanders, and I am one of them. For me it is about the amalgamation of Pine Rivers shire, Caboolture shire and Redcliffe City Council in my immediate area to the north and north-west of Brisbane. The Ferry Grove electorate is one of fastest-growing electorates in that area, and these reforms give this area a golden opportunity to have a strong regional council. It means that we can attract business opportunities, tourism dollars and build a better lifestyle for people who live and work here, and many people—more and more every day—are moving into the suburbs and the region of north-west Brisbane.

What is at stake? What is really at stake is their future, and I am talking, as I say, about 25 years down the track and well beyond. Incidentally, when I was first elected in 1998 there were more than 26,000 voters on the roll in Ferry Grove. This year there is almost 32,000. We need to focus now, plan now and build now so that we lay strong foundations for future generations. Regrettably, some of the critics of this important landmark reform initiative are still too caught up in the past. They are seeing the future only through the constraints of their past experiences. It is no good relying on the benefit of hindsight into the future when we find that we do not have the necessary local government structures to facilitate building a stronger Queensland for the growing Queensland that we have become.

I remind the House and everyone who is a critic of these reforms that these reforms were developed by an independent commission which took our future concerns and needs into account. I take the opportunity also to thank my constituents who shared their views with me—their very important views. Reactions have been mixed—some for, some against, some ambivalent. I have also held several discussions with Councillors Battersby and Millar of the Pine Rivers Shire Council to hear their views and points of concern in relation to the Pine Rivers council element of the new Moreton Bay Regional Council. These issues have included the need for electoral divisions and the name of the new regional council. I believe that the best interests of the new regional council will be best served with the established divisions that are going to take place for that new regional council. That way local residents will continue to have a local voice fighting for them.

As the elected representative for Ferny Grove, I know there is nothing more important than a strong local voice, and I will continue to stand up for my constituents. As always, my door will be open on this issue as it has been on any other issue. The local government reform program is, as I say, about building a stronger, more financially viable system of local government right across the state—not just in the Moreton Bay Regional Council area but from Douglas shire down to the Darling Downs. The new regional councils will be able to deliver more front-line services and more local services where they are needed. Money that would otherwise be spent on administration will be spent on local services for local communities.

This proposal lays the foundation for this unprecedented growth that we are currently experiencing and, on all estimations of all of the experts, will continue for a long time into the future, taking us towards the next 25 years. Indeed, it is a very sound investment in our future. I remind the House that it is not only the Moreton Bay Regional Council area but the whole Queensland economy that is booming. Queensland's economic growth was more than double that of Australia in the last 12 months to March this year. Queensland's retail turnover was five times that of Australia over the same period. The total investment in Queensland was seven times the national rate. Building activity was faster in Queensland than anywhere else in Australia. The unemployment rate at 3.4 per cent was well below the Australian rate of four per cent.

There has been strong employment growth throughout Queensland for many years now—it has far exceeded that of the rest of Australia—and Queensland's labour productivity of 2.2 per cent is well above the national rate of 1.6 per cent. So is it any wonder with the fastest-growing state in Australia—the fastest-growing economy in Australia as illustrated by all of these indicators, which indeed were put before the House yesterday by the Deputy Premier and Treasurer—that there is an urgent need for us to identify what is the best structure for local government across Queensland to take us into the next 25 years, 35 years, 45 years and beyond, because we need those local government structures to facilitate growth, infrastructure, planning, environmental issues and, not least in the north-western sector and the northern part of Brisbane, the issue of urban planning.

There are many constituents in my area and to the north who have expressed views one way or the other, but I have received correspondence from someone in the north-western sector who is of the younger generation and who has a young family and who is thinking about where they want their future to be. All of these issues that I have raised today are issues that they have raised with me as well. They see—and I think that there will be many more people who will come to see—that by creating this consolidated force of economic power which the three councils already have we will create a formidable economic driver to the north of Brisbane. We will facilitate the future growth in that area in the areas of infrastructure, social services and urban planning. I think there is a real opportunity here for the Moreton Bay Regional Council to become an economic rival to the Brisbane City Council. We have to remember that the Brisbane City Council is a consolidation of what was formerly 17 separate local authorities. No-one today would urge the state government to bring in an amendment to the Brisbane City Council act to disaggregate the Brisbane City Council back into 17 or any number of local councils. No-one would dream of doing such a thing.

Mr Hinchliffe: Be careful, because some are so backward that they might!

Mr WILSON: I take that interjection. I suspect that those same people, should they be around, would also be opposed to these local government reforms that we are implementing throughout Queensland. Really, we are playing catch-up—that is, we want the rest of Queensland to take advantage of the benefits that have been proven in this area for all to see in terms of the Brisbane City Council. Those areas can only benefit from consolidation through the amalgamation reforms that are set out so well within this reform legislation. I commend the work of the Premier and the minister for local government. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.39 pm): The Local Government Reform Implementation Bill is probably one of the most dishonest pieces of legislation that I have ever seen come before this House. No doubt the dishonest drivel that we have heard already from the government benches will be repeated time and time again in this debate. It is one thing to come into this House and debate philosophical differences, debate how we should do things and debate how we all should fulfil our basic role of making things better for our constituents and we can sometimes have differing opinions about that, but this legislation before the House today does not do that for our constituents. This legislation is fundamentally unfair, unjust and just not right.

I say to all the government backbenchers who will stand up here and repeat ad nauseum the false claims that are being made without any foundation that they need to examine their consciences, because it is just unfair, unjust and just not right. That is why the government has gone to such incredible, extraordinary lengths to ensure that the people who are affected by this legislation do not get a chance to voice their opinion in a formal way. That is why the government has gone to such extraordinary lengths to ensure that the debate in this parliament is rushed through as quickly as possible before the full impact of this legislation can be understood.

I support the extensive remarks of my colleague the member for Warrego in his role as shadow minister for local government. He certainly understands local government. He knows what local government is about. He put forward a very creditable case in his address. I certainly commend those members who are yet to speak the words that he spoke. The member's knowledge and experience stands in stark contrast to some of the ridiculous claims the minister has made and his total lack of understanding of local government.

This whole process of which this legislation is the culmination has been dishonest from the start. One of the most outrageous parts of the government's strategy has been the attack that it has levelled constantly at councillors and mayors who serve their communities, in many instances in a semivoluntary role, and who have done so for the better part of their lives. The other day I addressed a meeting at which I said to the councillors and the mayors who were assembled that there was not one person in the room who would not have been financially better off if they had never gone near local government. That is typical of so many councillors and mayors right across Queensland—people who have served their communities for so long for so little remuneration and, through the government's process, they have been attacked and called bloated politicians. Today, I want to extend to those people the credit that they deserve. I want to extend to them the recognition that they deserve. I want to wish them luck and all the best as they set about implementing the more outrageous parts of this legislation in the months ahead.

As I said, this whole process was dishonest from the start. It was based on a QTC report. That report was misused in the most outrageous and dishonest way. There was a complete misuse of the terms 'weak' and 'very weak'. A whole case was constructed that somehow or other councils were weak and very weak and on the point of financial collapse. But when we looked at the detail, as so many people did not bother to do or did not have the opportunity to do, we saw that the terms that were used in that QTC report had a very different meaning from what we and people in the street would assume that 'weak' and 'very weak' meant.

The QTC report itself made the comment very forcefully that the biggest issue that was contained in the results was accumulated depreciation and how councils have been forced to handle accumulated depreciation since the introduction of AAS27 accounting some years ago. That level of detail did not interest the minister and it did not interest the government. It seized on the classifications of 'weak' and 'very weak' and used those terms to justify some sort of political agenda that I believe has been long held dear to the Labor Party in Queensland for a whole range of reasons, some of which my colleague touched on.

At this juncture and in the public debate that has eventuated since then we, the councils themselves and the Queensland Local Government Association have established very clearly that there is no imminent financial collapse facing local government in Queensland. There is no major financial problem facing local government in Queensland. All the nonsense rhetoric that we hear from the other side about making councils stronger has no basis in fact at all. Some of these councils that are being amalgamated have millions of dollars in the bank, no debt and have operated very successfully for many years. Even one of the two councils that received the lowest rating of 'distressed'—Murgon council, which is in my electorate—has zero debt. Yet that council is somehow touted as the reason behind this whole process. The government has been fundamentally dishonest and fundamentally unfair from the start.

This process is driven by a political agenda that has lain dormant in the Queensland Labor Party for years. The Queensland Labor Party has fundamentally hated local government for almost a generation. Before I came into this place, I was in local government. I was mayor of a local shire and I know the attitude that is instilled within the Queensland Labor Party—that it somehow needed an opportunity to get square, to take the 'local' out of local government. This is a power grab. It is about taking power away from the communities. It is about taking the 'local' out of local government. With these changes that are proposed, local government will change fundamentally from a process that is about local voices having a local choice to a bureaucracy that can be controlled, that can be infiltrated by people with an agenda. I believe that that is what this is all about.

The case that has been constructed to support and justify amalgamation is dishonest and unfair—and it has been that way from the start. The unfairness and the injustice has been highlighted by the extraordinary lengths to which the government has gone to try to prevent councils from having a say and from conducting polls. Who would have ever imagined that in Queensland, in Australia, in the democracy that we all hold dear, a government would legislate to stop a council consulting its community? Not only that, today we see another amendment introduced into the parliament to extend that horrendous provision. Not only does the government want to stop a council from consulting its community; now it wants to stop the council encouraging, or facilitating, or asking somebody else to consult the community. It is a horrendous jackboot type of approach that has no place in our democracy. Irrespective of what we think about this particular issue, irrespective of what political agenda drives us, this sort of approach is a disaster for all of us.

Today, I have encouraged those communities—and I do so here again on the public record—to defy this outrageous law, to defy this outrageous amendment that the minister has introduced today, and to do so in huge numbers on a campaign of civil disobedience that will ensure that this sort of

outrageous legislation is unworkable. It is totally unworkable and the only approach to take is to defy it because of the ridiculousness of it that is obvious to everybody who understands. I say to the minister, if you think you can enforce this law, if you think you can enforce this amendment in the communities that I represent, then you are in for a shock. You are in for a shock, because the day you come up to lock the mayor and the councillors out of our council, you will have thousands of people out—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Leader of the Opposition, you will direct your comments through the chair.

Mr SEENEY: The day that the minister comes up to lock the mayor and the councillors out of the shire chambers in the town that I live in, he will find that there will be thousands of people there. The day that he rings the local police sergeant and tells him to go and somehow stop the mayor and councillors from going into the shire office, he will find out about the impracticalities and the impossibilities of the nonsense jackboot approach that he has adopted. It is a clear indication of his inexperience and his total lack of knowledge of what local government is all about. I would suggest that he, too, is a political pawn in a game that is being driven by an ideology that he knows very little about.

This process has produced some disastrous results for people right across Queensland but none more so than for the people that I represent. In my electorate I have 12 councils. They were the basis of the communities—councils like Wondai, Eidsvold, Gayndah, Mundubbera and Taroom. They were the very framework on which the community built itself and they were the framework that enabled the communities to function. They were part and parcel of the fabric of the community. 'Community' used in that context is a concept that members opposite who live in Brisbane cannot even begin to understand. But it is the precious thing that so many people have tried to fight to protect over the last few months and which they will continue to protect.

In some cases eight councils are proposed to be amalgamated into one—for instance, the Darling Downs Regional Council. In my electorate the North Burnett Regional Council will have six councils amalgamated into one—six councils and six communities with no centre at all. It takes 3½ hours to drive from one end to the other. It completely takes the concept of 'local' out of local government. Those communities will no longer have a local government. They will no longer have a local government. They will be administered by bureaucrats because it will change the nature of local government and it will change the nature of those people who can serve on those local governments, and those communities will forever be the poorer.

There is one case in my electorate that is probably the worst example in this whole debacle that has been foisted on Queensland communities. I refer to the Taroom shire. Supposedly, shires were not going to be split in half. Only two regional shires have been split in half that I am aware of. One is Tiaro and the other one is Taroom. To split the shire of Taroom in half shows a complete lack of understanding of any local issues or any local dynamics at all. There is no natural boundary through the middle of the Taroom shire. It has in itself a geographical boundary in that a series of ranges ensures that the Taroom shire exists almost like an island. To cut it in half and say that one of the towns in the Taroom shire—Taroom—should be in the Banana shire and the other one, Wandoan, should be in the Dalby shire is an absolute outrage. To use the divisional boundary in the old shire as the shire boundary shows a complete lack of understanding of how that boundary was ever arrived at. It has fundamentally split that community, and I think it is one of the most absurd examples of what happens when this sort of process is undertaken without any consultation, without any local involvement and without any care at all for the future of those communities. The Banana shire will be amalgamated with the northern end of the Taroom shire to make the Banana Regional Council. That in itself would probably be workable, but it would have been a lot more workable had the whole of the Taroom shire been involved in that regional shire.

In the north Burnett six shires will be amalgamated into one, as I mentioned before. I think that will be a totally unworkable situation, and there will be many other examples across the state. We have places like Charters Towers and Barcaldine, the Isaac Regional Council, the Emerald Regional Council, the Roma Regional Council and the Longreach Regional Council—all huge areas that will be almost totally unworkable. They will certainly be totally unable to establish any sort of local presence or local government or be able to ensure that those communities continue to exist in the way that they did.

The shadow minister has outlined what we will do. I think it is important that the people who are currently fearful for the future of their communities know that there is a solution. They are fearful for the future of their communities because they know what the impact will be of these amalgamations. They are the people who marched on the streets of Brisbane. Some 15,000 of them marched on the streets of Brisbane. An extraordinary number of people came here to march. There are people who came to Barcaldine who protested loud and long about the impact on their councils.

The case that I think should bring home the point to the minister and to anybody else in this parliament who has a heart or a soul is the bus loads of women and children who spent 26 hours on a bus to come down here to stand outside the Executive Building with their placards for an hour and a half in an attempt to get their message across to a minister and a government who refuse to listen. How on

earth can that sort of protest be ignored? How can a government possibly not take notice of people who are so motivated to fight for the future of their communities? How on earth can the government continue to deny those people a say in the future of their communities?

That is the position that this legislation leaves us in. It is not so much that a process of amalgamation will take place. I need to put on record—and we have said this from the start—that there is no doubt there are places in Queensland where amalgamation of some councils would produce a positive outcome. Those councils were moving towards that end through the Triple S process—a voluntary process that they themselves had put in place and that they themselves were working on. That would have produced an outcome that they and their communities could have gone forward with. It would have produced an outcome that would have addressed all of the problems.

For some time now councils right across Queensland have been working on a regional approach to the major issues, a regional approach to employing officers and a regional approach to town planning. They were achieving the benefits of a regional approach and still maintaining the benefits of local input and local community representation. Some councils had put an enormous amount of effort into the regional organisations of councils, or the ROCs as they were called. This government has totally ignored all of that effort and all of the effort that went into the Triple S process. The government has thrown all of that out and has gone for a dictatorial, jackboot approach which cannot work unless it has some support from the communities upon which it is going to be visited. That, I think, is the tragedy.

There is probably little doubt that this legislation is going to be passed, given the political realities of this place and given the complete reluctance of Labor backbenchers to think for themselves or to make any sort of judgement about the legislation itself. But the great tragedy is that this process is going to produce anger, upset, frustration and rebellion that will go on for a long time. It is going to tear the heart and soul out of small communities and it will have an enormous impact on individuals and families. When members on that side of parliament have long forgotten about this legislation and have gone on to something else that their political masters have directed, those individuals and families will have to deal with the consequences of this legislation, and the communities that they make up will have to deal with the consequences of this legislation.

This proposal has always been about communities. The protest movement and the anger that we have seen demonstrated and that I know the government has not been able to understand has always been about communities. It has not been about politicians, as the minister and the Premier try to cynically claim in their quick television grab. This legislation has a devastating impact on communities. It has a devastating impact on families. It impacts in a most unfair and unjust way, and the basis of it was dishonest from the start. If ever there was a piece of legislation that it saddens me to see come into this parliament it is this one, because I know it is so unfair and unjust. I know the anger and the determination that there is in Queensland communities to fight this legislation.

I also know that the consequences of this legislation will be felt by many people for a long time to come. We will oppose this legislation at every opportunity in this House. We will use every avenue available to us in this House to oppose this legislation. We will use every opportunity to support the communities and the people who will be impacted by this horrendous piece of legislation. We will do that for as long as it takes to ensure that some justice is returned to Queensland communities.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (2.59 pm): I rise to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. At the outset, I would like to say that my colleague the member for Kawana was taken suddenly ill today and has had to leave. I do trust he will make a speedy recovery. He was very determined to speak on this bill so I had a discussion with him in relation to it. He was very concerned about the impact this bill would have on Nambour, the base of employment for some 1,300 Maroochy Shire Council workers. He was very keen to ask the minister why there has been a rush to do this in the way it has been done and whether there are any benefits from the amalgamation. So before those opposite make something mischievous of the member for Kawana's inability to get up and speak on this bill, I want to make it clear and put on the record that he has been taken suddenly ill.

I note the amendment that was moved prior to lunch. This is an outrage that will offend every Queenslanders, including every Queenslanders who might happen to support elements of the government's legislation. To introduce the penalty of sacking a council simply because they ask the opinion of their ratepayers about a fundamental reforming of their local representation is an outrage. This is Queensland 2007; it is not Berlin 1937. No Queenslanders, no matter what their stance on this bill is, will accept this gross insult to democracy and gross insult to the people of Queensland who have been denied any say in a major reform of their local representation. I think it is one of the most obnoxious and offensive abuses of a government's power that I have ever seen in my lifetime.

If any community can provide unequivocal evidence of their opposition to this, I will be happy to lodge a request with the AEC—should I be able to find a practical means of doing it and if it is possible to have such a request considered. There are communities with no further need to state their position. Not even those opposite could possibly question the community of Noosa's massive opposition to this.

Even in a deluded state, no-one opposite could deny the total opposition of the people of Redcliffe to this measure. I am not sure of the details of what is available, but should it be possible I would be happy to ask the AEC to conduct plebiscites in those areas because there is no doubt those communities have rejected this intrusion on their rights.

There has never been any question on this side of the House or out in the community that there are circumstances and occasions when local governments should have their boundaries altered or amalgamated. This has been an ongoing process in Queensland. However, forcing these changes is simply not on. Firstly, local government is just that—it is the delivery of not only services but community policies at a local level and it is representation of people at their most basic level of governance. It is amazing and a measure of how arrogant and untouchable the Premier, Deputy Premier and minister have become that they could trash democracy and say to the people—

Mr Hoolihan: You wouldn't know what democracy is!

Dr FLEGG: I take that interjection from the member opposite who I have no doubt at the end of this debate will vote against anybody having a say in their local communities.

Mr Hoolihan: You'd be flat out spelling it!

Dr FLEGG: I hope those in the electorate of Keppel pay regard to those interjections screamed out by their representative here today. The government is saying to the people of communities right across Queensland that they do not deserve a say, that their view does not matter, that the government will not listen to them. This is arrogance and abuse of government like I have never previously seen. According to this government, the shape of people's local representation is nothing to do with the people. The government is forcing them to take what is dished out to them. This is a denial of fundamental democracy, and the views of local communities should be a fundamental part of decision making on these issues.

We on this side of the House will be voting against this bill with considerable conviction and compassion. If delivering this change in a democratic way will take more time, I say to the minister, 'Take the time and do it in a democratic way.' The minister is very fond of spending a fortune of taxpayers' money ramming his ideas down the throats of Queenslanders, particularly in the areas least affected under this legislation. In that advertising the minister made much of the fact that local government boundaries have not changed in a century. I conclude that it is likely many or most of the new boundaries could go on for that time. Why then does the minister proceed to rush this to the point where even the commissioners in their report said that they did not have time to deal with certain matters because this was forced through in a ridiculously rushed manner?

As has become a habit with this government, a spurious justification was used to ram this through. Just as increasing stamp duty on cars was spuriously alleged to be an environmental issue, the spurious justification on this occasion was that a number of councils were financially weak. Yet when we have a look at what has been forced through, the amalgamations bear no relationship to the financial strength or otherwise of the particular local authorities.

The other spurious argument which concerns me even more is that we need to make local government representation less local in order to promote major infrastructure and economic development. That is altogether too rich in a state where the state government had responsibility for infrastructure and failed absolutely and dismally and is now attempting to suggest it is somehow related to a failure on the part of local government.

Major infrastructure in this state is and will remain the responsibility of the state government, albeit this state government has failed dismally on that test. Ultimately, the allocation of resources and priorities for major infrastructure is inescapably the province of the state government. This is another spurious argument. However, it is a concerning argument because, as the state government becomes increasingly debt burdened with its \$52 billion of borrowings, it raises the spectre to me and to others as to whether having regional local government is in fact a Trojan Horse, an effort to shift more of the cost for major infrastructure on to ratepayers and away from a state government whose finances are deteriorating dramatically.

One thing is for certain out of this process, and I look forward to hearing the minister's response to this in his summing-up—that is, rates for Queensland ratepayers will not fall as a result of this measure. As we have seen with water infrastructure, there has never been any question that the state government has the power and responsibility to deal with infrastructure. It does not require local governments to be made into regional governments. The government's efforts would have been better placed getting its own infrastructure house in order.

In the hurried rush to deliver the government's politically driven agenda it has been all too apparent that there has been no analysis or planning done, and it is equally evident that the government has neither allowed the time for that to take place nor is it willing to listen even if that analysis were done and it showed that it was heading in the wrong direction.

Let us have a look at some of the issues relating to rates. In the regional council proposed on the Sunshine Coast, Noosa is a significantly lower rated council than those with which it is to be amalgamated. On a house with an unimproved capital value of \$200,000 in Noosa ratepayers pay a general rate of \$1,740; in Caloundra it is \$1,945.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Dr FLEGG: Or perhaps what is becoming a more typical valuation for that area—you cannot say I am not listening—on an unimproved capital value of \$500,000 in Noosa ratepayers are paying \$2,552; in Caloundra, \$2,844; and in Maroochydore, \$3,135. There are obviously other charges levied by local government, but in this government's haste I have not heard a single word from it about what the effect on these ratepayers is likely to be. In fact, it is a black hole of silence when it comes to what the serious day-to-day implications for ratepayers of Queensland are likely to be.

In another regional council, that being a merger of Caboolture, Redcliffe and Pine Rivers—some 360,000 people, almost the size of the Tasmanian population—Redcliffe has the lowest general rates. I am quite certain that residents in areas like Redcliffe and Noosa are not going to see the general rates of other communities reduced to the levels that exist in their communities. The silence from the government and those opposite is absolutely deafening. At very best we might see the rates averaged out, which in some communities where councils have managed financially very well and very, very prudently will still mean a significant increase. Given the enormous cost of regionalising councils and the fact that the government has produced no cost-benefit analysis to show major savings after the massive initial cost of amalgamation, I shall look forward to examining whether in fact rates rise even more than the current averages of those rates. Communities beware: Mr Beattie and Ms Bligh are putting up your rates.

Government members interjected.

Dr FLEGG: We have seen communities across the state, most notably communities in the south-east corner—those of Noosa and Redcliffe—express overwhelming satisfaction with the current arrangements and what is delivered to those communities and overwhelming opposition to joining with the other almost 80 councils that this government proposes to abolish. These are financially strong councils in tight-knit communities where the communities have chosen not simply the way their services are provided but local ways of life that will be under threat when they are abolished and absorbed into regional councils.

In Redcliffe, where I lived for many years, successive councils have chosen and given priority to building waterfront infrastructure and tourism facilities that are the pride of everyone in Redcliffe. I have heard nothing, certainly nothing that makes any sense, from the member for Redcliffe. If she represented the people of that city, in particular the 20,000 who took the trouble to sign a petition, she would be crossing the floor today and voting with those on this side of the House. At least the former member for Noosa, after some vacillation, was willing to stand up to some extent for her local community. I think there is a serious challenge on the table here in this House today to the member for Redcliffe. Does she want to be a Labor Party apparatchik who takes messages from the Premier and Deputy Premier out to her electorate and tell them to like it or lump it, or does the member for Redcliffe actually want to stand up for the people who elected her and put her in this House? I hope that the people of Redcliffe, as with people across the state, have a very long memory and remember that their member refused to stand up for them in this place.

Let us see how some of these areas fare when they go from having their own shire council to having maybe two councillors out of a dozen trying to maintain the distinctive characteristics of their community. It is not just the services and lifestyle of their community but the characteristics that people have chosen for their own community that will be homogenised under regional councils. Locals in Noosa have built a distinctive community that has resisted more than most in terms of not just high-rise buildings but high-density development. I do not think there would be many Queenslanders who would disagree with me when I said, 'Viva diversity' in this state. It is not a case of one area being better than another. We do not want a homogenised state of Queensland. We want a state where individual communities can make a choice to approach life, development and community differently. When one homogenises the basic level of local government into regional government we will see the prospect for communities to forge that diversity—to be a bit different, to give people a choice—gradually whittled away.

Local communities have shown a lot of initiative in forging their own local laws and their own local planning. Those communities, some of which might be quite happy to amalgamate, are not going to be given a say, they are not going to be consulted and none of their wishes, whether in favour or against, are going to be considered or taken seriously. There is understandably less reaction coming from larger centres that of course will more than likely have the voting representation to dominate the regional councils.

Let us briefly look at the Caboolture shire. Caboolture shire will be merged into a supershire, almost the population of Tasmania. It is a shire that is 127 years old and yet it is a shire where strong environmental values, particularly around the Pumicestone Passage and Bribie Island, have been a matter of enormous pride for residents. A 127-year-old local authority is to be abolished with the stroke of a pen without giving it even the opportunity to say yes or no.

Mrs Sullivan interjected.

Dr FLEGG: The member for Pumicestone ought to think before she votes here today as well. To make matters worse, there is no clear direction as to what will be expected of this massive council, whether it will start assuming the cost and responsibility of services in transport and infrastructure that traditionally have been provided by other means. As with all of these other councils across Queensland, there is absolutely no assessment of what benefits will be generated or even if there will be benefits generated.

There is no estimate of the massive cost of amalgamating these councils—and it is truly massive. If you have a look at any corporate merger as a guide, by the time all the HR departments, the payroll departments, the call centres and the plant and fleet are combined, by the time you relocate and probably build new premises, by the time you move thousands of staff and their resources and by the time you train those staff in totally new teams and totally new processes, the cost will be staggering. The government's \$27 million will be an absolute pittance.

Time expired.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.20 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. As all members know, this bill will see the amalgamation of 157 councils into 73 and will reduce the number of local government representatives from 1,250 to 526. I have watched the city based members shaking their heads and yelling out throughout this debate, and we have only just started. They have been stating that their shires do not feel the same way as the rural and regional shires. I ask: how the heck would they know? Have they gone out there and asked them? Why are they so afraid to ask properly through a referendum? Is it because the few they have talked to were perhaps the minority? By not asking the people through a referendum they do not know and cannot purport to know how the majority feel. Therefore they can stand in here and say anything they like.

This debate will go late into the night and sniping from government members will also continue late into the night simply because many on this side of the House do not agree with what the government has done nor the way it is doing it and are passionately defending the rights of their communities. The old adage, 'Methinks thou protesteth too much,' applies very well in this particular instance, and those shouting across the chamber should be very aware of that statement.

The government will win this debate. There is absolutely no doubt that it will win this debate. It has the numbers. We would therefore think that it would have the good grace to let those who disagree with its point of view express their view, as they have the right to express the view of their people. There is no graciousness in the amendments which the minister unceremoniously brought into the House today which say that mayors will be sacked if they take up the offer of the Prime Minister. If the shires want to take up the Prime Minister's offer and waste federal government funds, let them. This government keeps saying that they are going to waste the money. It is federal money, so let them waste it. If the shires want to waste that money, it will put on record exactly what the people think, and the people want to have a say. If the vast majority are on record as opposing this legislation, this amalgamation which the government says is needed will merely prove that this government, which purports to be a government for all Queenslanders, does not care what those very same people think. However, it does care about local government to the extent that it is prepared to sack councils if it finds out that they have conducted a poll. How big is the government? Not very big at all. Will it also sack the members of this House who poll their electorates? It may as well start with me because I have put it out there and I am polling my electorate. If it wants to sack me, it can go right ahead.

Some major concerns raised in this dramatic slash of shire personnel are the loss of identity and grassroots representation. Government members are not very big people, are they? They cannot take anyone saying anything against the government. The government is not 100 per cent right. It is wrong as many times as the opposition. Its members should just grow up, listen and be prepared to hear what others have to say.

Although there is an amazing amount of emotion surrounding this move to amalgamate, the lack of community knowledge about the reason behind this forced amalgamation causes a lot of people out there great concern. The Size, Shape and Sustainability process was working towards achieving a similar outcome. Some shires were working towards amalgamation, albeit perhaps not fast enough, but the government feels not enough of them were embracing the concept of amalgamation. The process was not happening fast enough for this government. So this move to force amalgamation was rushed in. It could be deduced—and many councils, councillors and the community have—that the Triple S process was merely a diversion to keep local governments occupied while the government worked out how it could ram this down people's throats.

This government states that it knows what is good for the people living in shires outside cities in rural and regional Queensland, yet there are members in this House who are party to government decisions who do not even recognise the issues we face. These same people are constantly making decisions which impact negatively on our communities, and we see it here again too. These same members are failing all Queenslanders by not allowing those impacted upon by the decision to have a say at all and trying very hard to shut up anyone who tries to put their point of view across.

Then on Tuesday we saw the height of hypocrisy. The Premier stood in this House and ranted at John Howard stating that he should go to the polls and let the people have their say. That was in response to John Howard, the Prime Minister of this country. John Howard said—

What the Beattie government is doing is riding roughshod over the wishes of the people of many parts of Queensland. We are not trying to compel a ballot in every shire and every council area. We are saying that, if you want a vote, the AEC will conduct it and we will pay for it.

...

Let the people of Queensland decide.

Howard wants the people to have a say. Is it playing politics? Of course it is. We are not all dumb. More than likely he is but he was stating exactly what the people of this state want: a say on amalgamation. What about it, Premier? If you are so keen on the people having a say, what happened to letting the Queensland people have their say on this particular issue? I have heard so much hypocrisy in this place, but that particular statement on Tuesday would have to be the worst case ever.

We have heard statements such as, 'Like a red rag to a bull,' 'The bush is bleeding,' and, 'Small towns are losing their voice'. We have heard members on this side of the House outline the efforts that people went to—mothers, kids, dads, shire councillors—to try to bring to the notice of their city counterparts and the government exactly how it will affect them. Those terms are emotive terms and they are hurled around whenever we talk of this amalgamation, but they describe very clearly what is happening. The word 'amalgamation' is today's equivalent of the first four-letter word we can possibly think of, and people see only a negative side to the merger of local governments. Why is that? Because they were not properly informed. They were not properly informed of the reasoning behind it, how it was going to occur and what the impacts were going to be on them. There is fear of the impact on the communities, and it is a real fear. Most people in this place did not recognise the effect that the removal of one small bank branch would have on a very small town. It closed it down. So I can imagine very few in this House being able to understand the effects that removing a local shire council is going to have. People will move to where the work is. It will impact on schools, shops and every other facility in that town. It will have a domino effect like you cannot imagine, but we have lived through it. So do not tell us that we do not know what we are talking about because we do and so do the people out there who are impacted upon on a regular basis. Towns literally fade away. People voted for this—

A government member: They are not!

Mrs PRATT: You come to my area, mate, and I will show you a thing or two. He should pull his head in because he does not know what he is talking about.

People voted for this government; that is true. It was voted in once again with a huge majority. So there is no doubt this legislation will pass and that will only be on the vote of the government. I do not blame just the government for the negative laws and bad legislation; I lay a lot of the blame for the government's dictatorial attitude and for having a Premier and government members with egos bigger than outdoors on the coalition, which continues to unravel and become not only an embarrassment to themselves but a non-event to the people of Queensland. When the coalition get their egos under control they might start to fight in a positive way for their constituents and the people of Queensland. When you do get your egos under control then and only then will the reins be pulled in on a government out of control.

Smaller towns fear missing out, so at the very least divisional representation must apply. I hope all shires where there is a need or even a perceived need take up this option. In large areas in rural and regional Queensland, the towns are far apart and divisional representation is essential. It allows representatives to be elected from the various towns and not, as is often the practice in some areas, from just the major town. Those councillors do not know the local areas, the local roads and the problems as well as those who live in those particular towns.

People do have a real fear of the impact of this amalgamation. They have a lot of questions. The major one is: exactly what are the benefits of this amalgamation? Maybe if the government had gone out, done the work, taken the time to educate the people as to the positives and negatives of this particular legislation instead of rushing it in there might not have been such a big backlash. It is fear of the unknown which makes people strike out, and people are striking out. There are a lot of people in this House who will not be here after the next election. I am pretty sure that a lot of them will be those now on the government side.

Howard has offered councils referendums if they want them. But by admission of the Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, no matter what the result is of the local referenda the federal government will not override the state government. All these polls would do is show exactly what the people think. They

have the right to a say. There is nothing wrong with a Prime Minister standing up and giving the people a voice. Whether or not it is for his own political interest I do not care. The people deserve a say. The people have a lot of questions, Premier. The community consultation and/or information offered to explain the amalgamation was negligible, if not nonexistent. I must ask: will there be a no disadvantage test applied to the amalgamation? I bet not.

Four new regional councils will cover the Nanango electorate. One is the South Burnett Regional Council, which will see the shires of Wondai, Kingaroy, Murgon and Nanango combined. The number of councillors will be reduced from four mayors and 33 councillors to one mayor and six councillors. Minister, I hope that they will be full-time councillors because they will have a big job.

It does not include Yarraman, which would seem to be a logical inclusion in the South Burnett as it has always been classed as part of the South Burnett. Currently in Rosalie shire, Yarraman will become part of the Toowoomba Regional Council, along with Toowoomba city, Cambooya, Clifton, Jondaryan, Millmerran, Pittsworth and Crows Nest. The number of councillors will be reduced from the current eight mayors and 61 councillors to one mayor and 10 councillors. To not include Yarraman in the South Burnett typifies the basic failure of those entrusted to draw up appropriate boundaries. They do not know the area. They did not consult sufficiently. Yarraman was always on the outer reaches of the Rosalie shire, but to make it part of Toowoomba is just downright ridiculous. It is like Toowoomba being the top of one's head and Yarraman being the very smallest part of the big toe nail. Yarraman has no like interest with Toowoomba. Rosalie Shire Council had already been talking to Crows Nest to amalgamate. These councils know their areas and know their like interests. They had done the appropriate research and communicated with the people. They, unlike this government, were following a due and proper process.

Somerset Regional Council will combine Kilcoy and Esk shires. The number of councillors will be reduced from the current two mayors and 18 councillors to one mayor and six councillors. North Moreton Regional Council will see the current shires of Pine Rivers, Caboolture and Redcliffe combined, reducing their councils from the current three mayors and 23 councillors to one mayor and 12 councillors. To date there has been mixed reaction to this amalgamation. Some passionately hate the idea, others see some benefit but they are not very sure, and there are others who could not care less because they take no interest. But one thing they all agree on, however, is that they want information that imparts some knowledge and not simply the fact, which they know, that councils have not been changed for 100 years.

This legislation is not fair to all local government. If we must have it—and it appears we must—then the boundaries need to be tweaked. They need to be appropriate to the communities. The people have had no say. I cannot and will not support this amalgamation of local government. I soundly condemn the bill.

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (3.33 pm): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. When this bill is passed later today 84 councils will be subject to amalgamation in Queensland, with 23—over a quarter of them—in my electorate. I said it in Port Douglas on Sunday and I say it again today: I want more. With two houses in the Commonwealth parliament, two in all state parliaments except this one and a system of local government, this has to be one of the most overgoverned countries in the Western world. While some people may argue that it also means we have stronger democracy as a result, I question whether having more politicians and more bureaucracy necessarily results in better democracies. What results is inertia, duplicity, buck passing and the most irritating political games imaginable. I am sick of it.

We are all Australians and we should be Australians first and foremost. Our federated system of government remains the last bastion of macro-economic reform. We need clearer lines of responsibility, less bureaucracy, more streamlined processes and, most of all, less politics and more action. Put simply, this House should be silent—just like the one down the hall. It is a museum—a testimony to the way we did things in colonial times before we had things like aeroplanes, telephones and other modern equipment. So are the current local government boundaries.

I hope this bill is a stepping stone for greater reform, much greater reform. This bill will make strong regional councils which will have real capacity to deal with state and federal governments not just in terms of lobbying but, more importantly, in terms of partnering with them, matching their resources and working together on areas of shared interest. In the long run, I hope they take over many of our responsibilities which can be better delivered at the regional and local level. That is what really needs to be done in this country, and anyone who has anything to do with the mechanics of government knows it.

The problem, however, is that we cannot even get simple change or, even in the case of having an Australian as our head of state, symbolic change. What we get is vested interests trying to protect their patch without any regard for the bigger picture. The bigger picture in Queensland is that we are being swamped with growth—economic growth and population growth. Smaller councils do not have the capacity to deal with that growth. They cannot attract the planners they require and they get bullied by developers and their lawyers, who sometimes have more money than the council itself, into approving things they wanted to consider more fully.

I turn to some of the specific matters related to the changes in my electorate. The first thing I want to do is bust the myth that those opposite are trying to perpetuate that every amalgamated council is against the change. In the northern peninsula area on the very tip of Cape York Peninsula there are five councils. Four of those councils have grabbed the bull by the horns and decided their future lies together. Those councils are Injinoo, Umagico, New Mapoon and Bamaga. Only Seisia has been forced to the table and I think we will be able to allay its concerns. I will talk about its concerns in a moment.

First I want to say to the four councils, councillors and CEOs who have agreed to this amalgamation, thank you. When others have panicked they have been brave. When others have found fault they have found the challenge and risen to it. When others have predicted the worst they have planned for the future of their communities. I say to those mayors and CEOs—Tex Nona and Bill Dalton in Injinoo, George Mara and Noel Balasingham in Umagico, Jesse Sagaukaz and Dalasa Yorkston in Bamaga and Colin and Merv Bond in New Mapoon—well done. The minister should strike a gold medal as big as a frying pan and issue it to them and their councillors. They are real leaders.

Seisia's concerns surround the ongoing ownership of strong, profitable enterprises it has established over many years. Many of the other 15 Torres shire councils share this concern and, to be fair and honest, so do the four councils on the NPA that have been amalgamated. These are legitimate issues but should not be the deal breaker. There are ways and means of sorting these matters out both within this legislation and the Torres Strait (Community Services) Act. I am confident we will find a way forward to the satisfaction of local communities with regard to these matters.

Some Torres Strait community leaders such as Torres Strait Regional Authority chairperson, Toshie Kris, and Island Coordinating Council chair, Margaret Mau, have expressed concern about the changes. The problem the government has is that many of the island councils have poor financial management records. In fact, according to the latest Auditor-General's report only four councils have received fully satisfactory results in the last round of opinions. They are Warraber, St Pauls, Poruma and lama.

Clearly these councils should hold their heads up high. Regrettably, they must suffer the same consequences as those councils that continually fail to account properly for their use of public funds. At the end of the day, this point seems to have been lost on the opposition spokesperson for local government. The finances of many of these councils need cleaning up. What he has in effect argued is that the government should keep sending taxpayers' money to organisations whether they spend it assisting their communities with service delivery or whether they give it to themselves in loans that never get paid back. I do not care if these people are my constituents or not; that is simply unacceptable, and how the opposition can say we should carry on regardless is unfathomable and demonstrates how unfit it is to occupy the treasury benches.

The argument has been put that the decisions we are making today will kill off island culture, and I want to totally repudiate that assertion. Island culture has existed long before community councils or, for that matter, parliaments. In fact, if there is anything that is killing off Ailan Kastom it is those councillors who lend public money to themselves while people scream out for better services and infrastructure. There has been a movement supporting greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders over their own affairs that has existed since colonisation. I support this move. Let us have no misunderstanding though: there can be no autonomy without accountability. There will be accountability under the changes before the House today.

Today the Queensland Labor government puts the Torres Strait on a pathway to autonomy that will continue to build momentum. I have said this before and I say it again: I want to see more amalgamations. I want to see the future Torres Strait Island Regional Council that will be established here today amalgamated with the Torres Shire Council and eventually take over the responsibilities of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. I want to see the Torres Strait have one peak body, one line of accountability, one strong united voice. Then the region will have the institution and capacity to seek the autonomy its people so desperately desire and deserve.

Before I came into this House over three years ago I spent a four-year term on the Cairns City Council. In my seven years of public life nothing has been more difficult than fronting the rally at Port Douglas on Sunday protesting the amalgamation of the Douglas shire with Cairns City Council. In my heart of hearts, I wish things had not panned out this way. Notwithstanding this, the council has been the master of its own destiny. It has more resources and opportunities than most shires in this state and certainly all other shires in my electorate. I truly believe that could it have governed itself in a way that the government and, more importantly, the community expected it would have survived. At no stage in the last three years has there been any concerted effort to work together in the common interests of the community.

Nevertheless, there are communities of interest between Cairns and Port Douglas that the reform commission and the government have deemed to be significant enough to warrant amalgamation. Most importantly, the council areas have the same two large industries underpinning the regional economy—tourism and sugar production. The reality is that there is conflict between these two industries. The burgeoning tourism industry requires more accommodation to meet demand and affordable housing for

its workforce. This puts pressure on the sugarcane industry that is fighting to keep the smallest mill in Queensland working. I do not know the answer to that quandary. I do believe that the answers are not confined to the current boundaries of the Douglas shire.

The government is acting to protect the concerns of people in the shire. Divisions will be introduced to ensure that people get a local voice. Iconic places legislation will be introduced to protect the components of the planning scheme which add to the unique lifestyle enjoyed in the area. This will protect the Daintree lowland rainforest and keep the high-rises off Four Mile Beach and other parts of the planning scheme the community deems important. The communities of Mossman, Port Douglas and other small towns will not disappear; they will continue to grow, continue to prosper and the strong spirit so evident at the rally on Sunday will not die. Instead, it will be supported by a larger budget with better corporate governance and capacity. I also want to quickly comment on the reform commission's recommendation that the government seek to normalise the town of Weipa. This will require the government to negotiate with Rio Tinto to make the transition. I hope these negotiations begin soon and happen quickly so that Weipa can become the great Queensland town it is destined to be.

I have seen all of this before. When the old Cairns City Council was amalgamated with the Mulgrave Shire Council, many people predicted that the sky would fall and over 30,000 people signed a petition to try to stop it. Now, seven years later, you would not find a soul to say the amalgamation was a bad thing. I said a few weeks ago that I will not be governed by fear. If the price we have to pay for decent, modern local authorities in this state is my political hide, then so be it. If that is the price we have to pay to get better services of government in this country, then so be it. I will not sit here and count the days until my super rolls in. I will use my time here to support the changes that continue to plan for our growing state and the people who reside in it. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (3.45 pm): I offer my respect and congratulations to the previous member who spoke in this debate, the member for Cook. His electorate is indeed lucky to have a man of such intelligence and commitment who was able to so eloquently speak about the future of the Torres Strait and the Aboriginal communities as well as the urban centres in his electorate.

I speak to the House this afternoon as the member for Cairns more than as the Minister for Child Safety. The bottom line in terms of local government reform and its effect on Cairns and the surrounding area of far-north Queensland is that we will have more clout. The region will be stronger for the reforms and will be better able to make our needs and our voices heard in Brisbane and in Canberra. As one of a number of local members from that region and as a former councillor on the Cairns City Council, I know that there is strength in unity and that through the plethora of local governments and arrangements that we have had up there we have not had the strength and the force that we will have now with bigger, stronger local governments. I will mention some in particular.

I was pleased indeed to see the recommendation from the independent commission's report that Yarrabah stay as it is presently. The Yarrabah shire council is doing a great job. It has made huge improvements over the last several years and this is an opportunity for it to continue to roll out its new level of sophistication in local government service of good community representation and community building and to simply focus on that for now. I think that is indeed a good recommendation and I support it. So far as Johnstone Shire Council and Cardwell Shire Council are concerned, the recommendation to amalgamate them was expected. It was predictable. There were some who thought that the commission may in fact put the three southern shires together—Johnstone, Cardwell and Hinchinbrook. That was not its decision, and I accept that as I accept all of the recommendations that it has made. I was particularly pleased, however, to see the bringing together of the four shires on the tablelands. For too long the tablelands has been splintered through small councils that, I am sorry to report to the House, have competed with each other, hardly communicated with each other and that have been resentful of each other and resentful of the size and power of the Cairns City Council. All of this effort and time spent looking within and fighting within has meant that they have not united and dealt with the real enemy.

There is no doubt that the Mareeba Shire Council is primarily to blame for the lack of good cooperation and working together on the tablelands. Still Mayor Mick Borzi in his most recent submission to the minister for local government said that the Mareeba shire has no connection to the other tablelands shire. That is patently absurd. In fact, he persists in looking at one foot of the elephant as though it is indeed the whole. This is a tremendous opportunity now for the tablelands. Yes, I understand that some people up there have been attached to their existing systems and that they have history and memories and that they are sad to let them go. But it is nonetheless a huge opportunity for the tablelands to become what it should, and that is one of—if not the—key agricultural precincts in Queensland.

With such a fine climate and with such high rainfall, they are uniquely positioned if only they can work together as one to offer tremendous economic opportunities for the future. Additionally, there are wonderful communities that can advertise a lifestyle that so many other Queenslanders would only dare to dream of. Most importantly, they will, as one combined shire, have the opportunity to really influence government, to be a major player alongside the Cairns Regional Council, making sure that the government centres south hear their message.

The recommendation that the Douglas shire move into the Cairns Regional Council came as a surprise to me. It is not something that I had expected, but on consideration and despite the very many pleas for assistance and requests to overturn the decision from those in the Douglas shire who have contacted me directly or by email I think it is the right decision. The council, I know too well, has been more than inept. The past three or four years has been a dreadful period of embarrassment for many of the residents of the Douglas shire. As the previous minister for local government, I knew that very well as a result of various complaints from numbers of people, including some still on the council, who called for the council to be fired and who made the suggestion themselves that maybe Douglas shire should be amalgamated with Cairns.

I am aware, however, that it is not, as some are suggesting—Mike Berwick and others—that it has just been an unfortunate period of instability on the council. It goes much deeper than that. I was also environment minister and dealt very much with the concerns about the precious Daintree and the majority view on the council that much more development than would have been wise should have been allowed. In the process of the consultations about that, I know that the divisions on the council actually represent real divisions of opinion right across the Douglas shire—that they are not as one about protecting the tourism industry, that they are not as one about protecting the amazing Daintree, that they are not as one about anything, for that matter. Therefore, the divisions have kept the council stultified and, in fact, this has required the state government to intervene.

Some of the emails requesting that we overturn the decision about the Douglas shire have dared to say, 'It is only we in Port Douglas in the Douglas shire who will look after the amazing environment that is the key drawcard to the tourism industry.' What nonsense. The level of government that has looked after the Daintree has been the state government. How short indeed are some people's memories. The planning scheme was threatening to allow excessive development in the Daintree. It was only through state intervention that that did not occur. It was only through state intervention that we saved the Daintree. As it turns out, it was only with state money that we bought back the properties that were so very precious.

In fact, it was the Hawke and the Goss governments who first put \$32 million on the table to save the Daintree. However, as the years went on, and thanks to the poor performance of successive councils, there continued to be unwise development in the Daintree. It was time for a new planning scheme and the council could not—or would not—pull it off. The arrangement that was then brokered by Mayor Berwick was that the state would provide \$5 million for the further buyback and that was to be matched by \$5 million from the council and \$5 million from the Commonwealth government. Neither the local government—Douglas Shire Council—nor the federal government came up with their \$5 million. In fact, the Beattie government financed the whole arrangement of \$15 million in order to protect and to buy back those sections of the Daintree. So I remind the residents of the Douglas shire that their safety in terms of protecting the unique, amazing and internationally famous environment that they have and therefore the very basis of their tourism industry and their comfort lies with the state government, not with their existing council or, for that matter, any council necessarily of the future.

Nonetheless, I am pleased that one of the very difficult agitators during the period of us working out how we could protect the Daintree has sent me an email absolutely supporting the action that we are taking by including the Douglas shire in the Cairns Regional Council. Her email states—

Dear Desley

Just to let you know I completely support the Beattie Government on the amalgamation strategy. I feel this will be better and the rate payers and residents will benefit in the long run.

I completely support the Douglas shire being amalgamated and think the shire will be better off.

After three and a half years of what we had as a council I didn't care if we amalgamated with the moon.

Kind regards Dixie Phillpot

I will attend quickly to some general matters about the reform. I stand by absolutely our government's decision to accept the independent committee's recommendations in full. To have done otherwise would have destroyed the very integrity of the process that we had implemented whereby we as state politicians stood aside from deciding the boundaries. It is right and proper that local government politicians stand aside from deciding their own boundaries, too. Therefore, while I might have been surprised about Douglas shire, that other members may even disagree with some of the recommendations, that we accept the recommendations holus-bolus is quite correct.

I recognise, nonetheless, the sadness and the fear particularly of some small communities in western Queensland who worry about their viability and their identity. I say to them that identity is not about boundaries. I ask them to look at Maleny. It has been part of a much larger shire and it has maintained magnificently its unique identity. So, too, with the new arrangements will Port Douglas and Noosa.

What about viability? In fact, I think hiding away from the rest of the region and trying to cling to the past is not the way to make a town that is threatened in terms of its economic future stronger. By being part of a stronger, bigger council with more money available and with better decision making those towns will have a better chance at a viable future than they have presently. We have an

opportunity here for mayors and for councillors of the future who can show true strength for their regions, who have vision, leadership and an ability to think strategically and an ability to take up the cudgels of the imperative of economic development for their regions.

I have to say that I have been dismayed by the number of mayors who have not been equal to the challenge—mayors who I knew during my period as a minister for local government who absolutely support the amalgamations but who have not had the courage to say so publicly, who are still ‘Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, we know you have to do this’ and who are out there campaigning as populists supposedly to defend their existing boundaries and saying ‘Woe is us’. I will not name them, of course. There are some other mayors who have been more honest with their communities and I pay my respects to them.

I am proud of my government on this score. If we were indeed a Labor government that was worried only about votes then we would not have done this, because a lot of us are going to be heavily impacted by angry people in our electorates who will not have forgotten by the time of the next state election. If we were really just worried about getting our Labor mates elected in Canberra then we would not be doing this. We would not have caused them the difficulty and the trouble that potentially may impact also on their election later this year. We are a government that is proving by its actions that it is here to make the hard decisions, that it is making a historic decision to provide a stable future for local government in the state of Queensland.

I give my respects to the minister for local government and planning and to the director-general of the department of local government and planning and all his staff. I also give my congratulations to them, presuming the outcome of this debate this afternoon.

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth) (3.59 pm): I am pleased to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill and would like to highlight two particular aspects of the reforms. The first relates to the changes as they affect local councils in my electorate of Mulgrave and the second concerns what these reforms mean for Indigenous local governments in Queensland.

Before I turn to these two matters, however, I would like to make a number of observations. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Local Government Reform Commission for its comprehensive report and recommendations. It has done a sterling job and it has done it without fear or favour. This is one aspect of the Local Government Reform Commission that critics of the government conveniently overlooked—the independence of the commission.

These reforms are the product of a totally independent review of local government arrangements and local government boundaries, not a review by a government department or by some other arm of government but an independent commission charged with coming forward with a report based on the review’s terms of reference. I can only urge those who have set themselves up as instant experts on the issue of local government reform, and trenchant critics of the government, to consider closely those very reasonable and very responsible terms of reference, those very sensible and very necessary terms of reference, and consider closely the report and recommendations of the commission and how the commissioners have adhered closely to the terms of reference.

There have been all kinds of wild accusations hurled at the government—accusations such as the government’s move to reform our state system of local government is proof that it does not have the interests of people in western and rural Queensland at heart, and as proof that it does not have the interests of people in other communities affected by the changes at heart. To this I can only say what absolute nonsense. You only had to listen to the tripe trotted out by the member for Warrego earlier today to get an idea of the misguided and loopy claims that are flying around.

What needs to be understood is that these are important and long overdue reforms. I can appreciate how some people are concerned and worried about the impact of these changes. In large measure, however, these concerns have more to do with people’s apprehension about change and resistance to change than any real prospect of adverse effects or impacts of the changes that will occur. These concerns have more to do with those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo preying on people’s fear of change, spreading alarm and whipping up emotions with a mixture of misguided claims and deliberate misinformation.

People are running around working themselves and others into a great lather, predicting all manner of doom and gloom, catastrophising about the effects of these reforms and generally carrying on as if the sky is about to fall in. I say to these people: the sky is not going to fall in; it is going to get brighter and bluer. I say this as someone with firsthand experience of an amalgamation of two local government areas—the Cairns City Council and the Mulgrave Shire Council. I speak as a resident of the council that ceased to be, the Mulgrave Shire Council. I well remember people running around at the time opposing the amalgamation and scaremongering about all sorts of dire consequences that would befall the city and befall the region if the move to amalgamate went ahead, catastrophising about dreadful things that would happen, just like we are seeing today.

Did all those dreadful things that were predicted happen? Of course not. Twelve years on, the amalgamation of the two councils has been a resounding success, and the city and the region is the better for it. No-one would contemplate a turning back of the clock. There has not been a loss of services. There has not been a loss of community strength and spirit. There has not been a loss of community life and vitality. There has not been a loss of any of these things. There have not been job losses. There have not been bank foreclosures. There have not been any family breakdowns. There has not been one area favoured and preferred over another by the combined council—one area that has gone forward at the expense of another.

In my own local area, I wholeheartedly support the changes recommended by the Local Government Reform Commission which involve the amalgamation of the Cardwell and Johnstone shire councils to form a combined Cassowary Coast Regional Council. These reforms are typical of the reforms that are being put forward: they make a great deal of sense. They will, for example, bring to an end the boundary anomaly affecting Mission Beach, with Mission Beach North part of the Johnstone Shire Council while Mission Beach South forms part of the Cardwell Shire Council.

It is just not an anomaly in terms of council boundaries and lines on maps. It is an anomaly that is to the detriment of the people of Mission Beach in their daily lives. We have in Mission Beach two water systems that are not connected, two sewerage systems that are not connected and roads that end abruptly in the middle of Mission Beach. I am pleased that the new council comprising six councillors and a mayor will have two councillors from the Cardwell shire area. In terms of the combined finances of the new council, I appreciate the commitment from the Deputy Premier and Treasurer that the debt situation of both shires will be addressed in a way that does not disadvantage ratepayers.

As Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, I would like to comment now on the reforms as they relate to Indigenous local authorities. While most Aboriginal councils will continue as discrete local authorities, there will be two new regional councils. The Aboriginal councils of the northern peninsula area—namely, Injinoo, Umagico and New Mapoon—will be amalgamated with Bamaga and Seisia Island councils to become the northern peninsula area regional council. My congratulations to the leadership of these councils for being brave enough to amalgamate in the interests of a stronger and more sustainable future.

The remaining 15 Torres Strait Island councils of Badu, Boigu, Poruma, Erub, Dauan, Hammond, Kubin, Mabuiag, Mer, Saibai, St Paul's, Ugar, Warraber, Yam and Yorke will become the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. This is consistent with the direction previously outlined in the government's policy paper *Local Government in the Torres Strait: The Way Forward*.

The government has accepted the commission's recommendation that these new regional councils be elected on a divided basis, ensuring representation from each discrete community, in recognition of their cultural diversity. For Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal Aboriginal shire councils, the amended legislation enables small changes to their boundaries with Cook Shire Council and the former Douglas shire. For Wujal Wujal, these changes will mean that houses built on the road reserve and an adjoining block will now be included in the Wujal Wujal council area, redirecting rates payable to that council. The boundary changes for Hope Vale will enable the council to establish a land and housing development on freehold land known as Miller's Block, intended to assist local residents with homeownership. The Mornington Island Aboriginal Shire Council also will include previously unincorporated Sweers Island and the Bountiful Islands.

I draw attention to the changes to local government arrangements for the Indigenous councils being consistent with the historic Indigenous Partnership Agreement, signed at Yarrabah last month by the Premier and me and the mayors of 13 communities. The IPA prioritises governance, leadership and service delivery reform. I am pleased to note that, following the signing of the overarching agreement, negotiations are continuing with communities for finalising local Indigenous partnership agreements during 2007 and beyond. These local agreements are developed in partnership with communities and include local level initiatives to respond to the needs of each community.

I also note the recommendation of the Local Government Reform Commission of the need to continue to build the capacity of new and existing Indigenous councils, and its recommendations in relation to land tenure. The government has again supported these recommendations.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with my colleague the Hon. Andrew Fraser on the implementation of the local government reforms and broader strategies to strengthen good governance, leadership and service delivery for Indigenous Queenslanders, and the cultural identity, viability and sustainability of discrete Indigenous communities. My congratulations to the minister for his courage in bringing this legislation forward, to his director-general, to members of his department and to all of those on this side of the House who can see that Queensland will benefit from these new procedures. I support the bill.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (4.06 pm): It is a pleasure to be able to make a contribution to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. I want to focus on the positive message and ease concerns whipped up by people more concerned about self-preservation than the interests of their

ratepayers. This bill amends the Local Government Act 1993 to implement a restructure of Queensland local governments that improves the sustainability and service delivery to all Queensland communities. This bill brings in some of the most significant changes to local government in Queensland's history.

Let me begin by bringing to the attention of the House the fact that the Fitzroy electorate encompasses the shires of Mount Morgan, Duaringa, Fitzroy and Woorabinda along with significant areas from the Broadsound, Banana and Livingstone shires and Rockhampton City Council. Under amalgamation, Mount Morgan, Fitzroy, Livingstone and Rockhampton join as one to become Rockhampton Regional Council. Duaringa shire moves into the Central Highlands Regional Council, Broadsound goes into the Isaac Regional Council, and Banana shire picks up the northern areas of Taroom. Woorabinda, the Aboriginal shire council, will continue to function as it is. While there are potential improvements offered for Woorabinda under amalgamation, there are land tenure and rating arrangements that must be resolved before considering amalgamation in the future.

As the state member I have also made numerous representations on behalf of Peak Downs, Belyando, Emerald and Nebo shires, so members can see that I am pretty close to local government in that area. While I am not a regular attendee at local council meetings, I do have a good working relationship with the CEOs, mayors and councillors across all the shires. From my years of being the member for Fitzroy, I have seen central Queensland councils operate with varying degrees of effectiveness. I suppose that I have fairly or unfairly judged the credibility and performance of individual councils by the number of complaints I get both personally and through the electorate office. But I can say in this place that the overall performance of local government in central Queensland is one of commitment, hard work and dedicated councillors who get very little in return for the effort that they put into their roles as local councillors. There are some outstanding councillors and mayors who have done a decent job, who are honest and who have achieved great things.

In the time allowed for me to speak on this bill, I want to touch on a number of issues relevant to the Size, Shape and Sustainability process, the amalgamations as recommended by the independent Local Government Reform Commission and the challenges we face as a result of amalgamation. Some of the grassroots people across the region have been critical about several issues relevant to the reform process, and it is interesting to see that there is a balance in the criticism that has been provided to me.

That criticism includes: the failure of Queensland local governments to take advantage of the Size, Shape and Sustainability process and come up with initiatives to improve and secure the future of local government in Queensland; the lack of commitment from the Queensland Local Government Association to show leadership in actively engaging local governments with the intent of getting the best outcomes for the people; the speed at which the reform agenda has progressed since the minister decided that local governments were not participating in the Triple S process in the true spirit and intent of that process; and the lack of information that has been made available to the public on the need for a change in the way that local government is structured.

However, the reality of life is that there has to be change. To do nothing is not an option, and it is a real shame that participants in this process in the main seem to have a fixed, self-preservation point of view. I want to draw the attention of the House to some comments made by Greg Hallam, the Executive Director of the Local Government Association of Queensland, at the LGMA national conference in Perth on 23 May 2006. Talking about local government in Queensland, he said—

Our local government system has never been under more pressure. Many councils are experiencing severe financial strain, through a mixture of climate change, high population growth, aging infrastructure, cost-shifting, rising expectations and so on.

Mr Hallam has publicly acknowledged the need for reform and that local government would do well to actively participate in the process to have ownership in the reform outcomes. That is a common-sense approach. But instead of getting on with the job and being proactive, progressive and focused, he along with local governments have danced around the real reform issues, including amalgamation. Local councils are certain to resist amalgamation, and one could understand why because they potentially could lose their council and their positions.

There is no doubt that local governments, particularly those in rural and regional Queensland, have enormous variations in their make-up, industry type, population and ability of land to produce. All of these factors affect the economic base and make it almost impossible to draw conclusions about the range of benefits that will flow from amalgamations. But by looking at communities of interest and taking into consideration geographical features, we can make representative areas stronger than they are today.

The opposition and Independents see amalgamation as a political winner and agree that the future of potential amalgamations should be put to a vote by referendum—that ordinary citizens should be making the decisions whether or not to amalgamate and improve the efficiency and performance of local government.

The alternative to amalgamation is to continue down the same bumpy road, tied to an ineffective and inefficient structure that will demand ever-increasing rates just to provide the services. Eventually, there will be demand from ratepayers for the government to step in. People are already saying to the government—even to me personally—that it is time to stop the politics, look at the issues and do what is best for them as ratepayers.

Every member is aware that it was local government itself that wanted reform. That is why local government itself brought on the Size, Shape and Sustainability reform program. The Triple S reform process gave local government the opportunity to work collaboratively to set up its own agenda for reform. It gave local community leaders, mayors and councillors the opportunity at that time to consider not only the current needs of their communities but also the long-term needs of future residents. The Triple S process potentially could have been a big winner for all, but the process was flawed from the beginning because it failed to factor in the self-interests of some of the key players—that is, the mayors and CEOs who would be doing themselves out of a place in their local council if they went down the road of amalgamation.

Let us look at what has happened in central Queensland. There were no Triple S recommendations from those councils going into the Central Highlands or the Isaac regional councils, as none of those councils had entered into the comprehensive review phase after almost two years. While they will argue that they were participating in the Triple S process, their submission to the independent reform commission on the whole in a public sense advocated the status quo—that is, stand alone, remain as is. However, there was an overwhelming view from the independent commission that these councils would be best placed for the future through amalgamation.

Despite the understandable reluctance of these councils to give up their existence in favour of what was best for the future, I commend each and every one of them for the cooperation between the councils since the boundary changes were made by the commission. I am glad that the government has accepted changing the name of the Emerald Regional Council to the Central Highlands Regional Council. That is a common-sense change of name.

Given my background as a hands-on worker, one of my first concerns about amalgamation was for the employees of councils, many of whom live in small towns where they, along with their families, contribute to local school numbers, small-business cash flows and sporting and community groups. That is one of the things that has been thrown at us over the last few weeks. But I have always remained confident, after thinking it through, that job losses would be an absolute minimum because existing services will still have to be delivered as they are today. Roads, parks and gardens still have to be maintained.

Many local government employees are already strategically located for the purpose of service delivery, and that will be an ongoing requirement of a new local government. The tyranny of distance alone is good reason to keep road gangs, maintenance teams and current office facilities open where they are today. All projects budgeted for under the current financial year will be progressed. Some CEOs and mayors have thrown that issue out there and said that those things would not progress because of amalgamation. I say to the workers that that is nonsense.

Our government is determined that today's local government employees will continue to work in local government. That is why we have implemented a staff support package that guarantees job security from March next year to March 2011. I have not heard anybody raise that issue in this place today. This will reassure those people who believe they are affected by amalgamation that their work and employment will continue.

By the time 2011 comes around, the new council will get the workforce balance right through natural attrition, promotions and retraining. What all this means is that there will be no forced redundancies of any employees other than chief executive officers. The only people affected by these changes are those mayors, councillors and CEOs of councils which are identified by the Local Government Reform Commission for amalgamation or boundary changes.

Further protection is offered to employees through an invitation to unions to be involved in consultation to address issues of retaining jobs where employees currently work. Workers will be pleased to know that there is no need to relocate for the purpose of keeping their job or retaining their level of remuneration. I am pleased that there will be a real focus from our government on the importance of proceeding with protecting the interests of employees by working non-stop to ensure that council workforces are considered as local government employees and not employees of constitutional corporations and therefore not subject to the Howard government's unfair workplace laws—I am aware of some councils in Queensland that were moving down that path—and that is good news for all local government employees whether they are amalgamated or not.

The staff support package is about maximising opportunities for the new councils to retain their existing expertise and for the workforce to adjust to the new structure while retaining their job and continuing to live where they currently live. That is a darn good deal—a worthy and honourable deal—and we should not forget for one minute that local governments in central Queensland have lost more jobs to the coal industry in recent years than at any other time in the history of local government in this state. So what does it say about the performance of local government? Our government is doing everything possible to ensure that council employees are retained, work where they work now and live where they live now.

The issue of representation is one of the issues I was most concerned about when amalgamation was first announced. We have heard a lot from mayors and councillors about the size and area that the new shire boundaries encompass, but this is an argument that, as far as I am concerned, has no

credibility. It really does not matter to me where the boundaries run. What does matter is that the economics are structured to support and maintain the needs of ratepayers at a sustainable level and that ratepayers have a fair representation at the council table. That is why I have made representations on this issue to the minister. I strongly support divisions because I want the rural sector and those small towns spread throughout the new council areas to have representation.

For the benefit of the people of central Queensland I seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* a breakdown of new councils in the region, their size in square kilometres, the number of councillors, the number of electors that councillors currently represent and the number that they will represent under the new structure.

Leave granted.

Existing Council	Size—Sq kms	Population	Registered Voters	Representatives	Voters Per Councillor
Rockhampton City	189 sqkm	60,500	39,100	10 councillors/ 1 mayor	3,900 voters each
Livingstone Shire	11,800 sqkm	29,600	19,300	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	2,400 voters each
Fitzroy Shire	5,900 sqkm	10,500	6,800	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	856 voters each
Mount Morgan Shire	492 sqkm	3,000	2,050	6 councillors/ 1 mayor	342 voters each
Under New Structure (3 less Mayors / 24 less councillors)					
Rockhampton Regional Council	18,360 sqkm	103,300	67,300	10 councillors/ 1 mayor	6,700 voters each

Fitzroy Electorate = 44,000 square kilometres / 24,000 voters

Existing Council	Size—Sq klms	Population	Registered Voters	Representatives	Voters Per Councillor
Emerald Shire	10,300 sqkm	14,000	8,100	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	1,020 voters each
Bauhinia Shire	23,641 sqkm	2,200	1,474	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	184 voters each
Duaringa Shire	17,700 sqkm	6,900	3,712	10 councillors/ 1 mayor	371 voters each
Peak Downs Shire	8,100 sqkm	3,400	1,752	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	219 voters each
Under New Structure (3 less Mayors / 26 less councillors)					
Emerald Regional Council	59,800 sqkm	26,800	15,100	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	1,800 voters each

Fitzroy Electorate = 44,000 square kilometres / 24,000 voters

Existing Council	Size—Sq kms	Population	Registered Voters	Representatives	Voters Per Councillor
Nebo Shire	10,000 sqkm	2,156	1,128	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	141 voters each
Belyando Shire	30,000 sqkm	11,300	6,100	10 councillors/ 1 mayor	611 voters each
Broadsound Shire	18,500 sqkm	7,000	3,800	10 councillors/ 1 mayor	378 voters each
Under New Structure (2 less Mayors / 28 less councillors)					
Isaac Regional Council	58,000 sqkm	20,400	11,000	8 councillors/ 1 mayor	1,378 voters each

Fitzroy Electorate = 44,000 square kilometres / 24,000 voters

Mr PEARCE: I have decided on this course of action so that the level of representation in local government is on the public record. I ask people to study the incorporated documents and compare them with some statistics that I am about to provide to the House. I ask voters to look at the electorate of Gregory represented by the honourable Vaughan Johnson—a member who does a great job for his constituents. The electorate covers 378,000 kilometres and had 18,750 electors at the 2006 election. Charters Towers, represented by Shane Knuth, is made up of 267,000 square kilometres and 18,519 electors. The electorate of Bruce Scott, the member for Maranoa, covers 779,000 square kilometres and had 87,874 electors as at 2004. The electorate of Capricornia, represented by Kirsten Livermore, covers 125,000 square kilometres with 91,000 electors as at 2004. The Fitzroy electorate covers some 44,000 square kilometres and I have 24,000 voters to represent.

Do not start giving me the rubbish that people are going to have to work a little bit harder to look after their constituents. People like Vaughan Johnson, Bruce Scott, Kirsten Livermore, Shane Knuth and myself can do it and so can these people.

An opposition member: Full-time?

Mr PEARCE: They will be full-time.

Mr Springborg: Are they going to be full-time, are they?

Mr PEARCE: I think the member will find that most of them will be. It is common sense. As elected members we service huge areas with 10 to 12 times the number of voters compared to less than 2,000 per councillor under the new boundaries. That is one of the best things to come out of amalgamations: fewer CEOs, mayors and councillors. There is no doubt that new councils will take some time to settle down. It will take strong political leaders to focus on the task and I know that those people are out there. There are some great people out there who would be able to do the job. I am confident that they will surface at the right time.

I want to offer up some thoughts on why I believe amalgamations are a positive direction for local governments to be heading in and what we should be doing as community leaders. We should be positioning ourselves as a community to get the best outcomes for the people who live and work in the community. Stronger local government structures come through a population base that delivers, through rates, a revenue stream that allows local government to operate at a greater level of efficiency using quality skilled staff. It is always good to ensure that staff are backed by the latest technology and modern plant and equipment to deliver those quality services.

Let us get real about this: strong, financially sound councils always have a better chance of providing social services such as health, recreation and community development facilities. Those things are in harmony with local priorities and needs. Those things come with development and growth. It is estimated that within the next 20 years the people of Queensland will see tens of billions of dollars invested in projects and associated infrastructure. Much of this expenditure will happen in regional Queensland. That is why we have to position ourselves to maximise the benefits to the regions, to build our towns and services to cater for the short, medium and long-term sustainability of our communities. The best way to do that is to have a power base that is more capable of representing the people when dealing with the state and federal governments and the multinationals that we have to deal with on numerous occasions throughout central Queensland.

Amalgamation delivers stronger councils, less duplication, better use of rates, a real focus on services rather than administration, a greater ability to maintain roads and infrastructure, and the ability to implement smarter community planning. I want to draw the attention of the House to a document titled *Sustainable Futures Framework for Queensland Mining Towns*. I have had a fair bit to do with the development of this document. The document is aimed at helping local governments achieve the outcomes that I have talked about. I think it will be a great tool in the future and, if used properly, it will assist the new local governments to head in the direction that is best for their community and for the region.

No town or organisation will lose its identity, as argued by many who are against amalgamation. What I am about to say at this time will probably draw criticism, but I say it with the greatest respect. Does a woman lose her identity, strength and character because of a name change through marriage? I think not. Nor does a line on a map alter what already exists in a community or district, just as amalgamation will not prevent or interrupt interschool sporting events, Rugby League games between towns or the places where people work. It is just nonsense to argue that changing the boundaries of a local government and giving that local government a new name will cause the loss of identity to any town or place within the council area.

Gracemere will continue to grow, retaining its own identity as a dormitory for people working in Rockhampton, on the Capricorn Coast and in the coalfields. Mount Morgan will always be Mount Morgan—a great town with a history that is unbelievable. As a matter of fact, I am tipping that as a result of amalgamations Mount Morgan is the town of the future. It is the next town to move forward. We will see rapid development and a change in direction for that community. Broadsound Shire Council coming under a new and larger structure does not change the character or the structure of Dysart or Middlemount as a community, nor does Blackwater's character or structure change because Duinga Shire Council as an area now comes under the Central Highlands Regional Council. Banana shire retains its name but takes in northern areas of Taroom. The structure and character of Moura, Biloela, Baralaba or Goovigen will not change because Banana shire is bigger.

There are lots of issues that we could talk about in relation to amalgamation, positive things that could happen for the ratepayers of the new councils, but in closing I say as a member who has represented central Queensland honestly for the last 17 years that I feel at ease about this new direction we are taking because I believe that the best outcomes are there for the future. In four or five years' time a lot of the smaller communities will be saying, 'What has amalgamation been about? Are we any better off than we were years ago?' At this time they are not very well off, so not too much has to be done to make it better for those isolated rural communities. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.26 pm): A great deal of my time is spent travelling throughout the electorate of Charters Towers and talking to the people who gave me the great honour of representing them in this House. In the past few months there has been only one issue of discussion—forced council amalgamations. People are disgusted and sick in the guts that a government could act in such a cold-hearted, dictatorial way.

The role of councils is varied and differs from shire to shire. No longer is the responsibility of councils solely roads, water, buildings, garbage and rates. They now have to be proactive to ensure the future of their communities. In some shires councils provide housing to attract nurses and doctors. In some shires councils invest heavily in local banks to ensure that the banks remain in the town. In some shires the councils act as funeral directors, offering sympathy, compassion and practical and financial support to families. Councils invest in businesses to safeguard the services offered, they provide activities for youth and children, and they support the aged and the frail. They look outside the square to develop local solutions to local problems. They contribute to the social, cultural and sporting lives of each and every citizen within the shire boundaries. These are just some of the many contributions to the fabric of smaller communities.

Amalgamations directly affect the livability of these communities. Mayors and councillors are democratically elected to the positions they hold. The government would be wise to remember that on Tuesday in this House the member for Keppel stated that since the reform provisions were first proposed the Livingstone shire had spent ratepayers' funds with 'gay abandon' at the whim of the mayor. It seems extraordinary that this government has the nerve to criticise the spending of any other level of government when over the years it has spent lavishly on sports stadiums, footbridges and multimillion-dollar parklands and is putting millions of dollars into promoting what a good job the Beattie government is supposedly doing.

This government is yet to explain to the people of the bush why their hospitals are understaffed, underresourced and downsized and why our Ambulance Service is in turmoil. Local councils have been the engine driving Queensland communities, providing infrastructure, jobs and administration. Local decisions are made through local grassroots knowledge. In many towns councils are by far the largest employer and the forced merging of local councils will rip the heart and the guts out of these communities.

While the Beattie government has failed to deliver basic services resulting in the health, energy and water crises, it is unbelievable that it has the gall to force amalgamation of councils that have the proven ability to capably deliver both efficiently and financially. There is no need to pursue the path of forced amalgamation. The state government is trying to create a distraction from its own incompetence. The state government should be working to fix the catastrophes that it has created in this state such as the energy crisis, the water crisis and the health crisis. These should be the government's priorities instead of putting its grubby hands on local government responsibilities which have increased dramatically as local councils endeavour to make up the shortfall—a direct result of the state government's incompetence.

This government knows very little about community spirit and pride. Through this whole sordid tale the lies told by this government have tried to discredit a perfectly capable and democratically elected tier of government. The Premier claimed that 43 per cent of Queensland councils are unsustainable. This has been distorted as it is only 13 per cent and half of these councils are large councils. There are more important issues out there than forcing councils to amalgamate, such as the energy crisis and the health crisis.

Six of our hospitals have recently closed down maternity services. This government is supposed to provide these services. How about giving our communities—places like Richmond, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Alpha, Clermont and Moranbah—a maternity service? Wouldn't it be much better to provide those communities with a maternity service than force those councils to amalgamate? When we want to get power put on, we have to pay for the high-voltage network because of the Beattie government's failure to invest in the infrastructure in that network. These are more important issues. The government has closed down our railway stations, it has closed down our courthouses, it has closed down our maternity services and now it wants to force our councils to amalgamate. This is one of the lowest acts in Queensland and the greatest attack to a democratic tier of government, to local communities, workers and families ever in Queensland history.

The six shires in my electorate—Aramac, Jericho, Belyando, Charters Towers, Dalrymple and Peak Downs—have been gutted by this government. It is with great passion that I vehemently oppose this legislation.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (4.32 pm): This talk of amalgamation has been going on for quite a while. A lot of our councils were very concerned during the last term. Minister Boyle, the minister at the time, promised, 'There would be no forced amalgamations this term,' and that was last term. We dreaded what would happen after the election. Of course, our councils went to work, and a few of them worked very hard which I will talk about later. I note amendment No. 9, which has been put forward, which amends clause 5. It states—

- (b) take any action to request, arrange, assist, facilitate or cause a poll to be conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission or any other entity.

We heard the member for Charters Towers mention dictatorship, and that is exactly what this is. The people of Queensland have never yet been faced with a dictatorial government such as the one they have at present. I know the minister is just a pawn. He has been given a job to do and I hold nothing personally against him. I want to put that on the record. Anyone could have had been given a job like this under Beattie. He is wielding the big stick and making the minister do this and I honestly do feel very sorry for him.

Someone said to me, 'They have trumped John Howard with this amendment.' No, they have not. We saw the cartoon in the *Courier-Mail* the other day. It was of a present to Bligh from Beattie before he retires. This is actually a present to John Howard as well, because Peter Beattie is going to go down in history as losing this election for the Labor Party. We are going to see the coalition win on this action. That is the good side of this legislation, because he is going to be faced with another three years of John Howard's rule. How good is that? I say thank you very much to the minister. He has done a wonderful job for Australia. He is going to put the Prime Minister back in and get him elected for another three years.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Palaszczuk): Order! Member for Darling Downs, please come back to the bill.

Mr HOPPER: On polling day the people of Queensland will remember this bill and the amalgamations that have been forced on them. It is absolutely disgusting.

Under the Size, Shape and Sustainability process, the Crows Nest and Rosalie councils worked very hard. They spent tireless hours forming their council. They had the people in agreeance, the CEOs in agreeance, the mayors and the councils in agreeance. I attended meetings with them when they were putting this in place and setting it up. They were actually excited about what they were going to present to the government and be allowed to do. They were actually of the belief that they would be allowed to do that. We can ask the member for Toowoomba North, the Hon. Kerry Shine, about it because he actually supported what they were doing and gave them confidence.

Highfields plays a very big role in the vote of the member for Toowoomba North. Those people are going to turn against him in droves over this because they want him to stand up here today and speak against this legislation. However, he will not do that. The repercussions from that will be totally immense. I do not blame those people. My phone has been running red hot since this has happened.

Mayor Noel Strohfeld and Geoff Patch worked very hard together. They were excited but it just did not happen. They were at that meeting the day the report was handed down.

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. What is the role of the TV camera here this afternoon?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Palaszczuk): I am seeking advice now. Member for Darling Downs, please resume your seat. I have sought clarification. The camera is allowed, but the camera must be directed at the person on their feet. If they do not do that I will have to ask them to be removed from this chamber. Member for Darling Downs, you may resume your speech.

Mr HOPPER: I must say they came in at not such a bad time, didn't they? With the amalgamation process the Toowoomba, Cambooya, Clifton, Jondaryan, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Crows Nest and Rosalie shire councils—eight councils—will form one council made up of 96,000 voters, and 69 councillors will be reduced to 10 councillors and one mayor. A total of 59 councillors will be out of a job as a result of this amalgamation. That is simply unacceptable. Those people give of their time, get paid very little and now the government is doing this.

The neighbouring shire of Dalby—and it will be called Dalby Regional Council—combines Chinchilla, Wambo, Tara, Murilla and division 2 from Taroom. That is going from 49 councillors back to eight and one mayor. We are going to lose 100 councillors with the amalgamation of the existing councils into just two councils. That is 100 people in my electorate alone. How acceptable is that? Imagine what sort of person would be needed to run a council the size of the Toowoomba Regional Council. It is going to be absolutely phenomenal. One hundred councillors are to go.

Where is the sanctity of our local government? That has gone. Honourable members should travel to those little towns like Goombungee, where the mayor, Noel Strohfeld, put forward people on Anzac Day to receive awards. All our local show societies are sponsored by our local shires. Are those small shows in those outlying areas such as Jandowae still going to get sponsorship from the major towns? We will just wait and see. This will come back to haunt government members. The 'local' has been taken out of local government, as we heard the member for Warrego say earlier in his speech. It is regional council now; local government has gone. It has been destroyed under this dictator. Under this dictatorial government this has been taken from us and we do not accept it. We on this side of the House do not accept it. It is as simple as that.

We need to have some divisions in some of these councils. They need to be weighted. In some of the western councils such as the Dalby Regional Council what will happen is that people living in Taroom will be represented by councillors in the town of Dalby. Dalby has 6,000 or 10,000 voters—I am not sure of the exact number. One third of the voters are going to live in the town of Dalby, so they are going to vote for Dalby people to be on the council. Unless we have divisions, how are councillors from outlying areas going to get elected?

I have spoken at length with some of the mayors. Bill McCutcheon from Chinchilla, who runs his shire extremely well, explained to me that he is not in favour of divisions because they can capture the bigger vote. If there are popular persons in a town where the population is greater than the councillors will come from that town. Those people in the outlying areas are not going to be represented.

What about Yarraman? Yarraman, which is in the electorate of Nanango, will now be part of Toowoomba. Members should ask the people of Yarraman how often they shop in Toowoomba. They go to Kingaroy to shop. They do not go to Toowoomba. This is the magnitude of the legislation before us today. It is going to destroy the bush. This is going to destroy rural people and take their values away from them. It is simply unacceptable.

I went to a function at the end of summer. We had a terrible thunderstorm. On the way home from that function at about 11.30 I saw the local grader operator, who works on the council, shifting trees and black soil off the road. The local councillor was at that function and rang him and told him to do that. That is not going to happen because the local councillor will be in Toowoomba. All that will be taken from us. How are they going to operate these massive shires from these regional centres? They cannot do it and it is unacceptable.

The Remuneration Tribunal has been brought into this. We are going to set a pay rate for councillors. We will eliminate farmers, and we will eliminate people who run their own businesses from standing for council because it is going to be a full-time job. Because of the size of these shires they are not going to be able to put the time in that they do now to run the councils. My wife was elected to the Wambo shire. I think she had about 450 electors and she knew about 430 of them. She knew every road. The area that she covered was immense. That is local people looking after local areas in local government. That is what will be taken from us in this bill. I believe that the main push behind this is the desire to unionise local government.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr HOPPER: The minister may laugh but those opposite will unionise local government. The Labor movement will now move into the third tier of government in Queensland. That is what is behind this push. That is the present from our Premier before he goes. That is exactly what he is going to do. He is going to unionise local government.

The independent Local Government Reform Commission was given as part of its terms of reference the job of setting the shire boundaries. It was a direction from the Premier. They knew what was going to happen. We will put our four-point plan in place and we will offer the people of Queensland the right to deamalgamate. Our shadow minister, who will be the local government minister after the next election, this man sitting here, will give the people of Queensland their councils back.

The amount of money that will have to be spent will be on the shoulders of those opposite. They are putting this legislation in. Money is nothing to them because they are \$53 billion in debt now and they are paying \$10 million a day interest on the debt. A bit more money is nothing to Queensland, is it? It comes out of their ears. We will just borrow more. What we will do when we win government is give the people of Queensland the opportunity to have their local governments back. We will do it under this man.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.43 pm): I rise to oppose the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. This bill shows the complete lack of respect and dignity that the Labor part of this parliament affords the role and the responsibility of local government and people in our communities. In my area there are three councils to be amalgamated—Gladstone City Council, Calliope Shire Council and Miriam Vale Shire Council. Currently Gladstone City Council is 163 square kilometres and has seven councillors including the mayor. Miriam Vale Shire Council is 3,778 square kilometres and has seven councillors including the mayor. Calliope Shire Council is 6,547 square kilometres and has 10 councillors including the mayor. That will be reduced to eight councillors plus a mayor.

It is interesting that a couple of speakers from the government side have tacitly acknowledged that councillors and mayors will now have to work full time. It will be interesting in a few years time to do a cost-benefit analysis and see how the costs compare. When we debated the establishment of the commission in this chamber a number of government speakers ridiculed councillors and mayors. They talked about them being self-serving and in there for the money. The reality is that in most of the rural and regional councils the councillors are paid a meeting fee which is an average day's wage—\$120 a day—or less. It is going to be interesting to see how the cost-benefit analysis stands up.

I respect in great measure the views of the member for Fitzroy. He talked about the larger state electorates and federal electorates where one member represents those communities across a broad range of issues. I think the member for Fitzroy has a local government background. I think the member would acknowledge, too, that the knowledge that councillors gain over a period of time is an intimate knowledge of the road networks et cetera. When the member was a councillor on the Fitzroy Shire Council and I know when I was on the Calliope Shire Council I knew where somebody lived not by the street name but by the tree at the driveway and the colour of the tyre that was beside it. It is that sort of local knowledge and intimacy that is going to be lost.

There are those in this chamber who argue that that is a good thing. I do not think it is. In the scheme of things it has been shown that the lack of contact with the community does not over a long time produce good results.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: The member for Lytton interjected. I did not hear it properly. It had something to do with the city of Gladstone. I understand the politics that are involved in that. The mayor of Gladstone has openly been in favour of amalgamation for a long time. He was part of the council in the PEARC process that was after the income producing parts of the Calliope Shire Council. However, at least in that process there was a voice given to the community. There were people from this parliament who went throughout Queensland and listened to the community debate on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed amalgamations.

At that time members like Matt Foley and others in this chamber from the government side of politics made an informed decision that a lot of the councils that may have been targeted for amalgamation had very strong economic as well as social reasons to remain alone. That is what occurred in about 1991. That indicated the strength of the man's character, not the weakness; that Matt was prepared to listen to the community and act on its point of view and on the information provided.

In a debate yesterday comments were made by the member for Keppel in relation to advertisements put in both the *Courier-Mail* and the *Gladstone Observer* under the title 'A question for Queenslanders'. I believe there is a residual lack of clarity about how those advertisements were paid. Some aspersions were cast by the member for Keppel. I want to make it clear that the Calliope Shire Council paid for those advertisements. It had nothing to do with the CQLGA because the member linked Councillor Rick Bichsel to CQLGA.

The other councils in the CQLGA would not have been consulted because it was not put to the Central Queensland Local Government Association. I would like to table a minute from the Calliope Shire Council meeting that indicates that the expenditure was duly processed through a council meeting and the expenditure formally endorsed.

Tabled paper: Minutes of the general meeting of the Calliope Shire Council held at the Calliope Chambers on 15 June 2007.

In the *Courier-Mail* on 24 July an article was written by Mark McGovern, who is a senior lecturer in the School of Economics and Finance at QUT. It states—

Review of the various documents—

this is in relation to the QTC documents—

shows no basis in economics or finance for the local government 'reform process' currently under way in Queensland. Sadly, much commentary reveals poor understanding of economics and finance, compounded by a failure to appreciate the details of analysis. Much has been made of the interim 'weak' rating of some councils. Such councils do have 'an acceptable ability to meet short and medium term financial commitments', the QTC notes. They are currently reasonably positioned.

The rating indicates a potential for difficulty in managing problems three or so years out, or if unexpected events occurred.

Such things may or may not need to be considered, and probably not for three years or more (if at all). Note also, and most importantly in the current debates, there is no mention of any need for structural adjustments for 'weak' councils.

'Very weak' councils may need to consider 'some structural reform and major revenue and expense adjustments'. Final numbers in each category are yet to be determined.

A 'distressed' council will need 'major revenue and expense adjustments and structural reform' to meet medium and long-term obligations.

He is quoting from the QTC document. He then goes on to say—

For some unknown reason the remedy for 'the distressed' is now to be applied to all councils. This is, at best, an amazing failure of logic. It is the sort of mistake sometimes seen in the works of a thoroughly confused undergraduate. Fortunately, such major flaws in analysis are easily picked up and remedied through effective education. They are also easily picked up and remedied through proper policy development processes.

Clearly, there has been a major failure of policy development, one worthy of independent external review. This failure is compounded in the confused terms of reference in the current review and the frighteningly poor understanding of industrial economics in departmental documents.

Current nonsense, if left unchecked, could eventually undermine the financial and economic position of the state itself, including all its local governments. Manifest inability to effect or use analysis is a serious problem in any organisation.

Interjections today and in other debates in relation to forced amalgamations indicate that the core reason for these forced amalgamations, the manner in which they are to be done and the attitude of both the Premier and the minister for local government have nothing to do with forming strong local councils. It has been articulated through objections that it is payback for local councils for past actions and activities. It is payback for local councils that escaped amalgamations in the EARC and PEARC process and the way that that payback is to be applied is to allow no latitude at all for the community voice.

The final nail in the coffin of the credibility of this process was when the minister introduced further amendments this morning to the bill before us which will effectively summarily dismiss any council or councillors who dare to take up the federal government's offer. I am not naive: I believe the federal government's offer is purely political, but at least it provides an opportunity for the community to have a voice when it has been denied one by the state government that is supposed to represent it. We are supposed to represent Queensland, yet the opportunity has been made available by the federal government to take up a purely political position and offer a plebiscite—referendum—to local communities because it has been denied by this government. Now the minister takes the position and says, 'I will sack you if you dare to take up that option.'

Mrs Reilly: What a waste of money!

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I am not disputing that it is a waste of money. I am not disputing that the federal plebiscite is a waste of money, but it is there because the community lost its voice. It has not been given a voice, and it should be. It should be given a voice.

I have a query for the minister that I hope he will address in his summing-up. The minister has said in the past that councils must continue to operate as usual but has put constraints on line items over \$150,000. Section 159ZW stops councils from making a policy decision during the transitional period. The definition of a major policy decision is contracts over \$150,000. The Calliope shire had procedures underway—and it was budgeted in council's budget—for major expansions in a number of areas, but one was the Calliope sewage treatment plant. In terms of sound infrastructure development, that sewage treatment plant needs to go ahead. I seek a clarification from the minister as to whether the transitional arrangements will allow for decisions that have been accommodated in the council's budget, which have already been put in train, are to be proceeded with where the budget has been set but perhaps contracts have not been finalised. Or will those contracts have to wait until after the quadrennial election and a new council is elected? What about all of the other issues that will need to be settled after that quadrennial election because of the enormous change? Will that infrastructure development have to wait until then?

The majority of people in the Calliope Shire Council are opposed to these forced amalgamations. Ironically, there are many people in Gladstone city who are opposed to them—as much the process as the result. Of course there are those who are in support of them. In fact, they have the same rationale as a lot of members in this chamber, particularly those who live in the greater Brisbane area who will be unaffected or affected marginally because they are on the periphery of the council area. They cannot see that it will greatly change the status quo for Gladstone residents, and it probably will not. It came up in this chamber several months ago when I asked the minister about what procedures are going to be put in place for differential debt loads where councils are amalgamated that have significantly different debt loads. There is no provision for it. If a council that has been astute in its financial management and that has rated its community over a period of time to reduce debt and eventually be debt free or very low in debt is amalgamated with a council that through different management decisions and different infrastructure decisions has a significant debt load, those ratepayers in the council area that has reduced its debt are going to be asked to service a debt they had no say in accumulating and at times little benefit from accumulating.

Others have said rightly that there is no cost-benefit analysis. Even in subordinate legislation in this chamber there is provision for an RIS. Often departments do not use it; they will use some fairly lame excuse not to do an RIS because perhaps they do not want to see the information that would be derived from the process. But companies do cost-benefit analyses. They sit back and look at the pros and cons of decisions that are about to be made, even sometimes for quite modest amounts of money. In this instance nothing has been looked at in terms of social impacts other than ministers and those supporting the forced amalgamations saying that there will not be any social impacts. I find that difficult to believe.

As I said earlier this week before the bill was introduced, State Development purchased properties at Targinni to enhance the State Development area, and those purchases commenced after emissions from SPP became intolerable on the community. Yarwun and Targinni are two discrete areas but have some shared infrastructure—a school, a shop, the post office and a number of things like that. The school had to be moved to the back of Yarwun because of its proximity to the railway line, noise and other safety issues. But each year the school numbers there are challenged because that community—and they are a great bunch of people—has lost support in terms of numbers of families from the Targinni region because those families have been decimated. As a result, the Targinni area has been decimated.

It is small things that have great impact in rural and regional areas. All it takes is five children from one family to leave a school. That might result in the loss of a teacher or a teacher aide, and therefore the ability of that school to service the students who are left is diminished. There are small schools in my electorate, but those schools will not be affected to any great degree because of the dynamics between Gladstone and Calliope. However, there is one little school that may be affected. It is a one-teacher school with a prep year and is attended by a blind student. She takes a great deal of time but is blossoming as a young girl. However, if that school loses any of its teacher aide hours, it is going to be really pushed to be able to provide the services to the rest of the school community, and it is only a small school. So it is small flow-on effects that have negative impacts on communities. It does not take a lot of loss in terms of families for some businesses and some schools to become unviable.

I am sure the minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that he addressed the Central Queensland Local Government Association conference at Blackwater. I have to say that in most of the addresses the minister has given very similar information. But he obviously met with some negative reaction from the communities that were represented there.

Mr Hayward: From the council.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: No, it was not from the council; it was from the community. I am sorry, it was the community; it was not the councillors.

Mr Hayward: They had stacked the meeting.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: No, they did not. These were people who feel strongly about what is happening. They feel strongly about their future. They feel strongly about their right to have a say in their future and that has been denied. The minister said that he understands small communities. He grew up in Sarina I believe—

Mr Schwarten: Proserpine.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: My apologies. The minister said, 'So I know what small communities are about.' Then he went on to say that he left at the age of 17 to attend university. I do not mean this disrespectfully, but I believe that, as the minister left at 17, he does not know what small communities are about. At 17 people are still very interested in getting a licence and all the other things that young people rightfully should be interested in, not what holds together a community.

Mr Schwarten: His parents still live there—his uncles and aunts, his grandmother. He goes there regularly.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: The minister's mum and dad would know if they are still up there—of course they would. I believe they will be disappointed, too, in their lack of voice.

The other issue that I wanted to raise was the argument that has been put forward that the Local Government Reform Commission is somehow totally independent. The Premier has implied that the commission has of itself made these recommendations for amalgamation and that it is on the basis of the commission's recommendations alone that change is occurring. The commission was instituted under the hand of this government. There was no consultation with anyone in the community. The names were announced in this chamber without, as I said, any chance for consultation and they were given their terms of reference by this government. So to say that the commission was independent and without influence from the government is, I believe, fallacious.

Communities in Queensland have spoken strongly against the process of this forced amalgamation. The Size, Shape and Sustainability process was being proceeded with in the belief that it was being sanctioned by government—

Mr Lawlor: Like a glacier. It was glacial in its speed.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I will take that interjection. The member says that the progress was glacial and that it was going at the speed of a glacier. The councils were not told by the local government minister that he wanted results quicker.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: No, if the local government minister had gone to the Local Government Association and said, 'Look, I don't believe progress is happening quickly enough,' then I believe the councils would have responded. They were working within the time frame that they were given. They believed that they were working within the time frame sanctioned by the government. Indeed, only a month or so before the axe dropped they were told that they were functioning in accordance with the government's expectations. I believe that they were working appropriately, given the time frames that were indicated to them.

My main opposition to the amalgamations is the way in which this has been done. My main opposition is that it has taken away the voice of the community which is so closely reflected in local government in particular. On the basis of the frustration and the anger that has been demonstrated in the community not just in my electorate but throughout Queensland, I have no other option but to oppose the bill.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (5.03 pm): This is a timely intervention in the debate, because I have in my hand 40 pages of amalgamations that have been done throughout the history of Queensland for which there has never been a referendum, there has never been consultation and there has never been any desire by the people who sat in this parliament from way back to the late 1890s to ever do what the previous speaker said. So when we say that this chamber is making decisions on the boundaries of Queensland, it is doing nothing different from what has been done by the other people who have sat in this chamber over the past 100 years. It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge that that is a fact. I challenge the member for Gladstone, or anybody else, to go through this document and show me one of these amalgamations that has been yielded by a referendum and where people have been consulted. It has never, ever happened. But, of course, there is one rule for Labor governments and there is one rule for tory governments.

Before the councils in Rockhampton were amalgamated—there used to be Rockhampton North and Rockhampton—back in 1923 and the councils in Brisbane were amalgamated at around the same time, again there was no consultation. I am glad that that occurred. Can members imagine Rockhampton today having two councils? My great-grandfather sat on the North Rockhampton-Burra council. So I have a very great attachment to the history of this issue. I will table the document so that people might better inform themselves before they make the outlandish and outrageous statements that have been made previously today.

Tabled paper: Document outlining the history of local government areas in Queensland.

The reality is that I am here today as the local member for the people of Rockhampton. For the people of Rockhampton, on a daily basis 8,000 people travel into their city. Thirty-five per cent of the people I represent are pensioners and 8,000 people come into Rockhampton every single day and use services paid for by the ratepayers in Rockhampton. Those people use those services and pay nothing towards them. If any member in this chamber can convince me that that is sustainable, I suggest that they go and see Stephen Robertson and get themselves booked into a health clinic.

The fact of the matter is that that is exactly the same as asking somebody who runs a service station to allow every 10th vehicle to fill up for nothing. I wonder how long that would last. Perhaps the way it would be done is that a few extra cents would be put on the petrol that the bloke in front puts in his tank to pay for it. That is what is happening at the moment. The facts are undeniable.

We talk about a democracy and a referendum, but why would the people of Livingstone vote to change that situation? Why would the people of Fitzroy vote to change when they are sponging off the people in Rockhampton? That is what it is. I have said it publicly heaps of times and not too many people have taken me on, I can tell you, because they know that it is true. I have seen people fill up their

vehicles with great big plastic bottles of water out of fire facilities that are right opposite the Brunswick Hotel on a Friday afternoon to take home. Who do they think pays for that? People from Emu Park use the Rockhampton dump and do not pay a cracker for it. I stand up for those people who every single day push the button on the toilet, drive on the roads and use every other facility—the people who put me into this parliament. Any person who stands up in this place and suggests that the people around Rockhampton ought to have a say so that they can continue to send my constituents broke—and the pensioners I represent get put out of their houses—does not know what they are talking about. So let us have no more of this pious nonsense that somehow the members on the other side can capture the business of representing the people they stand for.

I am opposed to John Howard's political referendum. I heard the member for Gladstone acknowledge that it is a political referendum. The member for Nanango said that it is okay for local councils to waste the money of the taxpayers. She said, 'It is government money. It comes from Canberra. It does not matter.' The reality is that the member for Nanango should listen to what the minister said—ratepayers are taxpayers.

If John Howard wants to start spending some money, I can think of 100 different places in my electorate where he can spend it. He can spend it on a new car park at the hospital for a start rather than asking the people of Rockhampton to go through a referendum that is not going to constitutionally yield one iota. I challenge any member in this room to tell me the constitutional basis upon which a referendum will change things. What will a referendum prove—

Mr Hobbs: It will show that the people don't want it.

Mr SCHWARTEN: No wonder the members over there are in so much trouble. Firstly, they have the manners of a razorback pig. Secondly, they have no unity whatsoever. The other point is that they hate the other members who sit with them. The members opposite think that this is smart politics. The people who back this in Rockhampton do not vote for me—the big end of town in Rocky, the people who are paying for the ads and who are pro amalgamation—and they do not vote Labor, but I can tell members that they will in future.

Mr Hobbs: We'll send this to Vince Lester. He'll beat you again.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is all right. Vince Lester can run against me in Rockhampton. I received a higher vote at the last election than he ever got at Emu Park.

The fact of the matter is that the ignoramuses opposite show exactly why the National Party is in the dire straits that it is in. They are rude, ignorant and arrogant. They have nothing to be arrogant or proud about in backing this unwinnable horse. They are flogging a dead horse. The reality is that they would be better off going out and listening to the core businesspeople in Rockhampton who throw money to the National Party.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: They will not be throwing any money the Nationals way again, I can tell them that.

Mr Seeney: What do you reckon Kirsten Livermore thinks about it?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Kirsten Livermore will be re-elected; do not worry about that.

Mr Seeney: You want to put a few bucks on the side?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Do you want to have a bet? I will bet you any money you like, because the people of central Queensland are much more concerned about their interest rates than they are about this, believe me. I know those wealthy people over there are not worried about it. They do not give a tinker's curse about it. Let me assure them that the people who will be going to the polling booths for Kirsten Livermore will be much more concerned about how much their mortgage is going to cost and how much their kids are going to go without—

Mr Seeney: What about the rates?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Interest rates; they are very much concerned about that, you are dead right.

Mr Seeney: No, those other rates.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Let me tell you, they are worried about the effect that this will have on their capacity to pay their rates. The young people in my electorate who have borrowed money got the biggest smack in the face they ever could have got yesterday. They are going to send a message back to Howard, and if they need to send it back via you they will. I would be very careful in wrapping my arms too tight around Howard. As the old saying goes, never warm your backside on a fire that is going out, and his fire is going out, I am telling you.

I need to make the point that when we look at the sustainability of the whole regional area of central Queensland there needs to be future planning. I have just come from a meeting with ZeroGen, and the member for Fitzroy had a similar meeting. There is a need to get industrial land and have proper planning there, but there is no incentive whatsoever under the current arrangements to do that. I

remember when I was on the council in Rocky and we took over some of Livingstone's land. We had to pay them rates on it for many years afterwards. Have members ever heard anything as idiotic as that—one council paying another council rates when they are right next door? But that is what we had to do. The Triple S project was going to fix that. Well last week they had a link-up between the four mayors of the councils and they could not even agree what the name was going to be. They could not agree whether they would have divisions or not, and here we are being conned into this view that the Triple S project was taking us somewhere.

I heard someone mention shared services. I have a bit of experience in shared services, because that is what our government does. With shared services they are all put together in the one place. That is what you do with shared services. You take the services out of Livingstone, out of Fitzroy and you plonk them in Rockhampton. That is how shared services work. If the member does not understand that—and I am not surprised that he does not have the intelligence or experience to understand that—I could draw it in cartoon form so he can understand it, but that is how shared services work. They do not work to push services out further; they bring them in. They aggregate them. That is what amalgamation is all about.

As for the mayors, we have heard about payback and all the rest of it. The fact is that the member for Gladstone is absolutely incorrect about this. There is no payback for those councils around Rockhampton at all. There has never been a time when they have identified with one another and had any form of unanimity. It never ever happened. So EARC had nothing to do with it. But if you speak individually to people who live in those areas they all say that they cannot understand why there are four administrations, four mayors and four CEOs in an area which you can safely drive around in less than half a day. No-one can understand why that is the case. The person in the street cannot understand it, but there has never been a mechanism to make it happen and there never was going to be. As the former mayor of Rockhampton, Jim McCrae, who now lives at Emu Park—not of my politics, I might add—said the other day, it was never going to go anywhere. There was never a mechanism to make it happen. Anybody with any common sense knows that.

We know that the mayor of Livingstone shire has been about self-interest the whole time. If you have a racehorse, call it 'self-interest'; you know it is always trying. He is always trying, and he is trying to feather his own nest in this. There is nothing about the people who are concerned. He does not believe in representative democracy. That is why my place at Kinka Beach does not have sewerage and does not have kerbing and channelling. That is why he gets on 4RO and makes it up as he goes along. He said that I paid 70 pounds for it when I bought it and why should I expect to get any services. I bought it in 1992. The decimal currency came in in 1966 but he does not seem to understand that.

The point is, why would he want to change? He told the Mayor of Rockhampton, Margaret Strelow, that if we were running an unsustainable business called the Pilbeam Theatre, of which I think 40 per cent of the usage comes out of Livingstone shire and those people pay nothing for it—

Mr Seeney: They pay to use it.

Mr SCHWARTEN: How embarrassing is this! I just want to get this on record. He said that the people of Livingstone pay to get into the Pilbeam Theatre. Anybody who knows anything about theatres that are council owned know that they are not full cost recovery. There is a pensioners discount. They get the same pensioners discount down there. It shows how little those opposite know about what they profess to talk about, because the audit sheets for Rockhampton show what a loss that runs at. Who picks that up? People like me who pay rates and pensioners like my parents who pay rates. What does he say? It is your fault if you run a business that is unsustainable. Of course he is going to say that. Why wouldn't he say that while his constituency sponges upon the people of Rockhampton? That is what they do. For the people who go there and pay nothing, there is no other word for it. They do not pay for the upkeep of such a marvellous building.

A woman from Glenlee wrote a letter to the editor just yesterday. She said, 'I can't wait for it to happen. There are no services out our way.' There is one park or something like that for 5,000 or 6,000 people. What do they do? They come into Rockhampton. Where do their kids play hockey, cricket and all the rest of it? In Rockhampton. Who pays for that? The Rockhampton ratepayer pays for that. As for John Hopkins at Fitzroy, he told me that he knocked on Don Close as the mayor on the basis that he needed the money. He said to me, 'Mum and I get a little car out of it. We get a car allowance, we got a bit more money to keep the pot boiling along, and we get a couple of trips here and there.' Talk about the motivation to be a mayor of a council, but that was it. That is the quality and calibre of people that we end up with. We put on the table that there must be divisions in central Queensland, because I have had experience in areas where there are no divisions. When Rockhampton City Council was undivided, I rang up a councillor—who happened to be a Labor bloke, I might add—and said that I was having trouble with the water pressure. He said, 'I'm not on the water committee.' So I rang somebody who was on the water committee.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The next bloke was a tory.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I was just about to answer that. This was in 1980 and I am still waiting for him to come and have a look at my water pressure problem. That just demonstrates the commitment of Tories in local government. When I was an alderman in the Rockhampton City Council representing a division, I did what any good elected alderman did, and that is why I continued to increase my vote. That is how I got into here, because people could see that I represented and took up their cases, whether it be crows attacking their fowls, whether it be people ringing me up in the middle of the night because they had water under their house, or low-water pressure, or whatever the case may be. The nonsense that Bill Ludwig and others suggest that you cannot think strategically while you are thinking locally says a lot more about him than it says about us doing this. Obviously he is incapable of doing two things at once.

In terms of Mr Hopkins, he told me on a number of occasions that he told the minister and he has told the Premier on the quiet that he really supports amalgamation. He told me that himself but he thought the constituency were against it. How fair dinkum can you be when you have someone who opposes local representation, who thinks that you are going to have 67,000 people represented by 10 people with all care and no responsibility sitting at the boardroom table thinking strategically while the poor people at Mount Morgan are owed \$30,000 by the rotten federal government over Aboriginal housing for which they will not pay rates. That is what those people ought to be interested in. I support Gavin Finch, who told the mayor of Livingstone to pull his head in. He ought to pull his head in because he is wasting ratepayers' money. I am a ratepayer there. I have never been consulted about it. There is all this talk about referendums. Where was the consultation with me? There are people who were not on the role in Livingstone shire—about 30 per cent of them, I think, who live down there like me and who are not on the role. I am not advocating a dual voting system. I had no say about how my rates were spent in terms of taking on this issue. I had no say whatsoever. So do not come in here bleating your democratic nonsense to me.

The final point I want to make is that I have heard a lot said about the age of the minister for local government. That is all the opposition has been able to really attack him on, because he has articulated in a faultless way and he has been as sure-footed over this issue as anybody I have ever met.

Mr Hobbs: Ha, ha!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Don't you bleat!

Mr Hobbs: Everyone hates him!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Let me take the interjection from the failed minister who was sacked from the Borbidge government for incompetence and other things. The gentleman opposite was sacked by the Borbidge government for being an incompetent minister. He was in the most incompetent government in the history of Queensland and he was the most incompetent minister so he was sacked, yet he sits here criticising this minister. I say that history will record this very well. It takes absolute courage to do this.

Mr Hobbs: What about your mate Bob Ellis?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Just keep talking and reminding everybody how incompetent and rude you are. That is why members opposite will continue to sit where they are now. That is where you will continue to sit, forever and a day, while you still think backwards like you are doing now. You are unlike this confident, competent man who has taken the agenda on this further than any other member of this parliament ever since I have been here. I congratulate the minister for this.

Mr Hobbs: All local governments hate him.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I do not believe they do.

Mr Hobbs: Oh!

Mr SCHWARTEN: I can tell you that the Rockhampton City Council does not.

Mr Lucas: The Bundaberg council doesn't.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Yes, the Bundaberg council. The mayor of Cairns thinks he is a great bloke; it is the same in Townsville and the list goes on. Opposition members cannot tell the difference between voices and noise. They think that because people can shout the loudest they necessarily have the greatest voices. That is why opposition members are inept and out of touch. They are not out there talking to the ordinary people at the Rocky Swap like I was on the weekend, or at the Brunswick Hotel last Friday night or in the cabs on Saturday morning. Members opposite are not talking to the ordinary people that I am talking to, I can assure them of that. The people of Rockhampton and, as I said, the people who support the Liberal Party and the National Party have put their hands in their pockets to carry ads to support what this minister is doing.

An opposition member: Ha, ha!

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is true. Geoff Murphy is one of them and Grant Cassidy is another. There are plenty.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: People who voted for you at the last election—and you did better than he did—will not be doing it again, I will give you the tip on that. They see this as driving the car by just looking in the rear vision mirror. That is what the problem is with the opposition. This is a real litmus test for the opposition to try to scramble to get some relevance and get something.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You will have a stroke up there; I am worried about you. I am really worried about your blood pressure. The fact of the matter is that this minister is doing something that is absolutely crucial for the future of this state and history will record him well.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (5.23 pm): The state government is showing leadership on the issue of local government reform. The Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport deserves the support from both sides of the House for taking the bit between his teeth and dealing with it.

Mr Seeney: Roll the big guns out.

Mr LUCAS: The minister has been faced with the situation where a number of reports commissioned by local governments themselves have indicated their lack of sustainability.

Mr Seeney: Why have you had to read a speech?

Mr LUCAS: The reason I am speaking in this debate is that this is an historic debate. In 1924, your crowd were in here and they opposed the City of Brisbane Act. Members opposite have only got to read the *Hansard*, and they might as well be reading the same speeches from 1924 again now. It is about time there was some vision over there. In 80 years time, people can read these conservative speeches and make the decision for themselves. I tell you what, Mr Speaker: this is a decision that will stand the test of time, as will the initiative of this minister.

All too often, we hear allegations from the other side of the House about how the government acts when it receives reports. This really does show why people on the opposite side of the House are true conservatives; it is because they are not prepared to address the issues. They are prepared to put it off; they are not prepared to show leadership.

In 1924 the conservatives opposed the City of Brisbane Act that brought 17 shire councils into one city of Brisbane. We can be very proud in Brisbane that we have the best form of administration of any capital city in Australia by a country mile. Why is that? It is because 80 years ago Labor showed the leadership and did something about it, and we are doing it again. Just like 80 years ago, the opposition will oppose it.

My community of Wynnum was one of those areas amalgamated, but to suggest we are any less proud to be baysiders or that we have less community identity because we do not go down to the Wynnum council hall to decide things is ridiculous. Come down to Kougari Oval to watch the Wynnum Manly Seagulls beat Souths Logan this Sunday and ask how many locals aren't proud baysiders because they are part of Brisbane City Council. In fact, one thing we have in common now—whether you are from Windsor, Woolloongabba or Wynnum—is that we are all individual communities that form part of Brisbane. We take it for granted, and I am sure that in 80 years people will look back at what we are trying to do here and say that at least the Beattie government was prepared to show some leadership.

We have ludicrous situations in great cities like Gladstone where people are living in Calliope; the economic development is happening in Gladstone and there is a lack of uniformity and consistency. If we had left it to those people opposite, it would be 2012 at least before we had any sort of consideration of it.

The funny thing is that the Liberals are absolutely thrilled to bits with this. If they had any principles, like Jeff Kennett—but when he did it he sacked all the councils—they would be in here at least standing up and saying it. I can understand the constituency of the National Party, I can understand what they are doing, but the Liberals actually want us to do it.

This is not about councillors; it is about communities and it is about providing sustainable futures for our rural and regional communities. In a previous debate about local government, the member for Southern Downs—one of the most embittered people here who should really go off to federal parliament—talked about how in one of his communities Main Roads provides 75 per cent of the funding for the local council. We only have to look at that report. In so many communities, Main Roads provides the majority of funding of that council. That is fine, there is no problem with that, we are happy to do it. But that does say something about the sustainability of the council.

That says a number of things to me. Firstly, it says how unsustainable that council is. Secondly, it says that the mainstay of the council is state government support, and that will continue because the roads will still be there regardless of who runs those roads at a local level.

Main Roads is about much more than simply moving people from point A to point B. Main Roads helps provide permanent employment for many local government employees in rural and regional communities. In the Bungil shire, this financial year alone the state provided over \$5.8 million for work

on state controlled roads, and it will happen after this bill as well. Local governments are also from time to time awarded works on the state controlled network on a sole invitee basis. On average, this is in excess of \$200 million each year. That is a huge boost to communities in rural and remote areas.

For example, Bauhinia shire has commenced 12.9 kilometres of pavement reconstruction on the Dawson Highway between Rolleston and Springsure, from Meteor Creek north to Three Chain Road for \$2.7 million. This financial year the state government will provide \$76 million in new funds directly to local governments for their roads through the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme, or TIDS. Under the Beattie government, TIDS spending has increased by 90 per cent, or an extra \$36 million, compared to when the coalition was in office. Since the Beattie government came to office nine years ago, we have contributed approximately \$520 million to local governments for TIDS projects.

This financial year alone we have provided \$458 million for Local Roads of Regional Significance, which includes 13,500 kilometres of state controlled roads that would be owned by local governments in other states. Instead of that, we jointly manage these roads with local governments through the Roads Alliance—a partnership recognised as best practice by the International Road Federation. The Roads Alliance gives state and local governments significant efficiency gains to invest back into roads. These savings have been realised through improved resource sharing, joint purchasing and better regional planning. Over the next five years, the state will invest \$2 billion to maintain and upgrade Local Roads of Regional Significance—another massive investment in local roads and communities. That will happen regardless of the structure of those local governments.

The state government spends six times more on roads in western Queensland than it collects in registration. In western Queensland in 2007-08—and off the top of my head I did the calculations on the electorates of Mount Isa, Warrego and Gregory—the state government will spend \$121.2 million on roads, while we will only collect around \$20 million in vehicle registration.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr LUCAS: The honourable member should have a look at that report. It talks about the sources of income. The rates revenue of one of those councils out there was nine per cent of its expenditure—nine per cent!

That western Queensland area I just mentioned includes the shires of Barcaldine, Barcoo, Bauhinia, Blackall, Diamantina, Emerald, Ilfracombe, Isisford, Longreach, Murweh, Quilpie, Tambo, Boulia, Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Croydon, Doomadgee, Etheridge, McKinlay, Mornington, Mount Isa, Winton, Balonne, Bendemere, Booringa, Bulloo, Bungil, Chinchilla, Murilla, Paroo, Roma Town, Tara, and Warroo. It encompasses the state electorates of Mount Isa, Warrego and Gregory.

A visit to remote Queensland is very instructive. There are very, very large distances involved. It is a real challenge for us, but we will continue to invest in those communities far in excess of the moneys that we receive in relation to Main Roads because we should do it; it is the right thing. They are wonderful communities but, just as the boundaries were set well over 100 years ago, things change. The essential quality of life of those people in those communities, the essential distances that they have to travel and the harsh conditions will remain the same regardless of what this law is—in fact, regardless of whether I am here or someone else is here. What will remain is the commitment from this government. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*. I have shown it to the Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

Queensland Transport

In addition the Beattie Government through Queensland Transport regulates subsidies for air, long distance bus and passenger rail services in 73 regional, rural and remote communities in Queensland.

In 2006-07 more than \$138m in subsidies were paid. This included \$7.8m for air services, \$2.4m for long distance bus services and \$128.5m for Traveltrain services. Compared to the previous Government, in absolute terms this represents double the commitment for air services and the introduction of support for long distance bus services.

Last financial year, these subsidies helped to transport, 223,000 air passengers on about 7,800 services, 118,000 coach passengers on about 6,000 services travelling more than four million kilometres; and 432,000 rail passengers on about 2,080 services.

These subsidies provide benefits not only to local residents but also for the local economy through increased tourism numbers and business activity.

Mr Speaker, under amalgamated councils, we will still have rural roads, we will still have rural industries, we will still have people living in rural communities. Only Labor is committed to continuing subsidies for rural services. The Liberal Member for Clayfield is on record as saying we should ditch the subsidy we pay to ensure regional and rural Queensland gets a traveltrain service.

Regional and rural Queensland ought to watch out. The real enemy isn't council amalgamations, which will deliver better, stronger local government. The real enemy of regional Queensland, isn't the Labor Party—it's the Liberals.

Mr Speaker, I'm proud to be Minister for Transport and Main Roads in the Beattie Government. I'm proud because this portfolio is one of the most important portfolios in a state that is so decentralised. Main Roads and Queensland Transport play a vital role right across Queensland. And they will continue to play that role whether there are 152 councils, 73 councils or four.

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (5.30 pm): I support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. As members are aware, this bill results from recommendations made by the Local Government Reform Commission, which consisted of chair Bob Longland, Di McCauley, Bob Quinn, Terry Mackenroth, Sir Leo Hielscher, Tom Pyne and Kevin Yearbury—a very distinguished and experienced group whose credibility could not be questioned by any sane person.

Key changes will reduce existing councils from 156 to 72. Mayors and chairpersons will reduce by the same number and councillors will reduce from 1,094 to 454. These proposed changes have generated a great deal of hysteria fuelled by Liberal and National politicians in this House and also many soon-to-be-unemployed councillors, mayors and chairmen—also, I must admit, by many genuinely concerned residents. I have spoken to many of them both personally and by phone, and I do not doubt the sincerity of those residents. But I do question and object to the hypocrisy and political opportunism of the politicians right up to the Prime Minister. In this regard I cannot improve on the words of Sue Lappeman in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* yesterday—

Now is the time to be both alert and alarmed. There is nothing more frightening than a desperate, panicked, poll-crazed politician trying to find something, anything, that will help him hold on to power. Prime Minister Howard's latest outrageous attempt to claw back support by intervening in a state issue doesn't just smack of desperation—it reeks. His very generous promise to have the taxpayer-funded Australian Electoral Commission pay for council referendums, as well as being costly for ratepayers, is also dangerous.

She continues—

It is dangerous because it gives false hopes to councils that the results might overturn the reforms, which they won't.

How accurate and how sensible she is. It is now common knowledge that Mr Howard's last roll of the dice is to go out of his way to pick a fight with each state and territory government. We have the Murray River issue in Victoria; the Mersey Hospital intervention in Tasmania; he suddenly discovered that intervention is required to assist Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

A government member interjected.

Mr LAWLOR: I take that interjection. There is the timber mill in New South Wales. The offer to Queensland local authorities to have a referendum must be seen for what it is—a hypocritical prank from a desperate man—a tricky and dishonest old man, actually. The proposal is described in Crikey today as scrappy and ratty and that sums it up. The Prime Minister, by the way, opposed the 1988 federal referendum which sought to give constitutional recognition to local government. I would like to see what the Local Government Association of Queensland thinks of that and if it might ask the Prime Minister to please reconcile these positions. Maybe it can offer an explanation itself.

Howard has shown nothing but contempt for local government. I am reliably informed that he even had Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman, who is of the same political persuasion, removed from his table at a fundraiser at the Convention Centre because he was not interested in local government. Desperation has obviously raised his interest considerably.

A lot of the angst in relation to this bill emanates from the Sunshine Coast area, particularly the councils of Noosa, Maroochydore and Caloundra. Closer examination of the remuneration paid to mayors and councillors is revealing. In Caloundra the mayor receives \$150,000 and each of the 10 councillors responsible for about 9,000 people each receives \$95,000 at least. In Maroochy the mayor receives \$112,000 plus a \$20,000 electorate allowance and each of the 12 councillors receives at least \$71,000 plus a \$12,000 electorate allowance. They are responsible for about 12,000 people each. The mayor in Noosa receives \$127,000, and nine councillors responsible for 5,500 people each receives at least \$70,000. Each representative, as I understand it, also gets a motor vehicle allowance, a phone and an office. What a rort. No wonder they are so upset.

We had the recent example of the member for Kawana's son winning a by-election for a division of Maroochy. They treat it as a family business apparently. Now we have a 19-year-old councillor on \$83,000 plus a car, a phone and an office. He received about 2,000 primary votes. I will move to the issue of conflict and competence a little later.

With all the noise generated from the opposition one would swear that these were the first amalgamations ever. The minister for housing gave an example of some 40-odd pages documenting amalgamations over the last century or so in Queensland. Brisbane was formed by an amalgamation in 1924—20 different shire council divisional boards and town councils were amalgamated. We now have one of the most successful local authorities in Australia. It was opposed, of course, by the tories of the time.

The Gold Coast has undergone several amalgamations over the past 50 or 60 years. In 1948 the old Albert shire and South Coast Council were formed from the old Southport Town Council, Coolangatta Town Council, Burleigh Town Council and Nerang Town Council. In 1978 Logan City was cut off from the old Albert shire and in 1994 Albert shire and the Gold Coast city were amalgamated to form the present Gold Coast City Council. Other amalgamations have occurred in numerous locations: Mackay, Pioneer, Ipswich, Moreton and so on.

What is happening is not new and arguments such as 'We've been like this for 100 years,' are not logical arguments against change. Indeed, they may be strong arguments for change. We heard some other illogical arguments such as the one from the member for Darling Downs who got up in this place and said that because of amalgamations people who used to shop in Kingaroy are now going to have to shop in Toowoomba, for God's sake. What is going on here? I did not read that clause in the bill.

In other states of Australia this has happened time and time again. It happened in Victoria, which has been mentioned by several people, where Kennett overnight dismissed the councils and that was it. When Ray Groom was the Premier of Tasmania from 1992-96 they reduced the number of councils from 49 to 29. It has happened also in New South Wales and other states of Australia.

I spoke before of conflicts of interest. It is interesting to note that the member for Noosa, who was interjecting earlier—I do not think he said anything sensible.

Mr Elmes: It is your turn next. I will say something sensible, don't you worry about it.

Mr LAWLOR: I have been waiting for it for quite a while. I will hang around, don't worry. The member's wife works as a PA for a Maroochy councillor. As previously mentioned, the member for Kawana's son has gone into the family business as a councillor for the Maroochy shire—all fairly incestuous stuff, I suggest.

Many of the people I spoke to on the Sunshine Coast told me that they wanted to remain as they are because their council was so honest, efficient and consistent in its decision making. So I decided to do a bit of research. A name that constantly recurred was the name Steve Dickson, who was a councillor on the Maroochy shire. Members may have heard of him. He is now the member for Kawana in this chamber. Members would not have heard much from him, of course. He sits next to the member for Noosa.

Mr Elmes: A good mate.

Mr LAWLOR: I am sure he is a good mate. When he came in here the other day I thought he was an intruder and I called security. He was to be speaking on the bill but I understand he has the flu, although the way this debate is going he might have recovered and be able to tack himself on the end of the debate.

The research that I undertook was mainly in the *Sunshine Coast Daily*. I have a few cuttings here from the past few years and I will table them shortly. A reading of these cuttings, and the headlines in particular, would indicate that maybe all was not as perfect as was stated in paradise on the north coast.

Here is a cutting titled, 'Coast toxic lakes shock'. That is on the Sunshine Coast. Another says, 'Ratepayers face huge bill to clean up toxic lakes'. There are a couple more here, 'Council didn't bother to check' and 'Two more toxic sites revealed'. We have another one here, 'Council knew lakes were lethal to wildlife' and 'Officers forced out over lakes'. This is an example of Mr Dickson's ordinary memory. He was the chairman of the planning committee and all the planning officers were sacked apparently. This article states—

A week after the planning staff's disappearance, on July 8, 2002, the council held a special meeting in which approval was given for subdivision.

Divisional councillor Steve Dickson—who also served in council at the time of the decisions—yesterday denied knowledge of the reasons for the planning staff leaving council.

He also denied he was in council at the time of the decisions that allowed the development to proceed.

'I was in Lightning Ridge at the time and didn't hear anything about it until my return,' he said.

However, the Daily has received a copy of minutes of a meeting for determining the application for Chancellor Park West Master Plan dated July 2, 2002. Mr Dickson was one of nine councillors present at the meeting.

What a convenient memory he had. Another headline states, 'Health hazard in our backyard'—beautiful. I would love that! I would love to own a house there! Another states, 'How many dead ducks does it take for action?', 'Developer, council to meet on lakes fix'—lakes fix all right—'Residents hope Links isn't lost'. This is an interesting one and this is from the *Sunshine Coast Daily* of 8 May 2006, 'Developments in Maroochydhore stall'. This relates to lack of planning, which they reckon they do so well and something which the then Councillor Dickson refers to as 'densification'. I would have called it density. A particular developer complained about the lack of a master plan. He said that the master planning exercise should have started three years ago—and remember, this is something on which they are really strong on the Sunshine Coast! One of the arguments they put forward to justify not amalgamating the shires up there was that they are so efficient; they plan so well. The article states—

He also said the master planning exercise should have started three years ago, something Maroochy planning chair Steve Dickson agreed with.

He was pretty casual about it. The article states—

'Sure, it should have been in place years ago, but it wasn't,' he said.

'Now we've got to make sure we take the time to get it right' ...

Plenty of time apparently! In relation to the 'densification', one would think by the way they go on about it on the north coast that they are against any sort of 'Gold Coast style' development, as they often refer to it, but not Mr Dickson apparently. The article goes on—

Interestingly, while councillor Dickson said he personally was opposed to increasing the height limit on the Big Top site, he said he believed the building density on the Wises Farm site, approved by council back in 2004, was now too low.

'Things have changed, more people want to come here ... I don't think there's enough densification in the Chardan plans,' he said.

A government member: What was that word?

Mr LAWLOR: Densification. It is a new word. I have never heard of it, but you learn something new every day. Here is another article, 'How can rules work for some, not others?' That is not a bad headline. One of the real arguments that people tried to force upon me was consistency in the town plan. This article is about a hardware store that was given the green light by Steve Dickson. I will quote from the article. It says—

Maroochy Council has ignored the advice of its planning officers once again in approving a hardware store in a residential area of Sippy Downs.

The decision not only goes against planning officers' advice, it goes against council's own town plan.

Town planning chair Steve Dickson—who brought forward the motion to approve the development—said it was not often he went against the town plan.

'But if a town chair can't go against the town plan, then what is he there for,' he said.

In other words, you have a town plan but, if you do not want to follow it, do not worry about it. Do not go through the normal consultation processes, do not go out to the people, advertise and so on and change the town plan; just make a decision that is quite inconsistent with the town plan. That is his way of getting around the town plan.

This is the same person, of course, who refuses to rule out running for mayor of the amalgamated Sunshine Coast. I do not know what chance he has. I do not think you would follow him out of curiosity, to be honest. When asked on Sunshine Coast FM ABC if he would be running for mayor, he replied, 'I'll keep my options open.' On the evidence of these clippings, amalgamation will greatly benefit the Sunshine Coast as it will the other areas of Queensland. I support the legislation.

Tabled paper: Copies of various media articles regarding the Maroochy Shire Council.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (5.44 pm): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007—and what a great reformist Labor bill it is before the House. I believe in strong and efficient local government. My contribution will be brief today and I refer people and students of local government history to my previous speech in parliament on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill of 19 April 2007.

In that speech I raised several issues, and I am glad that they have been taken on board and will, in fact, be implemented by our Labor government through this bill. The sections of the bill I am referring to are, firstly, subdivision 6 division boundaries for new, adjusted and continuing local government areas wherein the Electoral Commissioner will decide independently divisional boundaries—this is absolutely essential in a democracy; secondly, the establishment of the Local Government Remuneration Tribunal, which I called for and which is contained in division 3 of the bill; thirdly, criteria for establishing categories of local government, which is contained in section 250A1 of the bill, issues of which I referred to in comparisons I made then between Ipswich, Cairns and Toowoomba city councils and is also in the bill; and, fourthly, division 4 of the bill relating to reimbursement of expenses and provision of facilities to which I also made reference in the debate on the bill in April and which has also been included in this bill. These are great reforms that will result in better local government administration.

I wish to thank the minister for local government, the Premier and the government for taking action on these issues that are very important to local government in Queensland. I wish to point out that I understand that the Ipswich City Council fully supports the amalgamations and the bill before the House. I also understand that Councillor Paul Tully of the Ipswich City Council is the only member of the LGAQ executive who publicly fully supports the amalgamations and this bill.

A government member interjected.

Mrs MILLER: I will let him know. He is probably listening to this right now. Let us put local government into context. Local government is a creature of state government. No local government exists without the local government acts passed by each state government. Without such an act of parliament, local authorities simply do not exist. There would be no regional councils, no city councils and no shire councils. However, we would probably have a very big department of local government.

I just briefly want to make reference to the new Local Government Remuneration Tribunal included in this bill. Local government councillors in Queensland and the Northern Territory have been the only councillors in Australia who have had the power to set their own fees and allowances et cetera. This bill and the tribunal brings Queensland into line with every other state, and that is what should happen. For the benefit of the parliament, I will outline the system operating in other states of Australia.

In New South Wales under the Local Government Act 1993 chapter 9 division 4, an independent local government remuneration tribunal determines the remuneration for councillors and mayors. The act requires that, for the setting of remuneration, the tribunal determines remuneration categories into which councils can be placed. The tribunal allocates councils to categories and sets the maximum and the minimum levels of remuneration for councillors and mayors for each category. New South Wales has, in fact, eight remuneration categories, with the city of Sydney occupying a remuneration category separate from all other councillors.

In Victoria councillors are entitled to receive remuneration in the form of a council allowance. Mayors are entitled to receive a higher allowance, as they should be. The Victorian government sets upper and lower limits for all allowances paid to councillors and mayors. For the purposes of these allowance limits, councils are divided into three categories based on the income and population of each council.

Soon after being elected in Victoria each council determines the precise annual amount that will be paid to its mayor and councillors within those limits that have been set by the government.

In Tasmania councils are placed into seven categories based on the number of votes and the total revenue. Councillors are paid an allowance plus an additional allowance for the mayors and deputy mayors. A board of inquiry into allowances and local government elected members was appointed on 26 April 2004 and it reported on 28 July 2004. These allowances applied from that date for a period of four years.

In South Australia allowances are prescribed by the Local Government Act 1999 and the Local Government (Members Allowances and Benefits) Regulations 1999. Councils are able to set councillor remuneration levels within the statewide remuneration bands. These base amounts are currently a minimum annual amount of \$1,820 and a maximum annual amount of \$15,000.

In Western Australia, pursuant to the Local Government Administration Regulations 1996, remuneration is either based upon sitting fees for council and committee meetings or a fixed annual amount for meeting attendance. Mayors and deputy mayors also receive an annual allowance. There are minimum and maximum amounts that apply for payments to members they are entitled to receive.

In the Northern Territory it is understood that the councillors attend meetings of the council and committees in their own time and are paid a meeting allowance and also out-of-pocket expenses. I am very happy to support this bill as amalgamations will make local government stronger in Queensland.

Ipswich was amalgamated with Moreton Shire Council and it was very successful. Mayor John Nugent was the highly respected mayor of the amalgamated council and did a good job in overseeing the process. The unions were happy with the process at that time and they were fully consulted. In fact, I have been talking to some of our union representatives today. They inform me that it was a very smooth process and no-one lost their job.

I believe that there should be more amalgamations. In my view, Ipswich could well have been the Ipswich Regional Council taking in the Gatton and Laidley areas as well. As we go west from the capital Brisbane it would have been Brisbane City Council, Ipswich Regional Council and Toowoomba Regional Council.

This is an historic bill for Queensland. It will make for better and more efficient local government. It will be more democratic in that external and internal boundaries have been and will be set independently. It means better accountability mechanisms as the Remuneration Tribunal will be permanently established in Queensland. It will be a fair system of local government across the state.

Those people who, like me, have had the privilege of being trained by local government legends like Neil Macpherson and Ken Mead will know that future generations will thank our government for this reform bill. They will thank us for having the guts to see that there were problems and that we acted to solve them. They will thank us by having stronger, more economically viable councils.

To Michael Kinnane, who is with us today, director-general of the department of local government, and the staff of the department, I say, 'You walk in the footsteps of these great men.' I say, 'Look forward and be very proud because you are going to have the opportunity of implementing some of the greatest reform legislation that our government has had the privilege of putting through this parliament.' I know that Michael and the staff of the department of local government will do a fantastic job in implementing this legislation. This day will go down in the history of this parliament as a great day for local government in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ELMES (Noosa—Lib) (5.53 pm): I rise to speak against the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. This bill represents tyranny in its operation and the destruction of Noosa in its performance. What is worse is that the handling of this bill and the entire process of amalgamations represents a pattern of deceit by the Premier and this government. I say tyranny because despite overwhelming opposition from within Noosa from citizens and businesses, opposition from both sides of politics, opposition from all manner of high places, Mr Beattie and his minister refuse to see reason. They refuse to listen to the people of Noosa. They are hell-bent on imposing their amalgamations through any means necessary.

I say a pattern of deceit because we have had a number of events where the minister for local government specifically set out to gag the people of Noosa and all Queenslanders over this issue, starting with the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 which took away the requirement of a vote before amending any council boundaries to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007 which takes away any assistance people may receive from the Australian Electoral Commission to the leaked email from the deputy executive director of the Department of Emergency Services dictating that SES volunteers were banned from protesting outside this place on Friday of last week.

As if this pattern of deceit is not enough, the minister today threatened that any council that calls a poll on the amalgamations would be immediately dismissed without notice and would have administrators appointed. This pattern of deceit flows right through this government and taints all of its actions and brings this parliament into dishonour.

The removal of the Noosa Shire Council will result in the destruction of all we hold dear. The Noosa council has stood in the way of developers' bulldozers and it has kept our home a shining example for the rest of the state and for the rest of the country. By taking away our council and replacing it with one charged to handle Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa, this government puts in jeopardy the beauty and environmental jewel of Noosa.

Belatedly the Premier has recognised that Noosa is special and has suggested special legislation to protect Noosa and Port Douglas as iconic locations. But what standing does this legislation have to protect us when only a few short weeks ago another piece of his legislation took away our right to vote? So why is Noosa worth special consideration here? Compared to the legacy of the Noosa area and the efforts that have been expended to preserve the environment and keep Noosa special, the legacy of this Beattie government stands in stark contrast. The legacy of this government is sickening. Three former Beattie government ministers are now in jail or under investigation.

But now the Beattie government has reached a new low. Not only is it prepared to sully its own representation but it has directly attacked Queenslanders by refusing them access to democracy. We see here that the Beattie government is ruling Queensland without regard for the impact on Queenslanders. The Beattie government was not even listening when thousands upon thousands of Queenslanders from across the state made their way to this place to protest against this bill. Yet they are not given the respect of a decent response from the Premier or his minister. We all heard him today label giving a vote to people affected by this bill pointless. Then his minister followed up by introducing amendments which take away the only form of assistance which has been given to ordinary Queenslanders by the federal government.

The doctrine of democracy is a lofty concept and one which is often claimed by members in this place when speaking against government actions. But here we see that I am not just talking about hot air and rhetoric. The actions of this government are deliberately designed to restrict the voice of the people. This government is openly violating the main concept of democracy which gives people a voice.

For the purposes of the record I would like to discuss who will be supporting this bill today and the violation of the democratic process. We in this place heard earlier this week that the Deputy Premier does not care about this bill and its affect on rural Queenslanders because her house is in Brisbane and will not be affected. So following on from her remarks I would like to record who in the government will not be affected and who, similar to the Deputy Premier, simply does not care. Let me read the roll of dishonour to members. It is: Mount Ommaney, Mrs Attwood; Aspley, Ms Barry; Brisbane Central, the Premier; Chatsworth, Mr Bombolas; Capalaba, Mr Choi; Broadwater, Ms Croff; Sandgate, Ms Darling; Redlands, Mr English; Greenslopes, Mr Fenlon; Yeerongpilly, Mr Finn; Mount Coot-tha, Mr Fraser, the minister; Gaven, Mr Gray; Kallangur, Mr Hayward; Stafford, Mr Hinchliffe; Albert, Ms Keech; Southport, Mr Lawlor; Indooroopilly, Mr Lee; Lytton, Mr Lucas; Logan, Mr Mickel; Bundamba, Mrs Miller; Waterford, Mr Moorhead; Inala, Ms Palaszczuk; Bulimba, Mr Purcell; Mansfield, Mr Reeves; Mudgeeraba, Mrs Reilly; Nudgee, Mr Roberts; Stretton, Mr Robertson; Woodridge, Mrs Scott; Burleigh, Mrs Smith; Mount Gravatt, Ms Spence; Springwood, Ms Stone; Algester, Ms Struthers; Pumicestone, Mrs Sullivan; Redcliffe, Ms van Litsenburg; Cleveland, Mr Weightman; Murrumba, Mr Wells; and Ferny Grove, Mr Wilson.

That is the list of members who will make sure that the people of Queensland get this dishonest piece of legislation before this parliament rises tonight. All of these people simply do not and will not care about rural Queensland. Their homes and their way of life are not going to be affected by these amalgamations, so they simply do not care. I put the challenge to all members who I have just mentioned: prove me wrong if you will and cross the floor—

Ms BARRY: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. Even though I am the member for Aspley, I live in the Pine Rivers shire within my electorate and it will be affected by these amalgamations. He is misleading the House.

Mr ELMES: Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to the member voting with the coalition when the time comes.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): There is no point of order.

Mr ELMES: Of course not.

Mr Springborg: Good try though.

Mr ELMES: It was a good try. To prove me wrong, I invite the member to cross the floor when the vote takes place later on. If these people do not cross the floor they are showing their disrespect to the mums and dads, the kids and the grandparents of regional Queensland and it is following on from the deceit of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the minister for local government. My message to all of the members I mentioned is that history will judge them. History will record that a vote was taken today and that the elected representatives of Queensland chose not to care about who would suffer from their decision. History will record a pattern of deceit shown by the Beattie government today. When history looks back, I want people to remember that Labor was callous, not caring. It was happy to continue its contempt of rural Queensland. Let history record those words because they aptly describe this government's treatment of all Queenslanders displayed most flagrantly in this situation.

But Mr Beattie is not just disregarding the people of Noosa and all Queenslanders; he is disregarding support from all sides of politics. Some 31,000 submissions to the Local Government Reform Commission rejected amalgamation of the Noosa shire. Thousands upon thousands protested here in Brisbane just one week ago tomorrow. He is also disregarding the advice of federal leaders of both political parties. In fact, it has taken the Prime Minister to intervene in order to bring about some semblance of democracy to this government. But Mr Rudd is also on the record condemning this bill and condemning Mr Beattie's actions to prevent the people's voice from being heard. Premier Beattie's petulance in this situation is completely hysterical and he is refusing to listen to Noosa or to give the people of Noosa a chance to voice their opposition. This is a government bent on tyranny and a government drunk on power.

Why does the Premier not listen to his party's federal leader and consult the community properly? I table reports of some of the other objections to this amalgamation of the Noosa shire council—namely, from the local ALP branch in Noosa, an email from Kevin Rudd and support from Sir Richard Branson and Bob Ansett against amalgamation.

Tabled paper: Copies of various media articles and other documents regarding the Noosa Shire Council and proposed amalgamations of local authorities.

Clearly support for Noosa against this amalgamation comes from both sides of politics and the Premier and his cabinet are alone on this issue. Yet he continues in his petulance. His childlike displays in this place show that he is not acting rationally in pursuing this issue against Noosa.

I draw the attention of the House to comments made by the minister for local government recently. On 7 August Minister Fraser said with respect to amalgamation of the Noosa shire that the Local Government Reform Commission made a recommendation that it believes is the best result for the people of the Sunshine Coast as a whole as a region. Clearly, Minister Fraser is not considering what impact amalgamation will have on the people of Noosa; he is thinking about how the developing of Noosa will benefit the rest of the Sunshine Coast. Minister Fraser also said on that day that the people of Noosa should accept their fate. He said specifically, 'We should all accept the umpire's decision,' as if the Local Government Reform Commission was an independent umpire when one of the commissioners is a paid director of a developer. While the commission was set up to look independent, it was clearly stacked in a particular direction. On 5 June 2007 Minister Fraser said in this place that he could not trust local government councils to agree on amalgamation. He said that the only way to achieve what he wanted was to impose it upon Queensland because he could not trust Queenslanders to decide for themselves. Such is the paternalism of this minister, and aren't we lucky to be in his care!

The Beattie government has few friends on this issue, with no support not even from its party mates in Noosa or federally. So why is it proceeding with this? The reasons behind this process are unclear. We know what the official line is from the government, but Noosa does not fit into that definition. So why would the government proceed to force amalgamation on Noosa? The official line given by the minister is that the local councils are financially weak and will be unable to continue to operate without assistance. However, this reasoning from the minister stands in stark contrast to reality. Noosa, according to the minister's own web site, is listed as follows—

Noosa Shire Council

Your council is financially STRONG.

A local government with high capacity to meet its financial commitments in the short, medium and long term. It is likely to be able to manage major unforeseen financial shocks and any adverse changes in its business and in general economic conditions with only minor revenue or expense adjustments. Its capacity to manage core business risks is strong.

This assessment is part of the financial sustainability review conducted by the Queensland Treasury Corporation.

As at 18 May 2007, the QTC had completed an assessment of 105 Queensland councils against a 10-year financial sustainability forecast.

These are the words from the minister's own web site about Noosa. It beggars belief that if this government's own rationale behind amalgamations does not apply to Noosa, why then would it proceed? Perhaps it is because the Premier and his minister want to see Noosa developed. We know that he appointed his mate Terry Mackenroth to the Local Government Reform Commission to vote on whether Noosa should be developed and we know that Mr Mackenroth is a paid director of Devine Ltd,

one of Queensland's biggest property developers. We should also remember that it was Terry Mackenroth who started the whole Sunshine Coast amalgamation debate when he spoke in favour of it at a Property Council lunch in Mooloolaba just a couple of years ago. Such a person on the commission hardly makes it an independent umpire despite what the minister may like us to believe.

The Deputy Premier said amalgamations were necessary to give councils clout to deal with mining companies and other multinational corporations. But again this does not apply to Noosa because the council and the community itself have stood up to developers and other environmental vandals for more than a generation. It is the people of Noosa who are the insurance policy of our way of life and not this minister and his phoney legislation. They are removing the opportunity for the people of Noosa and the people of regional towns and shires across our state to vote on whether they want this amalgamation. This government is exhibiting all the hallmarks of history's tyrannical rulers. The stink of deceit can be smelt in every corner of Queensland today. I urge the Labor members opposite to see what their leaders are up to. Give the people of Queensland the opportunity to voluntarily accept amalgamation. Do not force it down their throat! Do not kill off some of our smaller regional towns and shires!

I cannot understand why this government refuses to see reason in this situation. I hope that government members in this place will see reason today. If they do not, let the record show that today in this place democracy was put to death. Let the record show that the Beattie government maintains its pattern of deceit to hoodwink the people of Noosa and the people of Queensland. Let the record show that Labor stands for oppression. Let it show that Labor stands for deceit. Let the record show that I and the Queensland coalition opposed amalgamation without the right of a vote. When we come back into power, we will reinstate the Noosa shire and we will give the communities across the state an option through the ballot box to re-establish their community in the way that they would wish.

I also say that it was with great relish this afternoon that I wrote to the Australian Electoral Commission formally requesting a plebiscite. The minister would be pleased to know that I did not speak to anyone at the Noosa Council. I did it off my own bat so I hope that Noosa can again be one of those places that continues the fight. Today is not the end of it. This is not the end of it; this is the start. There is another announcement that will be made tomorrow from the Friends of Noosa. There are more meetings happening tomorrow. This is going to go on and on and on all the way through to the next state election. We will make sure that the Labor Party is renowned throughout this state—from one end of it to the other—for this and remind people every day what it has done to the smaller regional towns and cities across Queensland.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (6.09 pm): Today we are debating some of the most undemocratic and dictatorial legislation that I have seen in my time in this place. Through this legislation, this government has single handedly and systematically stripped away the rights of local communities not only to exist but also to have a say in their future. I simply say here today that if we respect in any way the rights of local communities to exist and to have a say in their future then why is this government not prepared to give them a referendum? I will have some more to say on that in a moment.

I commend the councillors in the five local government areas in my electorate. They generally do an extremely good job in representing the people on local government matters. These people have now been in some way stigmatised by a government which has sought to indicate to them that they care only about their position and that their opposition to this is through some selfish motivation. I say to the minister and the other members of the government that they absolutely misunderstand these people, because they are proud of their communities and they are proud of representing those people.

Over the past few hours we have heard a lot from members in this place about how councillors are only interested in their money and their entitlements. I can tell members that the majority of councillors in my electorate get nothing but meeting fees and, in many cases, less than \$150 or thereabout a meeting. Generally in my electorate people get their democracy and their representation on the cheap. That is not going to be the case after what the minister does. We are going to see profound reform that will give the people of the local government areas in my electorate less representation and it will cost them much more. So we will get less representation, it will cost the people more and they will have to travel a lot further to get it.

In recent times we have heard a lot of rubbish from this government about how local government was formed in Queensland in the horse and buggy days. We saw them even evoke the images of Don Bradman in the most vile way. I can tell members that Don Bradman's father was not even born when the state boundaries of this state were established and his grandfather, if he was born, was only a boy. The state boundaries have not changed in around about 150 years. Does that mean that because they have existed for 150 years we need to jettison them?

As I travel around my electorate I hear people saying in unison, 'We should abolish the states' but no-one has said to me, 'We should be changing the local government boundaries?' In actual fact, if the government wants to do something and get some ticker, it should be advocating for state government boundary reform in Queensland. The boundaries which were drawn in 1859 have no historical context to what actually features in my electorate.

Ms Struthers: What about the gerrymander?

Mr SPRINGBORG: No, I am not talking about the state electoral boundaries, I am not talking about the Hanlon gerrymander; I am talking about the external boundaries of Queensland which have existed for 150 years. So the minister's argument is absolute bunkum when he says that something has existed for 100 years and therefore it deserves to be jettisoned. Yet we have state boundaries which in many cases are an anachronism, yet the minister is not prepared to look in any way whatsoever at some sensible changes to them. So we should forget this rubbish argument.

In my electorate the local government boundaries have generally served people exceptionally well. In the area that I represent, some 13 years ago I represented nine local government areas. After this process, there will be two local government areas. The number of councils was reduced in 1994 from nine down to five. After this process, the number of councils is going to be two.

Members can stand here all they want and talk all of this aspirational nonsense which they pull out of the air about how every child player wins a prize and how local government boundary reform gives good outcomes for everyone. I stand here as the only member of parliament who has had four councils in his electorate amalgamated into one. The new Warwick Shire Council was formed in 1994. I can guarantee members that there were winners and there were losers. If they want to see the losers, they should go to the small community of Allora and see how the people there lost their heart and soul, their direction and their services. They should also go to some of the other council areas that were sucked into the Warwick shire. Warwick Shire Council has attempted to do a good job, but when people lose their community identity, it can never, ever be replaced. When people lose their capacity for decision making, they can never, ever properly replace it.

I can tell members, as the honourable member for Gregory has interjected, how that amalgamation has gone. I can say to members that this was the amalgamation that we had to have in 1994. It was going to make this great structure. It was going to strengthen the area for the future. Now this government's cooked books—the QTC figures—are showing that the Warwick Shire Council is structurally weak and that it needs to be amalgamated. That just goes to show the lack of success of this so-called amalgamation process. That follows the Victorian example of the mid-1990s, which was just an abomination. Notwithstanding those amalgamations, if we believe the methodologies that existed some 10 or 15 years ago in Victoria, they have the same structural weaknesses. So let us not have any of this bunkum about amalgamation making councils better, about making councils more financially stable, about council delivering services better and about councils delivering services more efficiently, because I can tell members that that is not the case.

Under amalgamation, the first thing we get is a brand new administration office. We get councillors who are more highly paid—and I suppose we have to pay more for this democracy—and then we find that we have a more centralised approach to delivering town planning matters. What was much easier to do in going through the maze of bureaucracy is no longer easy. I can tell members that that has been the example, notwithstanding the best efforts of the very good councillors of the Warwick shire, because that is the way amalgamated councils evolve regardless of people's intent.

Frankly, the commissioners had little understanding of the issues that they were dealing with. I will tell members why. They might find that strange. It is because the commissioners did not travel to the communities and they did not understand the communities. I will give members a classic example of what I am saying. Inglewood shire, which has now been put into the greater Goondiwindi Regional Council, has no affinity as an entirety with the new Goondiwindi Regional Council. If the commissioners had bothered to travel to that area they would understand that. Inglewood shire has a community interest as a stand-alone whole in its entirety, but it cannot be supplanted into one council, whether that be the Goondiwindi Regional Council or the new Southern Downs Regional Council. The west of Inglewood shire has no affinity with the shires to the east of it and the east of it has no affinity with the shires to the west because of the way people travel in the shire to access services. It is just basic geographics. If the commissioners had bothered to travel to that area rather than travelling overseas, as they had to do to get everything over and done with a bit quicker, they would have understood the idiosyncrasies that exist in the Inglewood shire.

The methodology of these amalgamations is completely and absolutely flawed. We have seen councils that have been considered weak that have survived for cultural reasons. It concerns me that surviving for cultural reasons in Queensland is based on the colour of a person's skin, not the other unique cultures that a person might have. We have seen councils that have survived because of the tyranny of distance, even though they are weak.

With deference to the honourable member for Gregory who represents that area very well, let us look at this extraordinary example of the new Emerald Regional Council. The three strongest councils in that area have all been amalgamated as well as Daringa council, which I think was identified as weak. The Emerald Shire Council was the strongest, followed by the Peak Downs Shire Council, down to the Bauhinia Shire Council, which was also extremely strong—very strong if we read the government's public relations web site—and then the weak council of Daringa was also included. So even though a council is strong, even though it had the capacity to meet any financial exposure, it still did not survive.

The methodology of these amalgamations was absolutely ramshackle. This process was political, because the government wanted to get even with local government. It was political because the government wanted a diversion. It was political because this minister wanted to leave his mark. There was no consistent methodology applied that put communities of like together or was based on any sort of model of financial sustainability.

I have no problem with the amalgamation of the Waggamba shire and the Goondiwindi council. That should have happened and that would have happened. But the cobbling together of those shires that I referred to with the Inglewood shire uninvited is just an absolute abomination. It is going to see that community of Inglewood die. Why will it die? Because it will lose its council administration.

It does not matter how many guarantees the government gives about staff employment in the future, if it is going to gain any efficiencies it has to close that administration. The government can give the people who are employed in that council the right to have a job for the next three years, but it knows full well that it cannot guarantee where that job is going to be and those people cannot travel 100 kilometres down the road to Goondiwindi each day. That will then have an effect on property prices, which is already happening. People are now wanting to sell, because they know that taking 20 reasonably well-paid, long-term stable employees out of an area has a major impact on the housing market in a place such as Inglewood. Make no mistake about it. When those people go, that impacts on the standing of the school. It also impacts on the hospital. So, as a service centre, Inglewood is diminished, and it is an important service centre.

One thing that really concerned me when the government ran in lock, stock and barrel and gave some false assurances about the adoption of this report was when it said, 'We'll set the external boundaries but you've got a right to choose its name.' Well, whoopee-chook at the end of the day. The government is saying, 'You can tinker around the edges and you might even have divisions, but you've all got to agree.' Look at the undemocratic process of the new Toowoomba Regional Council, where seven of the eight mayors said they should have a name which is neutral, and because one did not want it they could not get it. There are the same sorts of issues with divisions throughout Queensland. It is an undemocratic process. It was a process designed to give false assurance and it ultimately failed.

I absolutely support the concerns of Inglewood and the fact that there should have been a neutral name—the Border Rivers—but the other two councils would not agree with it. I was a member who in 1992 had a redistribution of my electorate, and Warwick was formed out of the old Carnarvon and the old Warwick electorate. It was basically the same proportions and it was called Warwick. I know how people feel when they have a name which does not necessarily reflect their community. So neutrality in the name is extremely important.

In the case of the Warwick shire and the Stanthorpe shire coming together, which is like putting oil and water together, the only decent thing the commission has done is pick a neutral name. Those communities do not fit together. They are great communities and they work, but you have to represent those areas to know that they are culturally different. You can have cultural recognition in Queensland based on your skin, apparently, by some of the references in the report, but you cannot have it because of ethnicity or the way that things have developed in those communities. You cannot have any of that. The particular specific cultural uniqueness that has developed there has been set aside and their concerns have been completely disregarded.

It is going to significantly change the way those areas operate. I just wish this government had bothered to go out and listen to what people had to say. I would like to table today the results of two surveys conducted by councils in my electorate—one by the Stanthorpe Shire Council and the other by the Inglewood Shire Council. They used Thomas Direct Telemarketing, and I have a statement of certification here. There were no leading questions such as 'Do you hate the government because they have done this?' They just said, 'Good morning/afternoon ... I am ringing ...' The first question was, 'Are you in favour of the Inglewood shire being amalgamated with ...?' The second question was, 'Should the local community have the opportunity ... to have a say?' In the case of Inglewood, they surveyed 480 people out of a voting population of around 2,000 and the result was 81.46 per cent of those people opposed amalgamation and 86.88 per cent want the right to have a say.

Tabled paper: Copy of documents regarding results of surveys by Thomas Direct Pty Ltd in relation to proposed amalgamations involving Stanthorpe and Inglewood Shires

The Stanthorpe shire similarly had a survey conducted of about 500 people from their population. The results there were that 87.9 per cent of people were opposed to the amalgamation and 90.32 per cent of people wanted a referendum. That is why this government does not want a vote, because this government knows it is undemocratic. This government knows the views of local people are absolutely against it. It is not only Nationals, it is not only conservatives, it is not only Independents; it is also longstanding members of the community who support the Labor Party. Because they are connected to their local community, they have convictions regarding their local community and they are seeing the government take away their rights, their representation and their capacity to represent themselves in the future and set their particular unique direction.

The great thing about this place is that we are not like Mao's China, as much as the Bolsheviks over there might like us to be, where we all dress up in khaki and we run around singing 'We love Mao' songs. We have people in this state who like to be able to represent a particular uniqueness. If somebody wants to live in Noosa because of the way they have planned it and the way they have developed it, then that is good. It is unique and that appeals to them. It is the same for Maroochy, Caloundra, Stanthorpe and Warwick. These councils allow the evolving of a particular unique community identity which suits and caters for the needs of many people, and that is something that this government seems not to understand.

We will in government use these surveys as a basis for deamalgamation of those shires. We will in government—and I make this categorically clear today—restore the local community identity for those communities which are opposed to this and which have demonstrated that clearly, such as the Stanthorpe Shire Council and the Inglewood Shire Council. That is the simple reality which we will ensure happens in Queensland.

As I said, what we have seen from this government is a completely dictatorial, absolutely and completely undemocratic state. What about the assurances which it is seeking to provide to preserve the so-called iconic values of Port Douglas and Noosa? I have seen similar dishonest and misleading contentions from this Premier and this government as he sought to further pull the leg of Queenslanders when he developed Suncorp Stadium. He said that the people in that area of Queensland would be safe from having concerts and if it did happen it would be a one-off. He ran into this parliament after hoodwinking people and pulling their leg and changed the law so it can hold any number of concerts. The sorts of concerns that they had about protecting their local amenity against noise pollution and other things were scuttled away. Their rights were taken away and it was hoped that after a while they will get used to it, they will just shrug their shoulders and say, 'We have been hoodwinked by the government, but that's the way it is.' This government's promises on special planning legislation or special iconic considerations for Noosa and Port Douglas are not worth the paper on which they will be legislated in this parliament.

I want to return to the issue of constitutional recognition of local government in this parliament. A lot of people have talked about the referendum of 1988, and I remember that clearly. That was stalking horse legislation for a whole range of things and that is why it was voted down. There were four motherhood questions and a number of others which suited the Labor Party's agenda.

A government member interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I will say this to the honourable member who interjects: go back and read the Constitution of Queensland and the speech of introduction by the then Premier, Mike Ahern, on 6 September 1989. Look at the provisions of the Constitution of Queensland which he brought in which sought to protect the rights of local government. As I understand it, that was supported in a bipartisan way in this parliament and has been subjugated and set aside by this parliament. What we did in protecting local government rights in the Constitution in 1989 was quite specific, and that is a double entrenched provision with regards to the abolition of local government as a whole in Queensland—that is, if local government were to be abolished then there would have to be a referendum of the people. It was also a requirement that if a minister wished to dissolve a local government area in Queensland or a council in Queensland he had to refer the matter to the parliament.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Well, he had to be bound by the Constitution. The interesting thing is that you are talking about a constitutional commitment, or a lack thereof, but that is what the National Party government brought in.

It also has a provision in there that the government must consult with local government on issues which would have a profound impact on them—or it says that it should consult with them if it is deemed to be necessary on major issues. I would have thought that something such as the abolition of over one-half of the local government areas in Queensland should have at least required some consultation with local government in Queensland. Instead we have the minister running in here subjugating their rights, not even bothering to consult with them and ringing them up on the phone saying, 'Forget about it. It's too bad, so sad.'

There is another issue that people need to be aware of. Following this government's undemocratic process of forced amalgamations in 1994 the coalition government in 1996 on 16 September came into this place and introduced legislation which made it compulsory for a referendum to be held in relation to certain referable matters, and one of those sections related to the amalgamation of local government areas or the significant boundary changes of those local government areas. If honourable members believe in legislative reform, if they believe in democracy, if they believe in the statutes of this place why have they set it aside?

Mr Fraser interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Why have you set it aside? You know the intent of that, and you have actually set aside the rights of those people. You are scared. I will table that for everybody to see.

Tabled paper: Copy of extracts from the Local Government Act 1993.

The intention of this parliament when dealing with these matters is that a referendum should be held to ensure that people have their say. What we have here is a dictatorial government that is scared of the power of the people. The minister is scared of the people. If he believes what he is doing is right, the least he can do is to give them a say in their community. If the government were to change the external boundaries of this state and there has to be a referendum under the Constitution, then why is the government not prepared to abide by its own laws?

Sitting suspended from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (7.30 pm): I rise this evening to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. On 17 April this year, we saw the commencement of the bastardisation of the democratic process in Queensland. I am appalled to think that people right across the length and breadth of this state will not have the opportunity to reject this idea or have a referendum on the issue we are debating here today. This smells and reeks of antidemocracy. Back in the days when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was the Premier of this state, there were protests left, right and centre about some of the things he was supposed to have done, but nothing measures up to this. This is about removing the free democratic rights of the people. We have had people here over the years who have laid their lives down to give us that free process.

I am ashamed to stand here this evening and say that I am a Queensland and an Australian when we are talking about something that is not democratic. The fact is that the ordinary citizens of Queensland are the ones who have been deprived. I am the first to admit that we certainly need reforms, we need to look at local government boundaries in this state and we need to look at local government as a whole.

I heard what the member for Cook said this afternoon. One thing I will say about the member for Cook is that I applaud him for the guts that he showed in saying exactly how he felt about some of the issues in his own electorate. He is probably right in some of those areas, but it takes a lot of guts to say what you think. At the end of the day, the government is taking away people's rights, and I know there are a lot of people in western Queensland who have protested in a very loud way about their rights.

While we look at Queensland as a whole, most of our population is based here in the south-east corner where we have most things; we are a very fortunate state. There are people living along the eastern seaboard as far north as Cairns and Townsville and back into the honourable member for Cook's electorate, which is another remote and isolated electorate that goes right up to Cape York. There are people in every corner of this state—in the area that he represents, the area that I represent, the area the honourable member for Mount Isa represents, the other large electorates like Warrego and Charters Towers, all those smaller remote inland electorates and the coastal electorates.

Wherever we live in this state, we have a right to have our say and these people have been deprived of that right. From day one, on 17 April, the whole sorry saga has been a charade of deceit. I am surprised by this government. I respect the Premier, I respect the ministers and I respect all people in this House, but I think it is a sad indictment on the democratic process when that right to be able to have that referenda is taken from us. Whether the government was going to agree with it or not, the blanket was thrown right across Queensland.

The Premier showed he was a very smart operator in the way he selected the chairman and members of the Local Government Reform Commission because they come from different sides of politics and they are all people of great integrity and ability. The report was supposed to come down on 1 August but it came down about three days earlier than that. It was probably completed weeks before that, for all I know. Thousands of submissions were sent to that commission, so there would not have been a hope in hell of those committee members reading those submissions, condensing the information in them, correlating it into two volumes and giving us the outcome we have in these volumes that the commission brought down before 1 August this year.

I represent 12 local authorities in the electorate of Gregory. Whilst not a lot of people live in that area, they are certainly people who provide for the gross national product of not only this state but this nation. We have the great wealth-generating coalmining and agricultural areas on the eastern end around the Emerald and Bauhinia shires, the magnificent channel country and desert cattle plains of western Queensland going out to Bedourie and Birdsville, and the Diamantina shire and Barcoo shire based on Jundah, Windorah and Stonehenge. The list goes on.

I applaud the commission and thank them for leaving those big remote shires alone. They identified the tyranny of distance in those vast areas, the importance and integrity of the people who live there and the way they have provided leadership by looking after those remote areas over a long time. The Diamantina shire, which has only about 270 people living in it, produces millions of dollars worth of cattle each year and has a great tourist trade going through it, with probably 40,000 or 50,000 people passing through. That shire provides a lot of services for not only its own people but the people who travel through that region on a daily basis during each year.

The point is that that is applicable to all those remote shires, right back around the western border areas, through the Mount Isa electorate, up into the gulf regions, right back into the Cook electorate and to the top of the Charters Towers electorate. Those 19 shires have been left alone, and I thank the commission and the government for leaving them as they are. I believe that is a very integral part of the process of looking after remote Queensland and identifying with those areas in question.

I am disappointed to see there has been a bloodbath between some of these regional areas. I look at the Barcaldine Regional Shire, and there are two new shires coming in there. Two of those shires, Aramac and Jericho, are a part of the Charters Towers electorate; Barcaldine is one of mine. They cannot agree on a name change, so they will have to go with the name that the commission left them with—the Barcaldine Regional Council—and they will not have divisions either. I think this is a void in the democratic process and we will not get fair and equitable outcomes. I heard my colleague the member for Fitzroy talk about it this afternoon, and part of his contribution was worth listening to. Those divisions are a very important part of giving fairness—

Mr Lawlor: What does Robbie Chandler want?

Mr JOHNSON: He wants what the majority wants, and they cannot agree on having a meeting where they can get an outcome. Nobody can agree, so they have to go with what the commission recommends and that is no divisions. To get fairness and better representation for those people who live in the likes of the Aramacs, the Jerichos and the Alphas, we should have divisions and an equal number or a responsible representation.

The Longreach Regional Council has adopted divisions and is going with Isisford and Ilfracombe and will have separate divisions. They will have one councillor each and Longreach will have four, and the mayor will be open to competition from the whole area. I think that is responsible. But they could lose representation of a populated area. They could run a card or something. We could see a division that will create anarchy in those regional areas for a long time. Many of us have lived in western areas or country areas and we get very passionate about our own area. It is like your football team. You might not be too happy with the team up the road if they are a bit better than you and they want to give you a tune-up, but when it comes to standing your ground—

Mr Reeves: Your football team is in Sydney.

Mr JOHNSON: I missed that.

Mr Reeves: Your football team is in Sydney.

Mr JOHNSON: Yes. It is a good one, too.

Mr Reeves: They are a bunch of fighters, I've heard.

Mr JOHNSON: That is why they are called Bulldogs. Anyway, the situation is that we do not need that division. I say to the minister here this evening that we have to make certain that through the transition process we try to iron out any problems and have some proper and responsible exchange of dialogue to get the best possible outcome.

There was a big protest in my electorate in late April when these amalgamations were put forward. People came in from Boulia and other far-flung places; from as far away as Richmond and Hughenden and all places in between. There must have been 1,200 or 1,300 people descend on Barcaldine that day. Many people said that the councils forced their people to come. Nobody forced anyone. It showed the commitment, determination, drive and courage of those people to stand up for what they believe is rightfully theirs.

As I said earlier, many of those councils have been left alone. Councils such as Boulia, Diamantina, Barcoo, Quilpie and Winton have been left to stand alone. But the likes of Aramac, Jericho, Barcaldine and Tambo which is going into Blackall—I believe they are working out an arrangement—have not been left alone. They have been progressive centres that have managed their finances well; they are centres that are encouraging people to come and live there because they are good places to live and rear families; they are centres that are creating an environment where we will see population again descend on those areas. We have seen the demise of the wool industry over the last 20 years. We have seen the roo shooting industry fill the void in some places. Cattle is another industry that has come in. Tourism is also a very big part of western Queensland today.

Those women who travelled to Brisbane last Monday to stand out in front of the Executive Building did not do that just to be posers. They are women of sincere courage who are passionate about the land on which they live and where they come from. They love their families and they love their country. They love what their families support and what they stand for. It was a very courageous effort to travel 22 to 24 hours in a coach to spend a few hours here to express their opinion and then go back. That is what this country is made of. It shows the determination and grit and what these people are made of that they did that to get their point across. I thank those people for their effort. The important thing is that they did it because they believe. That is what has been taken away from them: their right to believe, their right to stand up for what is rightfully theirs.

The Prime Minister has made a commitment to allow referendums to be held in Queensland to determine what people want or how people feel. Now we have an amendment to the legislation to say that councils will be sacked if they progress with that. I believe these are standover tactics. I do not believe that we should be subjected to this in Queensland in 2007. This government must remember that one size does not fit all. We live in a state that is diversified and different, from the densely populated coastal areas to the expanses of the desert and the mountainous regions of inland Queensland to the peninsula regions of the far north.

The other issue I want to touch on, which the member of Cook touched on this afternoon, is the Indigenous councils of north and north-west Queensland. Over the last few years we have seen the Indigenous people lose the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, which was a body that they could speak through; we have seen ATSIC go—and there are probably a few question marks there—and only last year we saw the Aboriginal and Torres Strait island people have the blanket of local government thrown over their communities, which was fantastic. I believe it was an opportunity to bring those communities together as part of the reconciliation process, if we could call it that, so that those people could become a part of mainstream Queensland and we could take them forward and progress their needs.

Now we will see a merger of those Cape York councils. I agree with some of the comments of the member for Cook this afternoon in relation to finances. I still believe we have to give those people self-determination and self-representation. They have a different culture to us and we must respect and appreciate that they are different in that cultural way. We are living in a multicultural country with different nationalities coming from throughout the globe to live here. The people that I refer to in Cape York in the north and north-west of the state are the traditional owners of this country, they are the traditional people and we must embrace them and take them with us.

I also want to touch on the issue of the Remote Area Planning Development Board in Longreach. That board is a very, very successful operation that has been a blanket that covers all the shires of western Queensland. It has identified projects over the last 15 to 16 years to get business together to encourage growth and productivity and to market what we have in western Queensland to get people to come and live there. The same good work is being done by the Central Highlands Promotion Board and South West RED in Charleville.

I want to touch on Emerald and the Bauhinia shire for a moment. We have a situation now where that shire has merged with the Daringa shire in the electorate of Fitzroy and the Peak Downs shire in the electorate of Charters Towers. I applaud those four shires for working together to work out their divisions. It has changed its name from the Emerald Regional Council to the Central Highlands Regional Council. They have shown fine leadership and courage in the power of their convictions in getting that outcome.

Isisford in my electorate has a decent and progressive council. Robbie Bauer, the CEO of the shire, had the vision to see that the railway line to Yaraka was not going to be a paying operation and saw fit to talk to the council about it and then take it up with the adjacent councils and ultimately through to the minister, the Hon. Paul Lucas. He in turn has now agreed to pull the railway up and put a sealed road from Jericho right through to the bitumen between Windorah and Quilpie which will give a sealed road from Windorah to Jericho and ultimately be a tourist link, a link for cattle train trucks going through to Rockhampton and many other varieties of transportation that will accommodate the needs of that area. This is a vision of a small council that is caring about the needs of not only its own people collectively but also the wider community. I believe that people like Rob Bauer and Michelle McFadyen in Ilfracombe should not be thrown to the wind because they are now part of a merged entity. They are progressive and dynamic people who have purpose. Rob Hayward at Tambo is another one and Brenda Kelly in Blackall. Whilst Barcardine will probably retain its CEO, I do not know how it will work. It is very sad that these good people could miss out. I hope that those people will not miss out. I hope that they can be kept in the communities in the region because they understand and know it.

Rob Bauer is worried sick. He has a child away at boarding school in Rockhampton and wonders how he will be able to keep him there. What will we see in a place like Isisford? I hope that the minister will oversee this operation and make absolutely certain that these places will continue to be productive and important integral parts of the merged entities and make their own contribution at the table wherever it be—Longreach, Barcardine, Blackall or Emerald—so that they get the best outcome possible for those people in question.

In relation to the value of properties in those areas, I am sick and tired of people talking property prices down in western Queensland. It is about time we saw people start to talk property prices up. I interjected on the Deputy Premier here the other morning when she was saying that after this charade is all over her house in Brisbane will probably be worth half a million dollars. The houses in Isisford might only be worth \$60,000 to \$80,000 now, but after the amalgamations we have to make certain that they keep their values, we have to make certain that the roads continue to be upgraded and we have to make certain that employees are retained in places such as Tambo, Isisford, Aramac, Jericho and Ilfracombe.

The most important thing to remember is what these councils have done over a long period. They have provided services to the people; they have made certain that the communities are safe to live in by making commitments to sporting events, schools et cetera. This is a very serious situation that we are

confronted with. We are concerned about our democratic rights. We are concerned about our futures. Everybody cannot live on the coast. Some of us do live inland and that is where the wealth of this state and nation is generated. Give us a little bit of a go.

I say to the minister and the government: show these people compassion and understanding as we progress through this transition period. That is absolutely paramount and is in the best interests of everybody in Queensland, not just western Queensland.

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (7.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. Today is exactly one year since I became the Labor candidate for the Waterford electorate. In that time I have faced a number of difficult decisions. This legislation is one of the difficult ones, but I did not get elected to this place to shy away from the tough decisions. This is one issue that, no matter what the state government did, it was never going to be popular. If the state government were to sit back and let local government continue to struggle under the pressure of growth in Queensland we would soon be criticised for doing nothing when we should have foreseen what would happen. The other option—the right option and that option contained in tonight's bill—is to act now to build a strong local government system that can deal with the challenges of growth, that can plan for affordable and sustainable development. Doing nothing is not an option.

Local government is a fundamental part of government in Australia. This level of government is charged with some of the most important decisions for our communities, not least of which is its task to plan and control development of communities. Local governments are responsible for the amenity of our suburbs—whether our homes are a nice place to live. The amenity of our home affects so many other aspects of our life: our wellbeing, our family, our environment and our community support. Strong local governments are essential to ensure that we can plan for the challenges of growth.

In common with the state government, local government is fighting to cope with a thousand or more southerners moving to south-east Queensland each week. Even local government admits that there is a problem. Planning applications have been delayed due to a lack of town-planners. Some developers have more town-planners and more lawyers than the councils they are applying to. Local governments are finding it hard to cope. Even the Local Government Association of Queensland recognises the challenge facing local government.

The LGAQ came to the state government to establish the Size, Shape and Sustainability program. This program, funded by the state government, would see local governments examine and negotiate options for restructure, whether through shared service delivery or through changes to local government or changes to local government boundaries. This program was allocated more than \$25 million and was proudly supported by the state government. But after 18 months, the reality is that the Size, Shape and Sustainability program had not progressed and was not likely to.

The two local governments in my electorate, Logan City Council and Gold Coast City Council, had not even agreed to start negotiations. I understand that the Gold Coast City Council had said it would only participate in negotiations if other councils would agree that no changes to borders would be considered. There were only two agreed amalgamations between two small rural councils after 18 months of talking and more than \$1 million being spent. The cold hard truth is that no local government politician was prepared to make the difficult political decision to share services, to amalgamate or to make common-sense changes to borders. Local government reform requires the agreement of those people who are taking the risk of their own job—local councillors. I must put on record my support for the local government councillors in my area. They are honest and hardworking people who do the best for their constituencies.

While the changes from the Size, Shape and Sustainability program would, if agreed, go to a referendum, voters were never going to get an opportunity to have a say because local governments would not agree to any proposals that affected their current circumstances. Given this stalemate to this important reform process, the state government had no option but to act as it did in April this year. The flaw in the Size, Shape and Sustainability program was that it relied on those who had an interest in maintaining the status quo to agree to any change.

The Local Government Reform Commission, established in April this year, put in place an independent group of eminent Queenslanders to resolve the matter. An independent body reviewing boundaries is nothing new. The state and federal government election boundaries are determined by an independent electoral commission. The independence of the Local Government Reform Commission is beyond question. The commission was chaired by Bob Longland, a former Electoral Commissioner, and included Di McCauley, a former National Party local government minister who served under the Bjelke-Petersen government; former LGAQ president Tom Pyne; former local government minister Terry Mackenroth; and Bob Quinn, a former leader of the Queensland Liberal Party and a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Electoral and Administrative Review which examined the external boundaries of local authorities in 1992.

Because the independent commission was to make such an important decision, I wrote to all residents in the Gold Coast area of my electorate outlining the process, the need for reform and the way in which they could make submissions. A number of residents took the opportunity to make a submission and some contacted me for assistance in making their submission.

My position on the issue of local government reform is clear and has been on the record since April when the first round of legislation was passed. I wrote to constituents explaining the process and why it was needed. I made it clear that I supported the independent review process. I also made it clear that I would be making a submission to the Local Government Reform Commission that the Logan River had served our area well as a border between Logan City and Gold Coast city and it should remain.

As I promised the people of Beenleigh and surrounds, I made that submission. I expressed clearly my view that the current borders had served us well since the 1995 amalgamation of the Albert shire into the Gold Coast city. While we have not always received a fair deal from the Gold Coast City Council over the past 10 years, Councillor Hackwood has been successful in improving our share of funding from the Gold Coast City Council. A lot of hard work has been put into improving the situation.

Beenleigh and surrounds make a unique community. Historically part of the Albert shire, Beenleigh is a large country town with a strong sense of community and a strong sense of history. Halfway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, we have never fitted neatly into the Gold Coast box, but nor have we ever fitted neatly into the greater Brisbane area box.

The process is obviously one independent of politics. When the decision of the Local Government Reform Commission was released I was surprised to say the least. These decisions have been made without fear or favour and free from any vested interest. When the umpire has made a decision the process cannot be undermined because we do not agree with the decision.

The commission faced competing submissions: a submission from Gold Coast City Council arguing for the status quo and a submission from Logan City Council for its boundaries to be extended to that part of the Gold Coast north of the Pimpama River. The commission has based its decision on its view that the Beenleigh/Eagleby area had a greater community of interest with the greater Brisbane metropolitan area, particularly when it came to employment. Essentially, the commission noted that more and more people from Beenleigh and surrounds are working in Brisbane, Brisbane south and Logan than ever before. There were also similar observations in the 1994 Hoffman report that led to the Albert shire amalgamation with the Gold Coast city. The decision to include Beenleigh and surrounds within the new Logan City Council is one that will divide community opinion. Some residents oppose the change, some support the change but many just want to know that they will get quality services for reasonable rates after March 2008. I have been contacting personally those people who have contacted my office to discuss this matter. The key concern raised is about the protection of the identity of Beenleigh and surrounds as a distinct, historic and close-knit community.

I truly appreciate that this change has created significant uncertainty in this regard. A divided council will go some way to ensure distinct representation for Beenleigh and surrounds. In fact, our area will go from one councillor out of 14 to two councillors out of 12. I assure those people who are concerned about the distinct identity that if they live in Beenleigh today they will live in Beenleigh tomorrow. We will continue to grow and prosper. We are a close community and the fact that the local government authority is different will not change our beautiful and unique community.

We have survived the Albert and Gold Coast amalgamation to come out stronger and this amalgamation will be no different. There was great concern about the 1995 amalgamation with the Gold Coast city but those changes have only led to better services and better value for rates.

The new Logan City Council will be a diverse community stretching from rural Mundoolun to residential Woodridge, from Loganholme and Daisy Hill in the east to Heritage Park and Regency Park in the west. Within this broad diversity our status as a distinct community will be respected.

This change raises many issues for the transition of ongoing projects and services currently underway. I have already spoken to many local groups about the transition issues they face. These are all matters which will be considered by the transitional committee and interim CEO that will be established shortly after this legislation passes. As I have committed to those groups, I will be raising these matters with the transitional committee to ensure that the new local government can get off and running in March 2008 and that no time is lost in the meantime.

Can I finish my contribution on this. The Gold Coast City Council must deliver on the commitments to Beenleigh in its 2007-08 budget. The ratepayers of Beenleigh and surrounds have paid their rates in good faith and the Gold Coast City Council has an obligation to deliver quality services up until March 2008. This obligation is not only a moral obligation but also a legal one.

Subsection 229(1)(a) and subsection 229(2)(a) of the Local Government Act 1993 make it clear that councillors have an obligation to act for the entirety of the council. I will be keeping a keen eye on the ongoing expenditure of the Gold Coast City Council to ensure that Beenleigh gets a fair go. I thank the minister for local government and the Premier for their support of the member for Albert, Margaret Keech, and I in making it clear what is required of the Gold Coast City Council in the coming months. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (8.01 pm): I would like to start my contribution by highlighting an inconsistency in the comments of the member for Gregory. I put on the record that I hold the member for Gregory in high regard. During his contribution he praised the members of the review committee.

Mr Bob Longland is a highly respected man. The committee had members representing the Labor Party and the Liberal and National parties. The member for Gregory was quite complimentary about the skills, abilities and talents of these people. The member for Gregory also complimented them on their decision in relation to a number of areas in western Queensland and far-northern Queensland that they left alone.

The inconsistency is that this is the same committee that made the decisions to leave some councils alone and to amalgamate other councils. He cannot say that they are skilled and talented people who made good decisions on the one hand but those same clever, talented, intelligent people made bad decisions to amalgamate on the other. He cannot pick and choose. This august body of people made the decisions for councils right across the state. He may agree or disagree with some of the decisions but there is an internal inconsistency if he wants to pick and choose and say they are clever because they made these decisions but they are stupid because they made those decisions. They are the same people.

I would like to highlight that it was recommended that the Redlands shire have no change made to its boundaries. I would like to discuss the reasons the commission gave for this in its report. I encourage people to actually read those recommendations. It highlights the level of analysis they have gone through and the real thought they have given to the definition of community.

The Redland Shire Council in its submissions asked to take the areas of Springwood, Shailer Park, Loganholme—all those areas that are in the Logan City Council east of the M1. The Redlands shire wished to expand its boundaries to include those areas. The commission recommended no change to the existing shire boundaries. It pointed out that there is no direct connectivity between Springwood and the Redlands. It is very hard for an area to be considered part of a community if there is no direct road transport or public transport to that area.

When we read the analysis it did not involve hard demographics or hard finances. The reason for not including Springwood, Shailer Park and Loganholme in the Redlands is connectivity. People in those suburbs could never really feel connected and part of the Redlands shire. Therefore, it did not support the Redland Shire Council's request to expand into those areas. It kept the Redlands shire as it is.

I congratulate and praise the Redland Shire Council for having good economics over many years. It is sustainable. It is economically sound. At the same time we have developed a real sense of community in the Redlands. There is thought of extending the southern boundary of the Redlands down to the Logan River. It certainly makes a lot of sense to do that. The committee identified the issue of a sense of community.

Whilst members opposite may not agree with the decisions of the committee—and I cannot persuade them otherwise—it is false to say that the committee did not consider the community or the sense of community in its decision making. Its decision in the case of the Redland Shire Council is a firm example of taking that matter into consideration.

It would be remiss of me if I did not raise in this House tonight some concerns that have been raised in my electorate. A number of people have contacted me over their concerns about the name of the new combined Redcliffe, Pine Rivers and Caboolture shire area. These three entities have decided to be called the Moreton Bay shire.

A number of people in my electorate have said that Moreton Bay is an iconic area in south-east Queensland. It extends from up near Caloundra down to the Gold Coast. It is an area of water. Many constituents of mine have said that they are not overly happy with a local government area taking ownership of the Moreton Bay name. I would encourage the new combined shire to revisit the name either in the next few months or after the local government elections in March next year. I understand the concerns. To say one local government area has ownership of Moreton Bay is selling out parts of the Brisbane City Council, selling out parts of the Redland Shire Council and selling out other local government areas that border this beautiful part of south-east Queensland. I would encourage that combined shire to reconsider its name. I would encourage the minister to have discussions with the new amalgamated shire regarding the ownership of this iconic part of south-east Queensland. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (8.07 pm): When looking at the issue of reform in local governance some questions that need to be asked are: does the present structure fit today's society and can it adjust to the challenges of the future; do the boundaries reflect communities of interest; and are those councils viable and sustainable units? The report by the Local Government Reform Commission, an independent commission, did cover and examine these questions and more.

I would say that the majority of local authorities have responded positively in the past to the changes in their communities. However, we are now starting to see some significant changes that will mean some local authorities will lack the resources to be able to respond positively to those challenges.

The challenges are not going to go away, nor are they going to diminish, and therefore local government needs a strategy that will reform it to ensure that they are viable, reflective communities of interest and that they have the economies of scale that will provide the resources expected by

communities. Many have attested that most councils have performed these functions in the past with great success—a claim I will support. However, the increasing expectations of residents, ratepayers, businesses and workers will be unmet by those councils that are already operating at their fullest capacities under the current local government boundaries.

This problem needs to be addressed now and not when it becomes too late. That is exactly what the state government is doing. A concern that has been expressed is the possibility that the plan to create a Sunshine Coast council will result in decisions that go against the best interests of the preservation of Noosa's most significant areas. If the jewels of Noosa are to be maintained for the benefit of all Queenslanders, all Australians and, most importantly, for future generations then adequate protection must be provided. This will be done through state government legislation.

Speaking of Noosa, I want to correct the statement made by the member for Noosa. Firstly, as a ratepayer and resident of Logan City, to say that this bill does not affect me is incorrect. Secondly, council divisions within the electorate of Springwood will be changed due to the expansion of Logan City, and so once again I must correct the member for Noosa.

I now want to refer specifically to the changes for Logan City. The report of the Local Government Reform Commission confirms that while Queensland is the engine room for economic growth of the nation Logan City is the engine room for urban development in south-east Queensland. The report rightly identified that an expanded Logan City Council area will allow for a new council to plan appropriately for the population growth that is forecast for the Pacific Motorway, Mount Lindesay and Logan Motorway corridors. The feedback I received from residents was that they wanted very little change to the current boundaries, and I am pleased that the commission took notice of the council submission which basically reflected this message. The changes that have been made are manageable and sensible. The recommendation from the commission also demonstrates that in Logan City's short life it has developed into a strong and sustainable city and recognises that it is ready to take on the economic and population growth challenges of the future.

I believe the new areas of Beenleigh and Northern Beaudesert are unique identities and have a strong sense of history that adds another flavour to Logan City's natural resources. I also believe that this uniqueness and strong history does not need to be lost in the expansion. Instead, it should be embraced and enhanced when formulating future planning. Currently, there is a debate in the local media on a change of name for the city. While I do not have any suggestions for a new name—and I personally do not even have a desire for a name change—what I do want is for more Logan people to get out there and shout about the fact that Logan City has an enormous amount of positive work being performed. It has an extremely high community spirit and participation rate. Logan City is a great place to live, work and play. It will not matter what name you give a city if all you do is promote negativity. Changing the name does not change the image being portrayed. We need to embrace those councillors who are proud of their community and proud to positively promote their city. As I said before, Beenleigh has always had a very strong identity, no matter what city or shire it belonged to. I have no doubt that this will never change—not because of any name change or boundary change but because the people of Beenleigh know how important it is to promote their area in a positive and proud manner, something which they have always done.

I now want to refer to an article from the *Albert and Logan News* titled 'Logan—where to now?' It says—

Logan City Council has expanded. But what does all this mean and how will it take place?

It continues—

Logan City Council is committed to ensuring that transition to a larger city next year occurs as smoothly as possible.

The article says that CEO Chris Rose—

... stressed it would be 'business as usual' in the three affected councils up to the March 15, 2008 local government election, when the newly elected council would formally come into existence.

'Between now and then, council will undertake a great deal of work to determine how the existing Logan City and the relevant northern suburbs of Gold Coast and Beaudesert Shire will be brought together as a new community' ...

He then went on to answer some key questions that have been put to him by residents, and certainly the community does have a lot of questions which need to be answered. These are the questions contained in the article. It asked—

Will my rates change?

Once the new council is elected on March 15, 2008, it will begin a budget process. This process will ultimately determine rates for the expanded city. These rates will be introduced for the 2008/2009 financial year. Existing rating arrangements will remain in place until the new budget is handed down.

It continues—

Will projects planned for my area still go ahead?

The Queensland Government has given a directive that all projects committed in existing council budgets are to be delivered.

It continues—

Will I still have a local councillor?

The Queensland Government has agreed to Logan's submission for divisional representation for the 12 councillors who will be elected on March 15, 2008. Proposed internal boundaries will be advertised by the Queensland Electoral Commission. Public submissions will be invited and considered.

It continues—

What will happen to council staff?

The Queensland Government has guaranteed staff job security for three years from the local government election on March 15, 2008. Some staff from Gold Coast City Council and Beaudesert Shire Council will be transferred to the new Logan Council as part of the transition process. The number and selection process for these staff have not yet been determined.

How can I stay informed on the progress of preparing for the 'new' council that will come into effect on March 15, 2008?

You can monitor the reform on the Logan City Council's website ...

I seek leave to table that article.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Copy of article from the Albert and Logan News dated 10 August 2007 titled 'Logan—where to now?'

Ms STONE: I believe that the changes that were recommended certainly are good outcomes for Logan City and for its future. I just want to support what the member for Redlands said with regard to the Redland Shire Council submission. It wanted to take Logan East into its boundaries. I believe the commission got that right and we do not have any connectivity with that area. So I believe, as I said, it got it right with the recommendations it has made.

We must also take into consideration when debating this bill that the commission sought public consultation and received tens of thousands of submissions from Queenslanders from all over the state. From its investigations and public submissions, the commission did not change 36 western Queensland councils and was sensible and practical in its recommendations for amalgamation. Consider this: the structure of local government has changed very little over the past 100 years. Our nation and society have changed significantly. It is easy to see why the government is implementing local government reforms. If we are serious about planning for the future, then we must have a strong local government structure. The changes reflected in this bill are positive steps towards securing the relevance and viability of the third tier of government in Queensland. That is why I support this bill and commend it to the House.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (8.15 pm): I rise to speak against the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. In doing so, I am representing the opinion of the vast majority of my constituents within the Tablelands electorate and particularly the four tableland shires of Atherton, Eacham, Herberton and Mareeba which are to be amalgamated into one huge regional council. In three public meetings called at short notice involving over 700 people, all but one was totally opposed to the forced amalgamations being proposed. In other surveys conducted, figures produced were all in excess of 80 per cent against forced amalgamation. There was similar very strong support for the people's right to have a say by way of referendum. The voice of the people on the Atherton Tableland is very clear on this issue. In addition, the Johnstone shire, which is partly within my electorate and which is on the southern coastal edge, will be rolled into one with the Cardwell shire. The Johnstone shire's population is about two-thirds against one-third in Cardwell. It is understandable that the well-managed Cardwell shire and its ratepayers are greatly concerned about taking on Johnstone's financial problems.

The objective of this bill as listed in the explanatory notes is to establish local councils that facilitate optimum service delivery; effectively contribute and participate in regional economies; provide better economic, environmental and social planning; and effectively partner with other levels of government. Our four councils on the Atherton Tableland are already doing a great job of meeting the needs of their people and all four are financially sound, and I want to congratulate them all on the way they have capably conducted their duties at the local level. All four have growing populations and, most importantly, each and every one of them is closely connected to an integral part of their local community. Yet under the proposals to be enshrined in this bill, these four tablelands shires will be merged against their will into a single regional entity covering approximately the area of Tasmania. Can members imagine Tasmania having only one local government? I think not!

I urge members opposite to think about that seriously for a moment. It is an enormous geographical area and yet all of the intricacies and grassroots functions of local government will, under this proposal, have to be understood and delivered by just eight councillors and a mayor—and that is in addition to a host of new duties which this state government intends to impose on them. There is no evidence from any of the other states which have already gone down this path that any amalgamation can guarantee any savings whatsoever. In fact, there is strong evidence that they actually cost more while at the same time representation is reduced.

I have the personal account of someone who lived through this experience firsthand in Victoria. He related that as a result of forced amalgamations his small community has had little or no representation; the impact was all negative; all of his local council equipment was sold off; all contracts

went to large contractors which reduced competition; many smaller local contractors were forced to close due to no longer getting a share of council work; and administration and employment were centralised, and this caused local job losses. While it took some time for all of the negative impacts to become apparent, his community is now barely intact. Its identity and spirit was destroyed, many families were forced to leave and it had no clout to fight for local services because it was too small compared to the other centres in the supershire. Perhaps worst of all, when the community complained it was told to be happy with what it got. What it got was practically nothing.

I will return to the bill. I believe amalgamation would have been more acceptable if councils and residents had more time to consider it and especially if they had been able to have a referendum. Indeed, that was the process that this government had underway with the Size, Shape and Sustainability process. Everyone was shocked when the Premier announced in parliament three months ago that he was calling a halt to the Triple S process. He stated that his government would take over the decision making, cutting short the process by years and stripping away the voters' rights to have a say by way of referendum, which was previously promised. It is a very bitter irony indeed that under Triple S referendums were an integral democratic part of the process.

In his haste the Premier allowed only about a month for submissions and about three months for his appointed reform commission to make their recommendations and compile their report—something that would normally have taken much, much longer. Three months is an unbelievably short time frame. Somehow, from the comfort of their air-conditioned offices in Brisbane, the commissioners who the Beattie government appointed considered more than 47,000 submissions, including 3,796 detailed ones. That works out at something in the order of 500 submissions per day being assessed, considered and dealt with. In addition, the commissioners had to consider all the individual circumstances of every existing local government area before coming up with a detailed report and recommendations, most of which this government has accepted and is ramming through tonight.

The recommendations affecting my electorate will slash representation from 32 mayors and councillors to just nine. That alone will result in the loss of much valuable local knowledge. Premier Beattie claims that this will lead to a stronger council, but I believe that it is more like centralising power and it will lead to greater costs rather than a saving of costs. However, what is guaranteed is that these amalgamations will take away much of our grassroots representation at the local level.

The Premier certainly did not disclose that this kind of massive change was on the cards last year when he went to the election. Yet he and his local government minister have been out there threatening to sack any council that dares to hold a referendum or even a poll of its residents on this issue. That is not democracy. It is a far cry from democracy.

The Atherton Tableland is a tremendously diverse region. Its climate goes from the super Wet Tropics to the dry savanna. Its industries vary from one shire to another. Its agriculture is different. The kinds of tourism it offers are different. The communities of the area have different needs and desires. Most of all, the communities have their own unique identities. This is supposed to be a democracy. The people should have the final say.

I found a very interesting definition of 'local government' while researching this issue. It states—

Although local government responsibilities are not referred to in the Commonwealth Constitution, local government is recognised both as an integral component of the complex system of government in Australia and as an essential element of democratic government because of its closer links and, therefore, potentially greater responsiveness to individuals and the community.

These close links and responsiveness are most important in a state as large as Queensland. That quote is from a chapter of a 1993 publication titled *Decentralization towards Democratization and Development* and was written by none other than the Speaker, the Hon. Mike Reynolds. He went on a little later in the chapter to write—

It would, however, be unwise to take the state's ongoing support for granted as some states have traditionally viewed local government as an agent rather than a partner working in a development role.

Those are telling words indeed, because the Beattie government is certainly acting as if local government is its personal possession to deal with as it wishes. It is not. It belongs to the people just like this state parliament belongs to the people, just like federal parliament belongs to the people and just like the Westminster system of government is a tool of the people, not the politicians.

Although the majority of my constituents are strongly opposed to these forced amalgamations, they are also opposed to the brutal way this government is willing to tear up the most basic democratic right we have, which is to have a vote, and also the changing of our third tier of government from local to regional. In its haste this government has not only denied the people a voice but has also resorted to pathetic bullyboy tactics of threatening mayors and councillors with fines and penalties if they dare ask their people what they want. This bill before us includes provisions legislating penalties and even the sacking of any mayor or councillor who conducts a poll on local government reform or its implementation. Stalin would have been proud of his comrades.

The Premier has tried to argue that this silencing of the people was to save ratepayers' money, yet this Labor government is dipping its dirty hands into our pockets to the tune of more than \$36 million to force these amalgamations on us. He will not give us a say, but he will make us pay for the amalgamations that we do not want. I imagine that hypocrites across the planet may well view this Premier as the finest practitioner of their craft that the state has ever seen.

This ALP government has described these changes as a 'historic program of reform', that they are 'wide-ranging and thorough recommendations for structural reform' and that 'the current structure of local government simply does not prepare us for those challenges'. These challenges the government is referring to are those that it argues only regional councils can meet. In fact, the Premier is on record in *Hansard* on 17 April this year as saying that it would be irresponsible to go into the March 2008 local government elections 'under the same system'. Therefore, the government clearly believes that it is bringing to an end an existing system of local government and replacing it with another. We will not have local government anymore but regional governments. We will not be able to decide for ourselves if our mayors and councillors are full-time or part-time. Our councils will no longer be focused just on roads, rates and rubbish but, according to this bill, on social planning and regional communities of interest, regional economies and partnering with other levels of government and so on. The commission itself recommends not only new boundaries but new classes of councils. Representation will fall—in parts of my electorate from some 600 to 700 electors per councillor to some 3,300, which will be a massively more remote level of representation.

Just last Tuesday the Premier admitted in answer to a question without notice from me that the proposed system will be so different that he expects it to eventually erode away the power of the state government itself. If the government's view is correct and its changes are so deep that they are bringing an end to the system of local government we now have, then perhaps it might like to hear what the Queensland Constitution has to say about the matter. Section 78 applies to a bill for an act ending the system of local government in Queensland. Part 2 specifies—

The Bill may be presented for assent only if a proposal, that the system of local government should end, has been approved by a majority vote of the electors voting on the proposal.

Other parts of the Queensland Constitution guarantee that there must be a system of local government. I believe that section 78 is aimed at protecting the particular kind of system that we have in place, whatever it may be. In other words, it means that a referendum appears to be a constitutional requirement.

There is no doubt that this bill certainly affects local government and that, in turn, triggers section 77 of the Constitution. Section 77(2) states—

The member of the Legislative Assembly who proposes to introduce the bill in the Legislative Assembly must, if the member considers it practicable, arrange for a summary of the Bill to be given to a body representing local government in the State a reasonable time before the Bill is introduced in the Legislative Assembly.

The minister might indicate what efforts he made to meet this constitutional requirement as I understand that no effort was made and it was only as a result of outside pressure that the LGAQ finally had a look at the bill only a scant few hours before it was introduced. The explanatory notes indicate that this bill does not adhere to fundamental legislative principles in areas relating to its dependency on administrative power, review and the sufficiency of its regard for parliament. These are core issues that are being trampled on. But then, as this is a bill that ignores the wishes of the electors of Queensland from a government that refuses to give them a say, sadly that is no surprise.

The explanatory notes also outline the consultation undertaken for this bill. It is a list made up entirely of government departments and the Electoral Commissioner of Queensland.

The LGAQ was not consulted. Civil libertarians were not consulted. The people might have put in 47,000 submissions but how they were given any real consideration at the rate of 500 per day is a mystery to say the least. This process undertaken by the Beattie ALP government will long be remembered for two things. It will be remembered for destroying healthy local government and vital local communities and it will be remembered for subjecting the people of Queensland to the brutality of government by dictatorship. I oppose the bill.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (8.29 pm): Politics, not economics, is the driving reason the Beattie Labor government is pushing through this dictatorial legislation to forcibly amalgamate local governments without giving the people a say. If it were about economics the councils with buoyant and financially sustainable governments would not be facing forced mergers. If it really were about economics, this government would be able to supply us with a cost-benefit analysis. It has not supplied us with a cost-benefit analysis because it has not done a cost-benefit analysis. No competent business would enter into a merger arrangement with another without undertaking its own analysis of the benefits and the costs and deciding whether it was in their net benefit to move ahead. They would also carefully consider the new structure and that process of transition. There is no evidence as to a carefully considered process of transition or cost-benefit analysis because this Labor government did not have a plan of reforming for economic benefit or social benefit; it had the intention of dramatically altering the political landscape of Queensland.

I have listened to a number of Labor backbenchers and ministers and it is clear from the venom they have towards local government and the hatred they have of local councillors operating at the grassroots level that there is more than an element of paternalistic revenge in imposing their will upon the community rather than listening to the voice of the community about how they want to be governed at the local government level. Why is this government not giving the people a choice by way of

referendum for the future boundaries and the future way they are governed at the local level? The government is not doing it because it has a political agenda to radically alter local government in this state. It is an agenda more about trying to bring party politics in at the local government level. It is an agenda to break the structures of very active and engaged communities which have been successful in leveraging that voluntary community labour and integrating that with active local government.

For those members who move around the state, as I know my colleagues on this side of the House do, when we see communities thriving despite sometimes having structures which do not compare to some of the largest councils in this state it makes us ask, 'How do they do as well as they are doing?' It is precisely because they have an engaged community, active local leadership and something that punches above their weight which is doing something regardless of the impact upon their local pocket. For a lot of people in local government throughout this state it costs them to be involved.

Ironically, as councils get larger, as they become larger bureaucracies and as councillors receive greater remuneration, it is a greater challenge for local people to feel a connection with their local council. The diseconomies of scale that come once a local government goes over a certain size are evident in other states. But one of the greatest victims of forced council amalgamations into megacouncils is the loss of that level of community engagement.

I realise that in this House one of the disadvantages which the wider region of Queensland has is that there are 36 seats based in Brisbane. Thirty-four of those seats are held by state Labor MPs. This is one of the most Brisbane-centric state governments we have ever had. It is a Brisbane-centric state Labor government. I believe Brisbane is a great city but it is not representative of all of Queensland. This is one of the reasons that the effectiveness of communities which engage with their representatives is enhanced when you have a local community, a local council and people able to have an impact through a local voice.

We do not want a Brisbane city model imposed upon other regions of Queensland. It is good for Brisbane—they have had it since 1925—but it is not local government and not typical of what would work in other parts of Queensland. There must be respect for local communities. I think one of the greatest tragedies—and I notice Labor members laughing about this—was seeing those young mums travel more than 24 hours on the bus with their children. It makes you want to weep. I can still see Labor members laughing about this. Brisbane Labor backbenchers have no compassion for the fact that their seats and their areas are very different from other parts of Queensland. Let us respect that.

Brisbane is a great city but why impose a city-centric vision on different parts of the state which have a different vision for their communities and which are actively involved in trying to get the best for their communities? Seeing those young mums would make you want to weep. According to Labor members opposite—who are still laughing and carrying on in the parliament as I speak—are those young mums who travelled for over 24 hours in a bus with young children somehow misled in their concept of what is going to happen to their community? Do Labor members seriously believe what I have heard in this parliament today and tonight that people who have gone to those extraordinary measures are somehow out of touch with their communities and that Brisbane based ministers and bureaucrats know better than they do about what is best for the future of their community? Do they seriously think there is something in it for them? They are not even employed by their local government. They are not local councillors; they are concerned people in the community.

This Labor government does not want to give these people a chance to have their say. They do not want to give people a voice by allowing them to have a referendum and say what they want for the future of local government. I challenge this Labor government, if it really believes that this is in the public interest, to take the public with it and be willing to give the people a voice and a vote in a referendum. We know that change occurs in all communities, but where forced change which is imposed by government happens from a city-centric point of view the potential for damage in the long term, particularly throughout a vast and diverse state such as Queensland, is significant.

In Victoria we saw 11,000 jobs lost with forced council amalgamations. I have heard this lie from the Labor government that there will be no job losses. Then we heard modified polispeak: 'We have secured the jobs for three years,' and then I guess it is all in the mix again. The reality is that what they are talking about will be merged council arrangements where jobs will not be secure. There will be three years of limbo for some as they wonder what will become of their jobs, but they will not be protected just because they are under a state award.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: What will happen and what the minister does not understand—and this is what those young mums were desperate for the minister to hear and he did not care—is that when the centre of people's employment is changed to potentially hundreds of kilometres away or further, or when they find out after three years that the merged council no longer wants them in that community—it may not happen overnight but it will happen—as those families leave those communities that is the difference between having a hospital, it is the difference between having teachers in a school, and it is the difference between having a community with a network of sustainable services.

We saw the centralised model of health service delivery in this state that was implemented by this government and it failed. There are now fewer birthing centres throughout rural and regional Queensland thanks to a very decentralised model of health service delivery. If we look at this Labor government's model of other centralised service delivery, we once again see many other areas of reform. If this were really the great reforming Labor government, it would have reformed health so that we had more services throughout Queensland, not fewer services, particularly for the women of Queensland who now have fewer birthing services than ever before.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: We first saw regionalisation under Goss and Kevin Rudd.

Mr Hobbs: And what did we get?

Miss SIMPSON: More bureaucrats and fewer services. Then we saw the next model under Beattie. Once again, there was more centralisation and fewer services. What did we see with the Ambulance Service? Labor said it reformed the Ambulance Service. What did we get? We had a stripping away, once again, of locally based community groups who were involved, integrated and running those services. Labor said, 'No, we're going to reform it for you.' What did it do? It created bureaucracies and centralised power, and we now hear horror stories of people being unable to receive timely services. This is a Labor government that says it is reformist, but its type of reform has a pattern of destroying locally based services.

It is ironic. I cannot think of one local government that has caused the death of its citizens because of a lack of adequate administration. Yet this state Labor government has caused the death of citizens by poor administration—in the Ambulance Service, in the Health service, in the Child Safety service. That is the greatest damnation Labor members will have on their hands. How dare they say they have the right to reform local government when they cannot even reform themselves.

Mr Rickuss: History will be unkind.

Miss SIMPSON: History will be unkind. One of my best friends lost her husband 12 months ago when an ambulance failed to turn up after 30 minutes. This was a young man who was having a heart attack. That form of maladministration—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! The member will return to the matter before the House.

Miss SIMPSON: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, no, no! There is no 'with respect'. You will return to the matter before the House.

Miss SIMPSON: The issue here is that Labor's reforms have literally killed people in this state. Labor does not have a track record which would lead us to trust it with local government. Labor's reforms have literally killed people in this state, and that one example that I mentioned is unfortunately not an isolated one. This so-called reforming, brave government that says it is taking tough decisions has failed to take the decisions which are necessary to deliver the services to people throughout this state—the basic level of services they require, to know they can receive a well-resourced, well-staffed and timely Ambulance Service, that they can have regional and local community based services in their hospitals that will sustain them.

I will move to the Sunshine Coast issue, and I acknowledge my colleagues who spoke about people's concerns about losing their right to have a say. As I and many of my colleagues have said, when change is put to the people they should have a right to determine their future. I support the right of the people to determine their future. Some local governments throughout this state indicated they wanted to move to a process of change, but they did not want this Labor government to take away their right to have a say.

A 2006 report by the School of Economics at the University of New England on South Australian council amalgamations also proved that some of the issues and challenges that local governments face are not reformed by amalgamation. This report said there was 'damning evidence on the inability of amalgamation to improve the financial standing of councils in the state'.

There are communities that are having significant costs shifted down on them from state government legislation and they will face challenges. To simply and naively say that a forced council amalgamation process without adequate resourcing from this government to help them through that time of transition will somehow be of benefit to the community is just deceitful.

I challenge people to remember this. When rates rise in their communities because of forced amalgamation and rushed, unplanned changes, remember that it was this Labor government that did this. When communities cannot access their local councillor because the councillor is covering a larger area or the communities may only have minor representation compared to what they had before, remember that it was a Labor government that brought that to their community. For those parts of Queensland where there is a more fragile balance of sustainability which is based particularly upon a

critical mass of population, and when families leave those towns over the years due to council workers leaving because they are no longer locally employed, remember that this was done by a Labor government.

Queensland has traditionally been a decentralised state. It has actually been the strength of this state that we have had a network of vibrant communities. One of the concerns is that, as the population pressure along the coast and particularly in south-east Queensland has grown, this Labor government has failed to understand that one of the answers to the pressure in some areas is in fact strengthening the regional services so we actually maintain that decentralised network of vibrant and sustainable communities. Queensland is different and we should be proud of the fact that we do have a diversity of regions. They are not all the same. One solution does not fit every community. Communities that are engaged in their future are the healthiest of all.

One of my concerns is that this process of forced council amalgamation—where people have had their rights stripped away and they cannot have a say in their future—will mean that we run the real risk of people in the future saying, ‘Why bother?’ They will become more disengaged and less involved in their communities and local governments, rather than more involved. There is already a degree of cynicism about other levels of government and whether people’s voices have an impact. If that is taken away at a local government level, it will only breed a greater degree of cynicism.

A move to centralised power rather than developing community based capacity shows ignorance of what our communities really need. We need communities that are engaged and which are leveraged way beyond the dollar value. I urge this government to look at the examples of other states where forced amalgamations have caused local communities to lose jobs and they have failed to address those issues that do challenge councils, their ratepayers and their lifestyle.

Let us not forget again those young mums who travelled on this bus that came down to Brisbane. They were speaking for their community. I acknowledge them and salute them for that. Let us also acknowledge all those others who have gathered at rallies around this state over the last few weeks. They were also speaking for their communities. Really, this government should have given them the right to have a say. The government has lost the respect of many people who may have been Labor voters. It has lost the respect of people. The people do not believe that this Labor government will address those issues that do challenge communities. We need the support of the government, not their absolute arrogant, paternalistic answers which take away the rights of people to have a say about how their future is determined.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (8.47 pm): Beaudesert and Boonah shires are generally recognised as the two shires which are most severely affected in this amalgamation exercise. The premise for this exercise was to form stronger councils. Beaudesert was strong. It had a great urban rate base in the north, around Park Ridge, with the rural areas of the south. Boonah was about to celebrate 125 years of strong development. There was no desire or need to amalgamate. The catalyst was supposedly to make the councils stronger.

In looking at the simple facts of the forced amalgamation of Beaudesert and Boonah shires into what will now be the Scenic Rim, the basic facts are these. Beaudesert shire loses 40,000 residents living in the fast-growing northern urban areas. It picks up 10,000 residents of the very rural areas of Boonah, Kalbar, Peak Crossing and Harrisville. The result, especially when we are trying to form a stronger council, is a net loss of 30,000 people—30,000 people who are basically urban area development.

The commission’s comments were that all this will now form a financially weak council. They said that in their report. Their desire is to form a stronger council, yet the report states basically that what they have formed is a council with 30,000 fewer people—30,000 fewer urban people—and a council which they say will be financially weak.

Mr Rickuss: What is the area?

Mr LINGARD: I will talk about the area. All this against the stated desire to strengthen councils. All this against massive shire neighbours. The neighbours of the new Scenic Rim council will be Ipswich, massive; Brisbane, massive; Logan, massive; and the Gold Coast, massive. Yet here sits a shire which is now to be financially weak, according to the commission, with 30,000 fewer people in the urban area.

Boonah and Beaudesert have 740 council employees. They have now been told that 300 employees will not be required. So 300 will not be needed in the new Scenic Rim Regional Council. Ipswich, with an expanded council, will clearly want all of their workers; they will not want any extra workers. Logan, with an expanded area, will not require any other workers. So there are 300 extra workers who clearly, over the next few years, must find a new job.

The Beattie government guaranteed that there would be no net job losses, no forced redundancies or relocations as a result of these forced amalgamations. For a Beaudesert Shire Council worker living at Rathdowney it is a two-hour trip to Logan City. That is the nearest place he could be re-employed. Clearly, such an employee will have no option but to relocate somewhere. Hundreds of people will not be required to work for the Scenic Rim Regional Council. These people will have to travel great distances to their places of employment, depot or office if they want to remain in their home town.

The government has supposedly given assurances that staff will be retained for the next three years, but what will happen then? Whilst jobs are guaranteed, positions have not been guaranteed, nor have the localities from where these local government employees will work. There will be major disruptions for families. How can the government guarantee that some staff will not lose their jobs in the long term? How will the new Scenic Rim Regional Council, with half the population and twice the liabilities, be able to support essential services? I am unable to see anywhere else in the state where this process has been so blatantly gutted as Beaudesert shire or the Scenic Rim shire.

If an employee takes a redundancy I believe they will be greatly affected by the federal government's new rules which came into effect from 1 July. These new rules state that employment termination payments cannot be rolled over into a super fund. This will leave the local government employee greatly disadvantaged through no fault of their own. If an employee takes a reduction in salary this will have a severe impact on the level of benefit the employee will receive from the defined benefit fund. There are 6,000 local government employees in Queensland in this fund.

Why did we allow the South East Queensland Regional Plan? Why did the government make every council complete new integrated planning schemes? These processes cost the two amalgamated councils of Beaudesert and Boonah millions. How could Premier Beattie be genuine about the entire process when the review by the commission decided to create a financially weak regional council? I repeat that again and again. How can the government say that it was setting out to form stronger councils? How could it take councils like Boonah and Beaudesert and form what the commission says will be a financially weak council? How can it say it is not going to be a financially weak council when it has taken 30,000 urban people from Park Ridge, an area which is clearly going to grow and grow massively—I will provide the figures—out of Beaudesert shire, which had a prosperous future and considering the rate base on the northern end of the shire obviously it was looking forward to a great future? Beaudesert loses the high-growth area north to Logan but picks up the rural shire of Boonah and in so doing Beaudesert takes on an extra \$5 million in debt. Boonah cannot be expected to have the rate base or the projected growth rate of the previous northern part of Beaudesert shire. It is not claimed that it has. It has tremendous urban growth which will continue to occur but nowhere near the massive growth that was occurring in the northern areas of Flagstone, Logan Village, Yarrabilba when it was built and, of course, Park Ridge.

What this new council will be forced to face is all the difficulties which supposedly were the reasons for forced amalgamation. How can this new regional council be expected to remain viable? The present Beaudesert shire—I refer to the member for Lockyer's interjection—has an area of 2,884 square kilometres, but the Scenic Rim Regional Council will increase it to 4,356 square kilometres. This is an increase of nearly 50 per cent in area. The increase brings with it a matching increase in roads, bridges et cetera and the costs which have been a major problem for the present shire. It is a major problem for Beaudesert. It is a major problem for Boonah. The present shire has a population of 62,246, but the Scenic Rim Regional Council population will drop to 34,659, a decrease of 45 per cent. Half the number of residents will have to pay for about one and a half times the roads and bridges alone.

The commission estimates only 12.5 per cent growth of population by 2026—that is 4,400 people. As I have said, the government has already gutted the new Scenic Rim council and yet by 2026 there is only an increase of 4,400 people. Compare that with what is to be given to Logan, an area of 635 square kilometres with a present population of 38,252 to increase by 2026 to 106,605. The new areas of Yarrabilba, a new township of 50,000 people; areas of Logan Village; the whole area of Jimboomba; the area of Flagstone; and the area of Greenbank are all gone from what was once upon a time a very strong and prosperous council. With a population approaching 70,000 for the previous Beaudesert shire and an operating budget of around \$60 million, Beaudesert shire had a great future with the economics to fund major projects. It has all ended in a puff of smoke.

For instance, southern Beaudesert shire has approximately 100 or so very old small timber bridges, most of which are in poor condition, a number with load limits and needing replacement. They will cost tens of millions of dollars to replace and maintain. Add to that the timber bridges in Boonah shire and we have a real problem. There is also the future of the Bromelton industrial area. Is there some obscure process in place to see this area remain in limbo for the next 20 years? What is the Beattie government's plan for the inland port?

My other concern is that the commission continues to say that areas like Mount Tamborine asked to stay in Beaudesert shire. What it said when it was originally asked was that it wanted to stay in Beaudesert shire; it did not want to go to the Gold Coast. But if it was asked now it would say that it did not want to stay in the gutted Beaudesert shire. It originally wanted to stay in Beaudesert shire if Beaudesert shire stayed the way it was with the strength of the northern areas. If members went to Mount Tamborine now and asked people whether they wanted to stay in the Beaudesert shire, with the knowledge that a new shire was to go to Rosewood which included the southern rural areas of Beaudesert—with 98 per cent before saying they wanted to stay with Beaudesert shire—after the new boundaries I would not be surprised if less than 50 per cent wanted to stay. They can now see strength in the Gold Coast rather than staying in an economically weak Beaudesert shire.

The commission is saying now that Mount Tamborine asked to stay with Beaudesert shire, similar to Peak Crossing and Harrisville which originally said they wanted to stay with Boonah. Yes, they wanted to stay with Boonah if Boonah stayed with Beaudesert—the whole of Beaudesert, an economically strong Beaudesert shire. But what has happened is that Beaudesert has been gutted and it would be quite obviously more simple for the Peak Crossing and Harrisville people to stay with Ipswich. That is only common sense.

Once again the commission turns around and says that Mount Tamborine asked to stay where it put them. It says Peak Crossing and Harrisville asked to stay where they are now. That is completely misrepresenting the situation because it is quite clear now that having seen the gutted Scenic Rim Regional Council, Mount Tamborine and Beechmont would have had much more success going down towards the Gold Coast, and Peak Crossing and Harrisville would have had more success going towards Ipswich.

It is nonsense to say that because Boonah shire is being amalgamated into a bigger shire it is satisfying any of the objectives of the reform commission. The fact is that it is creating a weakened shire and grouping massive needs into a little pocket of south-east Queensland. It has whacked this little Scenic Rim shire—very much a rural area with virtually no urban growth and no prospects until 2026—in amongst the massive councils of Logan, Brisbane, Ipswich and the Gold Coast. I cannot see anywhere else in the reform process where a shire has been gutted. It simply defies all logic. Why amalgamate councils like Pine Rivers, Redcliffe and Caboolture to achieve financial strength on the one hand and in the same process create a weak shire called Beaudesert Regional Council, where the name has already been changed to Scenic Rim Regional Council, with a population of just 34,000?

To be consistent, all of Boonah should have gone to Ipswich, all of Beaudesert should have gone to Logan and all of the Beaudesert hinterland should have gone to the Gold Coast. What could be the motivation and how could this happen? It is obvious that the land use planners, the Office of Urban Management and their political masters, were in control of the Local Government Reform Commission and the infrastructure engineers were not even consulted.

We all know Terry Mackenroth's attitude towards urban sustainability. It is similar to that of the Deputy Premier. They say urban sprawl will not continue. It is quite obvious that this government has set out to blatantly control the development of areas such as Park Ridge and Coomera and control urban sustainability so that they bring development back into the city. I have spoken about this before in this House. I have spoken about what is happening in Perth where they blatantly say that they have to control the development of Perth. They will not allow development to go further north or south because the government cannot control the financial infrastructure that is required.

When the Public Works Committee went to Perth, they said to us that we are going to have the same trouble in Queensland. Unless we control the development in the area north and south of Brisbane, the government cannot afford the infrastructure. When we came back we wondered what they were talking about. If we go to Melbourne and look at what is happening around Docklands, we see that they are doing exactly the same thing. Sydney is doing exactly the same thing, too. Now we see that this government is trying to control the development to the south and to the north and bring it back into the inner-city areas.

It is those people who have the philosophy of no more urban sprawl who are affecting many of our decisions. I agree that obviously many people want to live in the urban areas around Boonah and Beaudesert. I know that if that continues we probably will have strong concerns about infrastructure. But that thinking has affected this plan. This is about the regional plan and about the urbanisation and infilling of the north of the existing Beaudesert shire. It is an end to unfashionable, low-density residential living in the eyes of neo-urban planners and the realisation of the urban footprint.

This is a perfect example of what I believe is an arrogant and dictatorial government making undemocratic decisions about something which will affect and impact negatively upon the jobs and the way of life of many thousands of country folk. I believe this amalgamation proposal will go a long way to completely shattering the morale and self-esteem of these communities which are already suffering from the effects of drought.

One of the other indirect problems I see is what might happen with hospitals. Beaudesert and Boonah both have two significant rural hospitals. I have spoken many times in this House about what is happening with Beaudesert Hospital. It is a magnificent hospital with 40 beds but the whole maternity section has been closed down. It is a brand-new hospital with absolutely no maternity services. The attitude of the bureaucrats is that all these people around Beaudesert can come into the city. Of course they can come into the city; we know that. But we all know what it means for a woman who is about to have a baby and her family: they have to travel into Logan for all the prenatal services, postnatal services and for the birth of the child, especially when there is a brand-new hospital with 20 maternity beds sitting there that is now used as a conference centre and storerooms.

The other night I mentioned in the House the X-ray units at Boonah hospital. I said that Fuji is putting in the new X-ray services. The Boonah hospital had been closed for three weeks to allow this X-ray machine to go in. They spent \$7,000 of their own money and they restored the rooms completely.

Fuji was supposed to complete the whole project on Monday. Fuji has not done it. For anyone who has anything to do with this JNet service, there are 70 hospitals around Queensland which have this new X-ray equipment going into them. I said that the old equipment had to be put back on Monday and they had to use the temporary services.

You would not believe it, but the minister has come out in the news today when asked by the ABC if I criticised Queensland Health when I said it was not good enough that this had happened and the minister said, 'The patients at Boonah can go to Ipswich Hospital.' That was his reply to the ABC host: the people of Boonah can go to the Ipswich Hospital. That is the trouble. If we allow bureaucrats and ministers to continue this process, every school in these rural areas will be closed because it is easy to put kids on a bus and take them into a central area; it is easy to close the Boonah hospital and take them all into Ipswich. Ipswich has magnificent services, but you still have to get people from Boonah to go there. There is this situation at Beaudesert which has a magnificent new hospital sitting there virtually vacant except for older people waiting to get into nursing homes. It is sitting there vacant because bureaucrats say that it is easier to take people to the hospital at Logan. What we are seeing now is centralisation occurring. Many bureaucrats have this attitude of, 'We don't need to continue these services in country areas; we can bring these people into the city.'

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (9.04 pm): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARRY: I gave you guys a chance; it would be nice to be heard in silence. As the Deputy Premier and Treasurer pointed out again earlier this week, Queensland is the power engine of the Australian economy, outperforming states like Victoria and New South Wales which, because of their populations and history, have traditionally been the lead states for business and residential growth. Australians have always been pioneers seeking out new frontiers and opportunities for themselves and their families. So it is no surprise that we are seeing the population growth each week that Queensland is experiencing. It would be easy as a government and a community to sit back and enjoy the economic benefits of the resources boom and the beautiful weather and lifestyle of Queensland, to coast along with the good times for the next decade, to enjoy the ride so to speak and to not upset the apple cart with the undertaking of the kind of reform that the government and the minister are seeking to achieve with this bill.

The bill before the House today has a clear eye on Queensland's continuing prosperity with a plan to historically overhaul the local government boundaries to ensure that our state's councils are reforming in the best strategic way they can for their communities. The undertaking of this reform has been based on the recommendations provided to the government by the independent Local Government Reform Commission and will, after this bill passes in this place, be put before the ECQ to undertake the task of drawing up divisions to ensure fairness and appropriateness of local representative areas. The passage of this bill at this time will also give local transition committees the time to oversee development of the new councils before the March 2008 elections.

These local transition committees will have clear terms of references that have already been released by the minister and their work will give residents, council staff and local representatives access to information about how their council areas will be affected by the new changes and, more importantly, give them accurate information that informs them about such things as job security and transitional fiscal arrangements. These local transitional committees will have strong union and community representation and transparency.

As the representative of the Aspley electorate and as someone who lives in the Pine Rivers shire in the electorate, I have already raised previously in this House the extreme pressure on our community that arises from the constant flow of traffic from the regions of Pine Rivers, Caboolture, Redcliffe and the Sunshine Coast—people who travel through Aspley to get to work in the centre of Brisbane every single day. There are 60,000 cars a day on Gympie Road, on which 75 per cent of the people who live in the shires of Caboolture, Redcliffe, the Sunshine Coast and Pine Rivers travel to the city every day for work. We talked about the women who I appreciate had a long journey down for the protests. The people who work in the city and live in those outlying shires would spend on average four hours a day, five days a week travelling. If you give them four weeks of holidays a year, that is 960 hours of their life every single year spent travelling to and from their places of work.

As I have said before, the biggest challenge facing those of us who represent the north greater Brisbane region is to find a way to reverse that movement. One of the answers is the creation of new regional centres that have both the status to attract head offices and branches of the private sector and the economy of scale that attracts large numbers of workers who live close to where they work and provide as many local services that local people need as possible, reducing the need for extensive car travel for the vital services and work that is required.

Under this plan, the areas of Pine Rivers, Caboolture and Redcliffe will become the Moreton Bay Regional Council with over 340,000 residents already with more to come each week. The opportunity for this council and its residents in which I live and represent is to create viable transport business service

hubs to maximise movement within the shire and reduce the daily exodus to Brisbane. I believe that all three shires have been doing a good job of trying to create hubs of employment and industry individually. In Pine Rivers the Brendale Industrial Estate has huge potential to be the largest industrial region within Queensland. Strathpine is already on its way to developing as a centre of government and private business. The new courthouse creates great benefits to the hub.

But the three councils left to separately operate will not and have not created the scales of economy needed to attract the private sector head offices that currently feel that they must be addressed in Brisbane city to be competitive in their industries. This has been a regular challenge identified by members of the greater Brisbane regional forums conducted by the Department of Communities who have asked us to create these regional hubs. We must make these changes in my local area if we are to seriously protect our enviable lifestyle in the Pine Rivers.

I have listened to lots of people across Queensland as I have travelled in my role as the parliamentary secretary to the minister for education. I still feel with conviction that this reform is vital for our state. Our only mistake, as I see it, is that we hoped that the Triple S process would deliver the kinds of outcomes that we have talked about. Our mistake was to believe that we had sufficient numbers of council representatives who could make the kind of courageous decisions that this local government minister has. They did not and the decision has rightly been reformed from their hands. Modern cities, modern states need modern councils. This is the way forward. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms van LITSENBURG (Redcliffe—ALP) (9.10 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. This has been a long and difficult journey for me personally even though I understand that in the long term these changes will be good for Queensland as a whole. I supported the Redcliffe City Council's submission to the commission to remain independent and expand its boundaries to its historical limits.

Like all Redcliffians I am proud of my city and its history as the place of first European settlement in Queensland. I was keen to preserve Redcliffe city as a local government and ensure this status was maintained. Like many of my constituents I was surprised and shocked by the scale of the commission's recommendations. While I am disappointed in the outcome I recognise that this is the decision of the independent umpire.

Many people have expressed their concerns about this change. Some of the most vocal have been our seven local councillors. This is understandable. There will be fewer elected officials in this new council. I feel sympathy for them. Some 3½ years ago I was elected with them and I have worked closely with them. Together we put forward a strong submission. But, unfortunately, the commission made a different determination. This is an emotional issue for many of my constituents.

Redcliffians are a proud people—proud of their history, their city and its unique lifestyle. Understandably, many are concerned about what these changes mean for their future. Like many of my colleagues in this place and many mayors and councillors across Queensland I am faced with a difficult choice: to give in to this fear of change and fight to maintain the status quo or to accept the umpire's decision and put my shoulder to the wheel and make it work and get the best deal for the Redcliffe community.

In spite of my personal feelings I know the time has come for me to be professional and do the job the Redcliffe people elected me to do—that is, represent them to the best of my ability during this transition period. It is vital to consider why these amalgamations have been proposed. Queensland's regions have been experiencing unprecedented high growth. That growth is set to continue with a million people set to move into south-east Queensland in the next 20 years.

Many of those people, around 300,000 to 400,000, could be moving into that belt west of Redcliffe in the North Lakes, Mango Hill, Burpengary, Narangba, Morayfield areas. To ensure these new residents and the people already living in the Redcliffe, Pine Rivers and Caboolture areas have access to the services and infrastructure they need it is vital that our councils are able to plan on a regional basis. The time has come for us to face change that will ensure our councils have the resources and the clout to deliver what our communities need into the future.

I know that the process of transitioning from three local governments to one will be really tough. My job is to make sure that Redcliffe is not disadvantaged in this change. One issue I immediately raised with the Premier and the minister last week was the name of the new authority. I am pleased that the government has accepted the recommendation of the three councils that the new authority be called the Moreton Bay Regional Council. Redcliffe in particular has an affinity with the bay. I am sure this name will mean much more to my constituents than North Moreton Regional Council.

The other issue that I immediately raised with the Premier and the minister was that if the new council was undivided for the elections Redcliffe would not be guaranteed any representation on the new council. I am pleased that the government accepted my suggestion that Moreton Bay councillors be elected from divisions. This means Redcliffe will have a guaranteed voice. At least some councillors will be elected from the Redcliffe Peninsula.

The quality of our local services and infrastructure in Redcliffe in the future will depend on the quality of the councillors we choose to represent us. That is something we will all have a say in. We will need councillors who have good negotiation skills, who can build bridges and understand the needs of local people but, most of all, councillors who have a passion for the city we love.

This legislation does affect our emotions and it triggers uncertainties and fears for the future. But it is Queensland's future we need to look to. Each small corner and each small town contributes to the whole Queensland. Redcliffe will not disappear with these administrative changes. Redcliffe city is more than a council; it is the people themselves.

If this legislation is passed we will still have the beautiful beaches and red cliffs overlooking the bay, the Redcliffe jetty and the mighty Redcliffe Dolphins. Interestingly, two days after the commission's recommendations were released the Redcliffe Dolphins played the Wynnum Manly Seagulls down at Dolphin Oval. It reminded me that for some 80 years Wynnum was amalgamated into the new Brisbane City Council. This was no doubt a frightening time for local Wynnum residents who would have been concerned about local services and infrastructure and preserving their identity.

With the benefit of decades of hindsight could anyone argue that the people of Wynnum or greater Brisbane would have been better off with a multitude of small councils? Could anyone say that the people of Wynnum, ably represented by Labor greats like the late Tom Burns and now by Paul Lucas, have lost any of their sense of community? I am pleased to say that the Redcliffe Dolphins thrashed the Wynnum Manly Seagulls 50 to 10 that day. Just like our football team I know that Redcliffe will power on, even with these changes.

It is the people who make our city unique, the place it is. Redcliffe is kept alive in our hearts through our willingness to contribute to our community, to volunteer, to provide rich and unique services and to showcase our cultural wealth. The establishment of a regional council will not change this. We will fight to keep our city unique within a regional council and that will give us the clout to face the future. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr WENDT (Ipswich West—ALP) (9.19 pm): After listening to today's debate, I think it is important to once again put on the record why the Beattie government decided to pursue this significant reform agenda. In April of this year this government made one of the most difficult but critical decisions of recent times in entering into an historic review of Queensland's local government system. This action was deemed necessary as Queensland's local government system had been widely recognised as being outdated and in need of modernisation so that it could better reflect the way Queenslanders live, work and interact in today's world. Members probably need to go back in history to understand that Queensland's local government boundaries were largely created more than 100 years ago. That is long before Queenslanders had cars, aeroplanes, highways, telephones, the internet and so on. However, it is significant to note that the need for local government reform in Queensland was an issue first raised by the local government sector itself.

As far back as 2005, the Local Government Association of Queensland was so concerned about local government sustainability that it instigated a reform process for local government and in so doing sought a partnership with the state. What was good about this process was the fact that it resulted in 118 councils agreeing to investigate their long-term future through the Size, Shape and Sustainability initiative, or Triple S as it became known. However, even though there was some will to improve, the program failed to deliver timely or meaningful reform. As such, in February of this year the government agreed that local government sustainability needed to be addressed as a priority.

As we all know now, the minister then wrote to all mayors in March asking them to assess the progress of the Size, Shape and Sustainability program and asking them to provide him with advice on what they believed the Triple S reform agenda could achieve and in what time frame. This is where it became interesting, for responses from councils clearly showed that substantial local government reform was not going to be achieved through the Triple S process before the 2008 local government elections. Therefore, as a result of this inactivity, the government was left with no option but to implement the local government reform process which involved establishing an independent Local Government Reform Commission to provide recommendations on the most appropriate system of local government for Queensland.

It is vitally important at this stage to remember that the seven members of the independent commission were selected from a wide cross-section of stakeholders with particular importance paid to ensuring that representation from all political parties was guaranteed. As such, I am aware that Mr Bob Quinn, the previous Leader of the Liberal Party, and Ms Di McCauley, a previous local government minister in the National Party government, were invited and subsequently agreed to provide their expertise on this important initiative. I should also highlight the fact that the appointment of these two significant political figures was conveniently overlooked by a previous speaker earlier in the evening. I wish to put on record my total support for the course of action taken by the government in this instance and particularly want to acknowledge the leadership of the minister for local government during the process so far.

It needs to be noted that the main reason why this reform process was so needed was due to the fact that the financial sustainability reviews undertaken as part of the Triple S process, as well as other financial audits, clearly highlighted the failing financial capacity of a number of local governments. In addition, an analysis of 94 councils by the QTC against a 10-year financial sustainability forecast rated 43 per cent of these councils—that is 43 per cent—as having a weak, very weak or financially distressed financial outlook. Nevertheless, if one ever needed further reasons to support the restructure, I am aware that other reports by independent bodies such as the Queensland Auditor-General, PricewaterhouseCoopers and McGrath Nichol highlighted similar financial problems across Queensland's local government sector. What this all goes to show is that all Queenslanders, no matter where they live, deserve access to a strong, financially viable local government, and as such this government has set about making the tough decisions to make local government sustainability a reality. As such, I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.23 pm): On 27 July the Local Government Reform Commission handed over its report on council boundaries in Queensland. It is a very thorough two-volume, 455-page report based on solid and well-researched data. Over a three-month period it reviewed boundaries and other local government matters and built on the work undertaken by councils as part of the Size, Shape and Sustainability program.

Let me start my contribution tonight by again putting on record my thanks to the chair, Bob Longland, an independent person who is well regarded by all sides of politics, and commissioners Di McCauley, a National Party minister for local government; Bob Quinn, the former Liberal Party leader; Terry Mackenroth, a former Labor minister for local government; Sir Leo Hielscher, a legend if you like in terms of public administration in this state, who served the Bjelke-Petersen government as indeed he would serve mine as an independent person; Tom Pyne, the former mayor of Cairns, an amalgamated council; and Kevin Yearbury, who was appointed by Di McCauley as a director-general. In other words, they are a very bipartisan group of people—independent commissioners—who came down with these recommendations. These recommendations were comprehensive and far reaching and the test of history will be that when they are examined people will judge them accordingly. This is actually a well-researched and well-presented report. It is thoughtful and it is considered. Anyone who can actually—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Please. This is actually a thoughtful contribution.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Let us have a bit of courtesy here. We do not need to be rude. The important thing about this was that it was a thoughtful and considered report by non-political people in the sense of their contribution. Yes, there were three former ministers, but because of that they were qualified to look at the state in this regard. I do not hear in this debate any criticism of Di McCauley or Bob Quinn by those conservatives opposite. Why? Because if they do they know it undermines their criticism. These people came forward with a report that was in the interests of the state and I want to—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No-one takes you seriously here. Please just—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jones): Member for Warrego, I warn you.

Mr BEATTIE: I just say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that no-one takes the opposition spokesman on this seriously, and I do not intend to tonight. I want to make a contribution with courtesy—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warrego, the speaker will be heard.

Mr BEATTIE: I want to make a contribution with courtesy. All I ask is this: we have had enough rabble. I want to make a contribution with a bit of courtesy and I do not—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warrego, I have warned you.

Mr BEATTIE: I will not take any more interjections, because this is a serious contribution without the sort of political nonsense that we have heard from the opposition spokesman. Let me move on. These individuals are people who are well regarded. The National Party does not want to criticise Di McCauley. Why not? Because she was one of them. She served with the opposition spokesman. Why does the member for Warrego not criticise her? Because he knows she is right. At the end of it he can say what he likes about this, but the hypocrisy of his position is that he wants to criticise one of his own. Bob Quinn was a former Leader of the Liberal Party. They all signed off on this. Why? Because it was considered and thoughtful. That is what it was.

The commission's recommendations, as I say, were comprehensive and far reaching. My cabinet considered and accepted all of the boundary recommendations because they were thoughtful and because they were considered. We also approved 22 of the other 25 recommendations it made. There were three recommendations we did not accept, and there were good reasons for that. Firstly, it

recommended that all councils subject to the review should conduct their elections on an undivided basis. We did not accept that because we wanted to go back to councils and, where they reached agreement, give them an opportunity to put up divisions. That was about us giving them a say.

The minister wrote to them, emailed them and gave them a chance to put forward a recommendation. If they agreed unanimously to the new amalgamated councils, that would have been accepted without any criticism. We would have accepted those recommendations. Where there was no agreement, then obviously the minister had to make decisions. As we toured the state, we made that clear to the council representatives we met. In line with the wishes of the councils, we decided that internal divisions could be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the new councils. As a result, 26 councils will go to next year's election with divisional boundaries and 46 will be undivided. There are some who ask why we are pursuing this with such haste. There is no haste, but there is a necessity. The state Electoral Commission and the federal Electoral Commission insisted that they needed to have the divisions by 27 September because if they did not have them by that date then they were not in a position to prepare the rolls. There is a joint roll—a federal and state joint roll. This was set by their agenda. We accepted that and hence the reason why this needs to go through tonight and be law tomorrow is so that we can have the divisions for those councils that want them.

We are giving the councils divisions at their request. To do other than this would mean that there would be no time to finalise divisions.

Mr Schwarten: That's what they want.

Mr BEATTIE: The opposition do not want these councils to be divided. It is opposed to divisions because it is doing everything to wreck what is a sensible plan. That is the first one. The second one is the decision as to whether councillors who serve in a full or part-time capacity should remain with the relevant council. We will establish an independent tribunal to set salaries for all mayors and councils in local government. The salaries that are set will determine whether the councillors are considered to be full-time or part-time. Thirdly, we also rejected a recommendation in relation to suspending small boundary matters related to Hope Vale, Wujul Wujul and the Cook Shire Council. The commission suggested that these matters be resubmitted by the councils after the March election. However, we decided that these matters can be resolved sooner prior to the 2008 election.

Recently I was in that area with Warren Pitt, the minister for Indigenous affairs. These councils—both the Indigenous councils and the Cook Shire Council—made it clear that they wanted these amendments. Hence if we can do it, let us do it. That is exactly what we are doing. I should say that the member for Cook was also there. He witnessed those conversations and he knows exactly what they wanted. We are now agreeing to what they want and what the member for Cook wants.

This legislation provides a blueprint to create stronger councils for a growing state. This is a historic day to give councils greater clout than they have ever had before. Over the past 50 years Queensland's population has almost tripled—growing by more than 2.5 million people. Our cities, towns, suburbs and communities have all changed. However, our system of local government has not. These local government boundaries have been around prior to the Wright brothers being able to fly, for heaven's sake. Surely after 100 years they require change. The population has changed. The culture of Queensland has changed. We need stronger councils to deal with the future growth of this state. That is what we are determined to do. As I said, the current local government boundaries are more than 100 years old. They do not reflect the growth in our population, the changes in demographics, or the shifts in our communities. They are out of date, they are historic, they require change and we are going to change them in the best interests of Queensland.

We have more councils than any other state or territory in the country. I ask members to just think about that. We have close to double the number of councils that there are in Victoria, yet we have approximately one million fewer people. I ask members to forget about the vacuum opposite. Let us talk about the facts. Many of our councils are no longer financially viable. That is simply not sustainable. A growing state such as ours needs strong, sustainable councils that can provide better services for ratepayers.

I mentioned Victoria. When Jeff Kennett, the Liberal Premier of Victoria, brought about local government reform—supported by the Prime Minister, John Howard—was there any opposition? No—not from the Prime Minister there was not, because there was not a federal election around the corner. What did Jeff Kennett do? Jeff Kennett sacked all the councils and appointed administrators. There was not one left. Overnight he sacked the lot of them. We did not do that. We acted in a compassionate and sensible way with the councils. We did not sack them and appoint administrators like Jeff Kennett did. I have spoken to Jeff Kennett. Jeff Kennett gave me some advice. He said, 'Don't leave them, sack them.' We did not do that. We acted in an appropriate way to treat our mayors and councillors with respect.

Mr Wallace: Who was the Prime Minister then?

Mr BEATTIE: It was John Howard—the same Prime Minister who wants to play politics in this state, supported by those opposite, and they will have the same future that he will have.

Councils have recognised this need themselves. Many participated in the Size, Shape and Sustainability initiative. Unfortunately, owing to the—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I say to those guys opposite that we love them. They are the best thing going for us. They can interject all night. We are not particularly worried. Unfortunately, owing to the voluntary nature of the Size, Shape and Sustainability process and the mixed level of commitment by councils, the expectations of achieving serious reform were not met. That is why our government established this process. The sustainability of Queensland's local government sector needs to be addressed now if we are to ensure that all communities can vote at the next council elections for strong, viable councils in March. And, yes, they will be.

We gave two years for this process. We gave an opportunity for councils to reach agreement on this and after two years we had four councils out of 157 that wanted to amalgamate. They were not serious about it. They were interested in themselves. They were not interested in Queensland or the ratepayers they serve. Frankly, when that happens the government has to have the leadership, it has to have the strength, it has to have the determination to deliver good local government to this state.

Mr Hobbs: Heil Hitler.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Warrego!

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw, Mr Speaker,

Mr SPEAKER: I find your words tonight most unparliamentary and if you do that again you may not be out for a day or two; you may be out for much longer than that. I said today that this is an emotional topic, but do not play the man, play the ball. It is a disgraceful situation that you are getting into. Both sides can play that. Let us try to have some order in the House.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, thank you. I believe that when you come—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Schwarten: You're a grub.

Mr SPEAKER: I say to the minister for public works and housing that that is an unparliamentary term as well.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I apologise, but I am most offended—and I must record this. Any reference to Fascism or Nazism, which my father fought against, I find repugnant and I ask the member to withdraw that reference.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Warrego did withdraw. I suggest that the parrot at the back, the member for Burnett, should just quieten down. Let us get on with it.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, thank you for your protection. Let me make it clear: we have tried to have a sensible debate tonight. The member for Warrego has been into the gutter, as is his wont. Let me tell members that we will not be put off by those people who want to make racial slurs and who want to get into the gutter. This is about the future of Queensland and we are determined to deliver for the future of this state.

Local transition committees will be established and we will work closely with local councils for a seamless transition to the new boundaries in time for the 2008 local government elections. This will be a transition to stronger councils for a growing Queensland.

I find it amazing that we come in here and those opposite regularly want to criticise us about the health system, they want to criticise us about roads and they want to criticise us about transport. But what is the common denominator in all of that? Growth. It is the pressures of growth that we have had to deal with that the National Party was incapable of dealing with for 32 years. It left us with a dreadful legacy. It was incompetence beyond belief. What did we do? We have dealt with every one of those problems. One of the other ways to deal with them is to have stronger councils to deal with a growing Queensland. Let me tell members that we are building a new Queensland that will be able to deal with the growth. The 900 people who move here every week from New South Wales, those who move from overseas and the natural births means that we have to cater for an extra 1,500 people every week. We are going to provide capacity for them. We will build the roads, the hospitals and the power facilities. Out of that we are going to have strong councils to deliver for them as well.

This is a historic day. This will be a blueprint for change in regional Queensland. It will help create new economic and industrial hubs of national and international significance. In other words, we will have regional councils with clout. When it comes to dealing with the mining companies in the Surat Basin and the Bowen Basin, instead of 16 councils we will have four. They will be able to deal with the mining companies, the state government and the Commonwealth government to get the results that the community in that area wants. There are pressures for housing and all sorts of pressures for roads in those areas. We need councils with grunt that can represent those communities, not some rotten borough that does not deliver for them.

We are determined to deliver for those communities to give Queensland the vision that it wants and needs. We will deliver it. That is what this is all about. As I said, this will be a blueprint for change in regional Queensland. It will help create new economic and industrial hubs of national and international significance.

The minister for local government and I have met with approximately 68 councils since the independent commission brought down its report. While there is no doubt that some are disappointed with the findings, the majority have accepted the decision and are ready to get on with the job of building stronger councils for a growing Queensland.

Let there be no doubt that every step of the way there will be opposition. There was a challenge in the courts tonight to the validity of this legislation. The court challenge has been thrown out. We are confirmed as acting constitutionally in Queensland. Let me make it clear: I will take the barbs and all the rest of the outrageous comments we will get from those opposite and from the Prime Minister who try to politicise this, but in the end this will be a historic day for this state as we build stronger councils to look after Queenslanders.

I say to the mayors and the councillors who were worried about their own backsides to put that behind them and think about the communities they represent. They should not only think about those communities but think about the workers and the families who will be part of this transition. We want these transitional committees to work. When this legislation is law tomorrow—and it will be law tomorrow—the minister for local government, Andrew Fraser, will be working through the transitional committees to deliver the sorts of councils that we want. We want to make sure that those who work for councils and the families of those workers have certainty. Today the minister and I announced that we will make certain there will be no distractions to that. We will not have the Prime Minister's interference in Queensland which will provide uncertainty for those working families. We are not prepared to tolerate that. We want those families to be part of this transition and to have certainty so they do not go home at night and worry about it. Those opposite are only playing political games. They could not care less about those real people; we do.

Mr Johnson: You've got that wrong, Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: The member for Gregory is an exception. There is some decency about him, but there is not about his friends, I have to be honest. The member for Gregory has some decency about him and I acknowledge that; he always has. But his friends are only interested in politics. We are interested in the people and we are determined that these working families will have certainty during this difficult time of transition. If we have uncertainty about what happens to councils, what does that mean? When the mums and dads get together on a Friday night they worry about their kids and they worry about their jobs.

We have guaranteed their jobs. We are going to guarantee them certainty, and we are not going to allow the Prime Minister to use working men and women in this state as cannon fodder to get re-elected. I say to the Prime Minister: you are a disgrace. The Prime Minister was going to go to Noosa tomorrow. He pulled out because we exposed the fact that he was going there. So he has sent the Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile up. That will be a great occasion. Noosa needs all the help it can get but it does not need Mark Vaile.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They do not want to do that to Noosa. Even Noosa does not deserve the member for Burnett. I want to make this point: we have signalled for iconic areas like Noosa, Port Douglas, the reef, the sandy straits and the Whitsundays that we will have iconic legislation to protect them in a way they have never been protected before. I say to Bob Abbot, the mayor of Noosa, who is a decent man, and to Allan Sutherland, the mayor of Redcliffe, who is a decent man, we will protect you in a way you have never been protected before and that is by this iconic legislation. Out of this we will protect those intrinsic qualities of Queensland through iconic legislation and we will give state support for regional councils that will have the grunt to deliver a greater outcome for this state. This is great for Queensland and it is good for local councils.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.43 pm): Very often in this place we have many robust debates and very occasionally something comes up that is historic and will be remembered by many people for years to come. Tonight will go down as a night of shame. We saw an arrogant tirade tonight from the Premier and the arrogance that he displayed when he laughed out loud and said, 'I'll be here for 100 years; you'll never shift me.' That is the sort of arrogance that the people of Queensland hate, and that is the sort of arrogance that we have seen bubble to the surface over the last 10 months.

This is the fourth evil trampling of the rights of people by this government in recent months. We saw it just last year when the poor victims of Dr Patel were told at a public meeting that the government was trying to bring him back when they knew that they had stopped him coming back four weeks before. We saw the trampling of the people of Gympie and the Mary Valley when the Premier knew he was seen as the person who did not build dams. So he purposely proposed that dam knowing he would have protest meetings and he wanted to convey to the public of south-east Queensland—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Toowoomba South—

Mr HORAN: My speech tonight, Mr Speaker, is about what the people in my electorate feel about the trampling of their democratic rights and the fact that they and the people of the Darling Downs have not had a chance.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Can you take your seat for a moment. I am going to let you expound those values in a moment. Can I indicate to those members who may be wondering about the member for Toowoomba South mentioning the extradition of Dr Patel that the legal advice given to me as the Speaker is that that is fine in terms of sub judice as long as it does not go to the heart of the matter that is involved in the case. Therefore, I have allowed the member for Toowoomba South to speak in that way.

Mr HORAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. So we see these constant examples culminating in what is happening tonight on this night of shame. Members on this side of the House have been reasonable in talking about shires where there was need for adjustment and where there were some logical, sensible, practical opportunities. Perhaps the government could look at the issues of some of the doughnut shires where there is a town surrounded by another shire. Some of those have been talked about and debated for some years. But when we look at the Size, Shape and Sustainability report we see that this government has failed to work with local government in a cooperative way to get to some timetables. What has this local government minister and the one before him been doing? They said that the process just lingered on and did not get anywhere. It is because this government just meandered along through its local government ministers until this year it got to the point where it wanted to trample everybody's rights and give nobody a say.

One of the most precious things for the people of Queensland is being able to have some representation and to be able to have a say. How many times did we hear those terms used in this parliament? If we look at the Darling Downs where eight shires have been brought into one, we had a harmonious community where we liked and appreciated each other. Whether it is business, sport or social, Toowoomba and the downs have always been like that. But it has been the towns of the downs and the shires and those magnificent people over generations who have been councillors, leaders and mayors. We have 64 councillors and mayors.

I have heard people speak in this debate in a derogatory way about people as though they go in there to put their snouts in a trough. Try taking on a job as a mayor or a councillor in some of those Darling Downs shires and working long hours, doing it for your community, doing it because your family or yourself have lived there for generations, doing it because you believe in the area, doing it because you want to promote Clifton, Pittsworth, Cambooya, Millmerran, Oakey, the Rosalie shire and Crows Nest, whose residents are proud of Highfields. These councillors promote their areas.

Oakey has been promoted. They have streetscaped the street. They talk about it, they promote it, they build it up and they try to get industry. Those councillors are part of Oakey as a part of the Jondaryan shire. They are part of Glenvale, closer in towards Toowoomba. The shire of Crows Nest, which had been moving in a practical way to amalgamate with the shire of Rosalie, is proud not only of Crows Nest but also of the blooming and blossoming suburb of Highfields. They are always there talking it up. Go to the cultural centre and you will always run into the mayor or the councillors, whatever functions are on. They support it, and the people of Highfields love it. They love it because of the way the shire looks after them and the way that they have representation. They have some eight councillors in that area which they can go to.

Now we are going to have this huge area with eight councillors who may well be mostly from the Toowoomba area because of the sheer weight of numbers. That is going to mean that the representation of all those people on the downs is going to be seriously and massively diminished. Are councillors from Toowoomba going to go out to functions at Millmerran or Yarraman? The shire will go 40 kilometres south-west of Millmerran, close to Inglewood. The shire will go up to Yarraman in the Burnett. The new shire goes within three kilometres of Dalby because the Jondaryan shire goes that close to Dalby. Will they go 80 kilometres out to do the roadworks? It is just ridiculous.

I hear people talk about their patch that they know of and understand. If you know and understand the Darling Downs and you understand the towns of the downs and you understand their integration with Toowoomba, then you will understand the huge hurt and damage that has happened in this process.

A large part of the hurt has been due to the way in which it has happened. I had a fellow from our area ring me; he is a fellow whom I really admire. His family is represented on one of the war memorials in the south-west of the city for World War I, World War II and the Korean War. He is very upset, and he rang to talk to me about the way this process has happened. He said that his family fought for democracy so at least we could have a say. I think that is what is upsetting people. As much as there are mistakes, as much as it has been rushed in and as much as there are those who are against it or for it, everybody feels the government has been undemocratic, heavy-handed and arrogant because of the way this has been handled.

When the government wanted to build Lang Park, Labor members took some time and talked to people. They canvassed various ideas and floated the ideas for probably a year or more until they felt it was right to move with the whole process. But this has been bang, right between the eyes. That is how it has happened, and people do not like it. I can tell the government that there will be a lingering hatred over what has happened in this circumstance.

How do we define the heart and soul of townships or communities? It is a difficult thing, isn't it, but we all know the heart and soul of the areas that we come from. We can say in a disparaging way that the boundaries were drawn 110 or 150 years ago, but they still work, they are still appropriate and they are still vibrant shires being promoted by people who live there and care for them. Councillors are there to talk to the people about the verges of the road being slashed, a new little sports field, help for the show society, the annual Anzac Day ceremony and all the different things that go to making these communities. That is the heart and soul of these places.

I love Toowoomba, but other people like to move out to Highfields or they like to live at Pittsworth, Cambooya and all those sorts of places because that has the village atmosphere they want. They like the shire. We do not hear complaints about those shires. There are shires on the downs that have no debt. Millmerran in particular has no debt, Clifton and Cambooya have very little if any debt, and then at the top of the tree there is Toowoomba City Council with the bulk of the debt. We will end up with a shire where the city of Toowoomba has about 63 to 65 per cent of the population and about 83 or 84 per cent of the debt, so that debt will have to be absorbed by other parts of this new proposed regional shire.

One of the arguments for this has been improved costs and efficiency. I can tell this parliament that if any single council on the Darling Downs or in Queensland wasted hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, like this Queensland government has wasted money on the recycled water pipeline, they would be sacked. The government is paying double the price for gravel and aggregate at certain times. Stuff is being put in the wrong place and they are being told, 'Don't shift it, just bring some more trucks.' People are being offered hundreds of thousands of dollars for jobs to entice them away from elsewhere. Trenches are being put in the wrong place. I can tell a litany of stories about the cost.

To get the five millimetre gravel that is required will take every quarry between Grafton and Bundaberg working at 120 per cent capacity for 12 months, and they will still not supply the amount of gravel that is required. It is an El Dorado for people and it is known everywhere. If we talk to people around south-east Queensland, we hear that they all want to get on it.

The government is wasting money and is being forced to pay these prices because of this obscene haste. It panicked because there was no planning and no proper water infrastructure in place going back to when the Goss government got in and the Wolffdene Dam was closed down. Because of all that, we are now paying probably twice as much. When the project was only five to 10 per cent complete, the government announced another \$680 million increase, from \$1.8 billion to about \$2.4 billion. So let us not talk about financial efficiencies in councils, when this state government is wasting hundreds of millions of dollars in this way on these projects. As I said, any council that did that would be sacked.

I want to talk about another measure of efficiency—development approvals. Development approvals have to be done well and accurately in the modern world of approvals, and they also should be done in a timely fashion. If we look at this new regional council with Toowoomba as the centrepiece, approvals for relatively straightforward developments by developers like my predecessor—and everybody knows that the former member for Toowoomba South is a major developer who has been doing high-standard developments for nearly 50 years in the city—can take six months or more. I know of one that has taken 10 months and it will probably go another 12 months at least. In the adjoining shire of Crows Nest, those same developments are properly assessed in a matter of weeks. That is the difference between a small shire and a large shire. So it is not true that big is necessarily better.

I want to raise a couple of issues that relate to my shadow portfolio of primary industries, and I am pleased that the minister for primary industries is here tonight. I have mentioned this in previous debates. The mayor is the first point of call for the DPI leadership when there is a biosecurity problem, a major exercise or an outbreak of something. They pick up the phone and go straight to the mayors; that is where the local leadership and the local knowledge is. Stock inspectors are not around like they used to be. The mayor is the first point of call. On the Darling Downs, which is the centre of Queensland for feedlots, intensive industries and agriculture, that is gone under this legislation. There will be none of those mayors out there. There will be some council bureaucrats in the city somewhere but all of that which is so important will be lost.

The other issue I want to mention is the National Livestock Identification System. This was recently introduced into Australia at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Those electronic ear tags cost about \$4.50 each, and how many million head of cattle have we got in Queensland? The primary industries minister might help me here. We have the bulk of the Australian herd, which is about 27 million, so we probably have some 15 million to 20 million. The code in those electronic ear tags—at \$4.50 each—is the name of the shire.

Mr Mulherin: We'll sort it out.

Mr HORAN: You'll sort it out! How many million will it cost? If there are 20 million animals at \$4.50 a tag, does the minister have a spare \$90 million? Everyone will have to cut the tags out of every bull, cow, steer and heifer. How are we going to sort that out? With all of the changes to the shires—with some going this way and some going that way—the biosecurity in the Queensland cattle industry will be under an immediate threat because it will not be accurately coded through the ear tag system. In every other state in Australia in every single shire, those electronic tags are coded with the shire. That is just one little example of the problems that will occur. The rush and haste that has been associated with this whole process is disgraceful.

As I said earlier when talking about the boundaries of the proposed Toowoomba Regional Council, there was obviously no thought whatsoever given to amalgamating these eight shires and whether it made any sense to have Yarraman sticking out on a cow's horn into the Burnett or whether it made sense to have those areas way out past Millmerran. There was no thought given to any of that.

I doubt that the 35,000 submissions got read by too many people. People in Queensland genuinely tried to put in a submission thinking it would be of some use. Minds were made up well before this process started. The riding instructions were there, the guidelines, the fences. There was an instruction from the government. It knew what it wanted. I have always regarded Terry Mackenroth as a very able and capable local government minister. I know what Terry's philosophy about amalgamations has always been. He is a pretty strong character. There would be no doubt in my mind that Terry's opinion would carry the day, and that is what we have seen—the whacking together of all these shires with no thought and as a result we have all these other situations occurring.

Now we have the issue of divisions. There has not been agreement on divisions. We could end up with a very sad and tragic situation where there is no representation. Where previously the seven rural shires had 56 representatives who were interested in the area, representation may now all come from Toowoomba. There may be one or two from the country. Who knows how it is going to go. I think it will be a real problem.

Again we had an issue with the new name, as other areas did. People almost threw their hands up in the air and said it was a *fait accompli*. What is in a name? The name is probably the last vestige that those people had of some form of recognition. The Toowoomba Regional Council is a big mouthful. If it was called Toowoomba and the downs council at least there would be recognition of the two components of this amalgamation—the Darling Downs shires and Toowoomba City itself. It is the term that those who live in the area use—Toowoomba and the downs. It would have given these people some feeling of fairness.

Another issue I want to raise is the disgraceful and dictatorial threat to sack and dismiss these councils. Do members know why they will be sacked? All they are trying to do is get some democracy. The minister wants to sack these good, wonderful, generous Australian citizens—these Queenslanders. Those opposite stood up and gave one minute's silence for a convicted drug runner from Singapore but will not stand up for their own Queensland mayors! That is one of the most disgraceful things I have ever seen in my life. When I think of the good people on the downs—the mayors, the councillors—who want to have a referendum—

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr HORAN: They want to have a referendum so at least they can have their say. What is wrong with that? It will cost Queensland nothing. Can the government not let them have their say? Those opposite would sack them and yet give a minute's silence for a drug runner. Shame on them! It is a shameful night tonight.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (10.07 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. One of the reasons given by the government for rushing this bill through parliament is that where the bill and the proposed new act require that the new councils are to have internal divisional boundaries the Electoral Commission must decide those boundaries by no later than 15 September this year. That is just over four weeks away. I understand this date was set because the government had earlier locked in the local government elections to be held on Saturday, 15 March next year.

I do not believe that there is any need for this rush of activity. It has been reported that the federal government has offered to assist with the holding of a referendum on the state government proposal where the local communities choose to have a referendum. I have made inquiries with my own federal member, Mr Alex Somlyay. His office has advised that the federal government's offer of involvement is not by way of a referendum but is an offer of a postal plebiscite over a period of one week and that voting will not be compulsory. I believe that the current scheduled date for the next council elections could have been postponed to allow the state government time to review the results of the proposed postal plebiscite before finalising the government's preferred positions.

Last Friday I travelled to Brisbane to receive a copy of the Local Government Reform Commission's recommendations and to listen to the Premier and the minister for local government outline the state government's response to the various recommendations. On Tuesday—just two days

ago—the bill was introduced into this parliament. Today amendments have been tabled by the government including amendments which in substance will allow the government to sack local councils if councils propose to proceed with a referendum. Later this evening, in a few hours, we will be voting on this very important bill.

My electorate is covered by the Maroochy Shire Council and I understand that the Maroochy Shire Council Mayor, Joe Natoli, supports the Maroochy, Caloundra and Noosa councils being amalgamated as one. Yet my neighbours, Noosa residents, would prefer that they stay as a separate entity. There can be no doubt in my mind that the Noosa shire, under the leadership of Mayor Bob Abbot and earlier mayors, has over many years successfully demonstrated an ability to stand up and lead in a whole range of areas that I believe many other councils in Queensland aspire to.

I cannot support this bill. I cannot support the way the state government is threatening to sack local councils that may choose to conduct a referendum simply because their constituents want their council to have a referendum. I have received numerous submissions about the proposed amalgamation and I now table a copy of many of the recent submissions I have received.

Tabled paper: Bundle of documents making submissions relating to proposed amalgamations of local authorities.

Those submissions I have received are from Mayor Joe Natoli, Terry Reason, Mayor Bob Abbot, Wendy Guthrie, Pauline Summers, John Le Drew, Kevin Spencer, Ann Searle, Phillip Roslan, Peter Arch, Henry Drew, Dennis Brown, Chris Andrews, Derek Yarrow, Janet Southern, David and Heather Morton, Dan Mehonoshen, the Aramac shire, Charles Phillips, Tony Haslam, John Fraser, Gwen Jones and the TWU. The reason I read those into the record is that I gave a commitment to those people that I would certainly table their submissions in parliament when I had the opportunity to speak on this important bill.

I do not intend to repeat many of the comments already made by other members during this debate, but I choose to progress to a number of other matters raised in the bill. In the minister's second reading speech he indicated that he will be introducing further legislative reforms to ensure that planning initiatives of areas with a unique combination of significant growth and iconic features are protected. Earlier we heard the Premier speak about this very important additional legislation which the government will be introducing. In this regard I draw to the attention of the minister and the government a letter I have received from the Montville Village Association. In substance the association has requested that the picturesque Montville-Flaxton area set in the magnificent Blackall Range in the Sunshine Coast hinterland be protected under the government's proposed iconic legislation. I table a copy of that letter for the benefit of all members.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 7 August 2007, from Colleen Brady, Secretary, Montville Village Association Inc to Mr Wellington MP relating to iconic status for the Montville/Flaxton area.

By way of support for this request for the protection of this area, I draw the attention of the minister and the government to the range of matters which were last year canvassed by the Maroochy Shire Council and the state government when the Premier chose to exercise his call-in powers and overturn the Maroochy Shire Council's decision to approve the controversial Links development at Montville. I understand that at the time the Maroochy Shire Council approved this development it was contrary to the council's own town plan and also contrary to the advice of the council's own planning department.

I understand that later on that council then moved a motion directing its town-planning staff to come up with grounds to support its decision to approve that development. I also refer the minister to division 10 section 159ZW(1) which states—

A merging local government must not make a major policy decision in the transition period for the local government.

Subsection (3) states—

The Minister may, within 7 days after receiving notice of the making of the major policy decision, revoke the decision if the Minister is not satisfied that, having regard to exceptional circumstances that apply, it is necessary for the local government to make the decision.

I next take the minister to the definition section of the bill in which he refers to a major policy decision as including where a decision is made by the council—

To enter into a contract, other than a contract between the local government and the State or the Commonwealth, the total value of which is more than the greater of the following—

- (i) \$150000;
- (ii) 1% of the local government's net rate and utility charges as stated in the local government's audited financial statements included in the local government's most recently adopted annual report.

The reason I have referred to these parts of the bill is that the Maroochy Shire Council has recently purchased land on the outskirts of Nambour for the purpose of constructing a major landfill development. I understand that the Caloundra council currently has no long-term plan for the disposal of its waste. Over the recent months I have tabled numerous petitions in this chamber signed by many of my constituents opposing Maroochy Shire Council's proposed landfill site. Many people in my community are now even more worried that the proposed Maroochy council's new landfill site may become the destination of not only Maroochy council's future waste but also future waste from the

Caloundra council as a result of the possible amalgamation of these councils. Can the minister please clarify that if the Maroochy council and/or Caloundra council proceed down this path that this bill gives him the power to intervene on this very important issue? Many of my constituents believe that, instead of having a number of landfill sites in the region, it would be more appropriate to have one regional landfill site away from closely settled areas.

I next take the minister to division 4 of the bill, which deals with transition committees for amalgamated councils, and in particular to proposed new section 159YR(4) which states—

The local transition committee may from time to time include on the committee, as voting members of the committee, other persons the committee considers are suitable to represent the views of the community within the new local government area.

On the Sunshine Coast the proposal is that Noosa, Maroochy and Caloundra all merge. I seek clarification as to how many members of the community may be invited to sit on the transition committee and exercise the full voting powers as a transition committee member.

I note clause 9 of the bill provides that no longer will local government councils be able to decide how much they get paid and instead councillors' and mayors' remuneration will be set by an independent tribunal. It is similar to the process currently used for determining the salary packages for Commonwealth and state politicians. I understand that this change will bring Queensland local government into line with most other Australian states, which have an independent body to oversee council remuneration.

I also seek the minister's clarification on the method of election that is to apply at next year's council elections where councils go to the polls with internal divisional boundaries. I understand the legislation sets out that, when a council with internal divisional boundaries goes to the election, the election will be conducted on a first-past-the-post basis for the election of the mayor and councillors. Can the minister please clarify this in his final summing-up?

Finally, I realise that it is 10 past 10 at night and there are many more members who wish to speak and be involved in this debate. I simply say that I look forward to making further comments when this bill proceeds to the committee stage. I do reiterate that I cannot support the bill.

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (10.13 pm): I rise to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. I am very disappointed with this bill. I do not know whether the minister or government members actually read the report because if they did they would have seen that its aim was supposedly to make councils stronger. The report says that the Beaudesert Scenic Rim council would be financially weaker. Three hundred workers will not be required. Logan City does not require those extra workers; it has said that in the paper. Beaudesert will not require the workers because of the loss of ratepayers from its shire. The way this process has been conducted is just crazy. I am disappointed that the minister did not actually read that report in relation to Beaudesert and understand that. If the aim was to make councils stronger, how is making the councils weaker going to achieve that aim? Beaudesert has lost 30,000 people and increased its area by 50 per cent. It is just crazy. I cannot understand this.

The democratic process has been rushed. The minister was actually sending letters out to councils in my area saying they could start the amalgamation process at the same time as he was preparing this bill. I cannot understand why there was such a big rush. As everyone has said, these councils have been in place for over 100 years and they have worked very well. If amalgamation is so successful, why is Beenleigh being deamalgamated again out of the Gold Coast City Council? Beenleigh was in its own shire until the fifties. It then went into the Albert shire and then the Gold Coast City Council. It is now going into the Logan City Council. What have we succeeded in doing? We have only to look at history to see that it does not actually work.

What cost-benefit studies have been done to show that there will be benefits from this process? Have there been any cost-benefit studies? Can honourable members imagine major companies conducting amalgamations of this size without undertaking any cost-benefit studies? People talk about these shires being strong enough to deal with the mining companies. Four of these still relatively small councils taking on BHP Billiton? We can imagine how much stronger they are going to be! BHP Billiton would buy and sell most of the shires out in central Queensland. It is fairytale stuff. It is not going to give councils any extra clout or benefit.

Most of the councils are working very well together. I represent two full shires and three other part-shires in Laidley, Gatton, Ipswich, Esk and Beaudesert. Laidley and Gatton shires are a fairly good fit. They will fit together fairly well. It is a bit like some of the doughnut shires that fit together in some areas; they do make sense. They were just about to start talking about the amalgamation process. Gatton is a bit larger in area and a little bit larger in population.

Mr Shine: How much of Esk have you got?

Mr RICKUSS: Not much. I have a bit. I have Coominya. The Esk shire is a small area of my electorate.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: That is right; the family of the member opposite will have to vote for me soon. The Esk shire has a small area. There was talk of amalgamating Esk into part of the Laidley shire, but it never came to fruition. Esk and Kilcoy have actually amalgamated. That shire will now be weaker because, unfortunately, Kilcoy was in a weak financial position and Esk was just starting to improve its financial position. Now those two shires have been made weaker because of the amalgamation. It will not help them at all.

I represent part of the Beaudesert shire down in the Flagstone-Greenbank area. That is now going to go into the Logan shire. Unfortunately, even some of the politicians who represent those areas do not live in those areas. It is just a shame that that sort of thing is going to occur. Now they are going to be disfranchised by the move with the councils as well. No cost-benefit analysis has been done into this process. It has been rushed. It would have been better if the process had been allowed to go through at a reasonable pace.

I am also concerned about the lack of divisions. Some of my councils had meetings about divisions, although they could not get consensus on it. As a member of parliament, I have received a lot more complaints from councils that are undivided, particularly where the councillors are only part-time. They are supposed to look after the whole area. Every councillor is to look after all of the area but at times the reality is that no councillor looks after any area. That becomes a problem in the undivided shires. Even after Gatton and Laidley are amalgamated, each councillor—and there will be six—will still represent fewer than 3,000 voters. So I would imagine they would still be part-time positions. I cannot see how that is going to really benefit that area.

I am extremely disappointed that 300 council workers from the Beaudesert shire will actually lose their jobs. The minister stated on page 2 of his second reading speech that Beaudesert and Boonah will become more sustainable. How will they become more sustainable? He stated on page 5 that council workers will not lose their jobs; only elected officials and CEOs will be affected by the reforms contained in the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill.

What will happen to the 300 workers in Beaudesert? I keep harping on it. Unfortunately this government does not really care about the workers. It is plain to see that it is not interested. It is all PR and spin on that side of the House. Those opposite do not really care about the workers. It is all PR and spin from over there. This would not have happened if they cared. It is all PR and spin.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: The member should go and talk to the council workers in Beaudesert. I invite the member to talk to the council workers in Beaudesert any time.

Mr Reeves: They will keep their jobs.

Mr RICKUSS: Some 300 are going to go.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mansfield is being repetitive.

Mrs Smith interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: I take the interjection from the member for Woodridge. Logan City Council has said they do not want the extra workers.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Lockyer, do you mind speaking through the chair. I have already said to the member for Mansfield that he is being repetitive with his interjections. Can you keep on going.

Mr RICKUSS: I will take the interjection from the member for Woodridge. Logan City Council has said they do not want the extra workers. Some 300 people will be surplus to requirements. Can members imagine council workers who live in Rathdowney going to Logan. It is a two-hour drive to Logan. Why would they want to do that? That is the sort of thing that the member for Aspley was talking about before.

Mr Seeney: They don't understand.

Mr RICKUSS: They have not got a clue.

Mr Seeney: Just not interested.

Mr RICKUSS: No. Unfortunately we have a weak shire in Kilcoy and an improving shire in Esk so they have decided to amalgamate them. Now we will have two weak shires joined. This is a real problem. There is no real sense to this whole process.

As I mentioned before, the Laidley and Gatton councillors will only have 3,000 voters each. The shire will still be too small to have full-time councillors. So this will be an undivided shire that covers an area that is bigger than the area covered by most members on the other side of the chamber. The councillors will struggle to drive the hundreds of kilometres from one end of the shire to the other. It will be a battle for part-time councillors.

I turn now to the transitional local committees, the TLCs. I cannot fathom the benefit of the transitional local committees. In March we are going to have a bigger elected council. What is the committee supposed to do? Surely the two elected councils are the ones that should be organising the

transition. What is the benefit of having a local committee. It is creating another level of bureaucracy. The new council elected in March will be able to overturn all of its decisions. What is the point of the transitional committee? It is just something else so that the government can say that it is not its fault that it did not work; it is the TLCs fault. It can say that the transitional committee did not do a good enough job.

Mr Johnson: Is the TLC the Trades and Labour Council?

Mr RICKUSS: That is what it is going to be—the Trades and Labour Council committee. The Trades and Labour Council has never been able to run anything. They sent petrol stations broke in Australia. It is the only group in Australia that could ever send a petrol company broke. How good is that? Now the TLC is going to run the councils.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: That is right. It could not even run a petrol station. It is a shame it never got into pubs because it would have sent them broke as well.

Ms Nolan: It means tender loving care over here.

Mr RICKUSS: I think TLC stands for a total lack of care. That is what it will be. I feel that there are going to be problems with councils that are not divided. Part-time councillors struggle at times to cover large areas of country.

I am really concerned about the fact that there was no cost-benefit analysis done of the whole process. The member for Toowoomba South mentioned the NLIS tags. How many other situations like that will occur across the state? There are little things that are reliant on the shires that are there—

Mr Reeves: They'll be fixed.

Mr RICKUSS: Yes, but how much is it going to cost? That is what I want to know.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: But this is supposed to save us. I have a word of warning for the councils that are being amalgamated. I think that they will have to tread very carefully with their bureaucrats. Unfortunately, some of the bureaucrats will feel disfranchised and disadvantaged. They will have to manage that situation very well. It is a bit of a shame that the democratic right of the councils has been suppressed so much so that there cannot be a real transition. The process could have been a lot smoother than the rush job that has been put in place by this government.

As the member for Toowoomba South said, we have a minute's silence for the Singapore drug lords but we cannot exercise the democratic right to vote on council amalgamations. I cannot believe the hypocrisy of those on the other side of the chamber. They will not let people vote on whether they want to be in another council.

I honestly hope that there are a number of mayors around the state who take the government on. I would like to see the government send in the administrators. How many administrators are those opposite going to be able to find on 1 December if all these councils decide to do this on 1 December? Over the Christmas holidays how are they going to run all these councils? It is going to be ridiculous. What will happen to all the administration staff in the councils?

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: I do not think that there will be enough union officials to be in the TLCs. They will be total loss committees if union officials are involved.

An opposition member: They will truck them in.

Mr RICKUSS: The real problem in a lot of areas is that they will not have two or three union representatives to make up the committee.

Mr Johnson: Dean Michael might come over and be the coordinator.

Mr RICKUSS: Dean Michael might come up and be the coordinator. I take that interjection from the member for Gregory.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: Apparently he is not very useful down in Tasmania anymore.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Lockyer, you are wandering a bit.

Mr RICKUSS: It is the interjections.

Mr SPEAKER: I know you are taking on the interjections very well. If you want to go back to the topic that would be good.

Mr RICKUSS: Unfortunately this government has trampled the democratic rights of a lot of Queenslanders in this process. It has been unfair. The time frames have been unrealistic. The divisions are unrealistic. The costs will have blown out of all proportions. There will be very little benefit to the state government. It is a shame that this bill will be rammed through tonight.

Hon. KG SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (10.28 pm): Before I say the comments that I have prepared, might I just pose a question to the honourable member for Lockyer. He raised the question of Kilcoy and Esk and said that Kilcoy is weak and joining it with Esk will make the new entity weaker as well. I am just wondering what his solution would have been for Kilcoy. He would have let it what—die by itself?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Excuse me, Leader of the Opposition and shadow minister for local government. I think there is some rapport here. You have got faith in the member for Lockyer.

Mr SHINE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very pleased that the Premier made the announcement earlier tonight in terms of what I think was a shameful application and a misuse of the courts in order to prevent debate on this very important topic being carried out in this parliament tonight. That injunction proceeding was dismissed with costs against the applicant, and that is a very appropriate result and a result important for the democratic process that we regard very highly.

I am proud to be a member of a government that takes the role of local government so seriously. The government is determined to ensure that local governments are sustainable and viable. Unsustainable and unviable councils threaten jobs and the communities they are supposed to serve. I strongly supported the government's decision to appoint an independent expert commission comprising people from all parties. I welcomed the appointment of former local government ministers Terry Mackenroth and Di McCauley and former Liberal Party leader Bob Quinn. Di McCauley was of course a National Party minister. She was also a very well-respected member for Callide.

Many of the western shires will remain unchanged, as we know. A number of others will amalgamate as per the commission's recommendations. Strong, sustainable and viable councils will best guarantee job security, future growth and prosperity. These communities are of course the lifeblood of rural Queensland. The best way to support these communities is to ensure that they have strong, sustainable and viable councils. As the member for Toowoomba North, I supported the proposal for the Crows Nest and Rosalie shires to merge. Crows Nest and Rosalie shires took the Triple S program seriously—one of only four out of all of the councils to do so in the entire state. I took the trouble to write a submission to the commission supporting a merging of the Crows Nest and Rosalie shires. I do not know whether too many members opposite took the time to write any submissions to the commission, let alone to support—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SHINE: So those opposite failed to write any? Such was their interest in the process! While I am disappointed that the commission did not support the proposal, I am pleased it was considered. I can understand the rationale of the Toowoomba Regional Council that was recommended by the commission. The job now is for all councils and the community to work together to ensure that the Toowoomba Regional Council works and it works in the best interests of the region.

I want to refer to the comments by Crows Nest Mayor Geoff Patch in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* last week where he said on behalf of his council—

Our attitude is to look for the positives and get on with the job of working with the seven other local authorities. Our ability to focus on the big picture and work together cooperatively will be the key to ensuring a successful transition.

Members opposite should take notice of Mayor Patch. He also said—

We believe we owe it to our residents to embrace change by building a strong regional government that will be poised to take advantage of the considerable growth and economic opportunities. It is also important that the new regional council continues to deliver locally based services.

I also note the comment of Jondaryan Shire Council and prominent National Party member Peter Taylor on the front page of the *Toowoomba Chronicle* today where he says—

Politics are being played on all sides. We don't want to be squeezed by the state and federal governments.

The Toowoomba Regional Council is an amalgamation of Toowoomba city, Cambooya, Clifton, Jondaryan, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Crows Nest and Rosalie shires. Last week the local government minister and I met with local mayors and councils to discuss the Toowoomba Regional Council, as we did with representatives of the workers. Two key issues that arose out of that meeting were divided versus undivided and the name of the regional council. It is important to note that, where two or more councils have been amalgamated and these councils share concerns regarding the adopted name, a different name will be accepted if supported by unanimous submission from the councils.

The Local Government Association of Queensland issued a media statement yesterday which claimed that—

By amalgamating particular local councils, the state government has found a way to skew the new redistribution to bring about a more favourable outcome, despite massive population growth since the last redistribution in 1999.

This statement is nonsense. It is egregiously stupid and it is monumentally defamatory. The LGAQ ignores the independence of the Queensland Electoral Commission and it misrepresents the requirements for regular redistributions of state boundaries under Queensland's electoral laws. In May Executive Council approved the appointment of the three-member committee to oversee the

redistribution review of Queensland's electoral boundaries. Former Supreme Court judge and Queensland's first Integrity Commissioner the Hon. Alan Demack AO is the chairman of the committee. The other committee members are Electoral Commissioner David Kerlake and director-general Rachel Hunter. I urge the LGAQ to correct its false public statement. I urge the LGAQ to withdraw its attack on the independence of the Queensland Electoral Commission, a senior public servant and a former Supreme Court judge.

Mrs SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (10.35 pm): I rise to support the bill and in doing so want to pass on my congratulations to the minister, the Hon. Andrew Fraser, from a congo line of ratepayers who have made positive comments on this government's initiative. I confess that I spoke to the former minister for local government about council reform, so I want to also add my congratulations to Minister Desley Boyle for the preliminary work that she did. People have said to me that we are overgoverned in this country, and I have to agree. I am still wondering what the federal minister for health does. Here in Queensland we have 28 federal members, 12 senators and 89 state MPs. Well, guess how many councillors and mayors we have?

Ms Croft interjected.

Mrs SULLIVAN: Eight hundred? I take that interjection from the member for Broadwater. She is the closest, but unfortunately she is still far off the mark. In Queensland we actually have close to 1,200 councillors and mayors. Yes, I will repeat that—1,200 councillors and mayors. That is staggering. And who pays for this top-heaviness? Well, we do through our rates and other council charges. Have council services, facilities and infrastructure kept pace with the increase in population and controlled development? No, they have not. But the rates have kept going up. As one family man said to me recently, 'They are rating us out of our home.' And it gets worse. Councillors have on average between 6,000 and 12,000 ratepayers whereas we as MPs have 30,000 taxpayers.

The changes will obviously mean that councillors and mayors will have more ratepayers, but providing that they are well resourced and are good representatives they will do their job well; otherwise, why would they bother putting their name on a ballot paper? Perhaps they should look for another career. While I am talking about councillors, I particularly want to thank councillors John McNaught and Lyn Devereaux in Caboolture shire because they have done a lot of good work in the area and I am very proud to have been associated with them. My shire, as I have said, is Caboolture. Council and mayors voted themselves such a good salary package just after they were elected for a fourth term that it has become a very lucrative job indeed. They of course did not tell anyone about these increases and, sadly, their salaries and perks are a massive impost on our ever-increasing rates. This is despite the state government propping up the council with numerous million-dollar grants for a variety of projects.

This bill is appropriate, it is right and it is about time. It was done in a transparent way and people did get an opportunity to have a say, despite what members of the opposition said, and they did! The independent commission which the government set up received a variety of submissions—some for the amalgamations and some against. That is the democratic process. But unfortunately the press focused on the comments from those who did not want a change and on stunts by the Nationals. I cannot believe the hypocrisy of those opposite. If members cast their minds back to when Jeff Kennett was the Liberal state Premier of Victoria, as the Premier said previously, he completely wiped out the councils. He sacked them. That is not the way we do it in Queensland. That is the Liberals' jackboot style. We are trying to work with the councils to implement this reform. If members also cast their minds back to 3 September 1988—

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mrs SULLIVAN: I do not think you were even born then! If members cast their minds back to 3 September 1988 when the conservatives were in government in Queensland, there was a referendum. There were four questions on that referendum, one of which was to recognise local government in the Constitution.

Unlike the Howard referendum question on whether Australia should become a republic—and the question that he put was mean and tricky and very long—this question was actually very simple. However, only 33.61 per cent of the people supported it. The failure of the local government question in the 1988 referendum denied councils recognition under the Constitution and ensured that the state governments retained the power to legislate for all matters concerning local government.

The Liberal and National parties opposed the local government referendum question. In fact, they opposed the four questions. They advocated a no vote. For the benefit of those members who do not know what the referendum questions were, here they are. The first one was to provide for four-year maximum terms for members of both houses of the Commonwealth parliament: 67.0 per cent of people voted against that. The second question was to provide for fair and democratic parliamentary elections throughout Australia: 62.41 per cent voted against it. The third question was to recognise local government in the Constitution. They managed 66.39 per cent of people to vote against that. The fourth question was to extend the right to trial by jury, to extend freedom of religion and to ensure fair terms for persons whose property is acquired by any government: 69.21 per cent voted against that.

Apparently, four-year parliamentary terms, fair and democratic parliamentary elections, trial by jury, freedom of religion and fair payment when a government compulsorily acquires someone's property was too great a price to pay for recognition of local government under the Constitution. Ironically, at the time Queensland local governments and their umbrella organisation, the LGAQ, seemed to agree and mounted at best a very lacklustre, half-hearted effort to garner voter support.

The protests being mounted currently by those individuals who would like to see us ignore the recommendations of the independent bipartisan reform commission not only disrespect the people on that commission and not only ask the Queensland government to undertake inferior management of the state but also they are too late—almost 19 years to the day too late to be precise. New boundaries are nothing new. State and federal governments have boundary changes and MPs come and go. I did not hear the opposition going into bat when Paul Braddy lost his seat when it disappeared. I did not hear anything from Brisbane residents when some of their wards disappeared recently. There have been amalgamations before, governments of all persuasions come and go and we have not had any referendums on any of them in the past.

These reforms will build stronger councils for a rapidly growing Queensland. I quoted several sources about this issue in my speech in this House on 19 April, so I will not repeat all of those. But I want to finish with a quote from the Mayor of the Isis Shire Council, Councillor Bill Trevor, who said—

Let the state government get on with it and provide the reforms that local government need to bring them into the 21st century.

I only wish that the opposition would come with them into this century instead of making comments that could be attributed to a dinosaur era. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GRAY (Gaven—ALP) (10.42 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill before the House. This bill proposes the most strategic and futuristic change to the shape and delivery of services at the local government level across this state in a century. These changes are long overdue. This bill is courageous in nature, and it must be. This is not a time in Queensland's history for conservative cowardice but for considered reform. Hard decisions need to be made, courage is needed and this government is indeed courageous.

The commissioners are to be congratulated on their considered report and their futuristic stance. Their recommendations set a platform for meeting the local government needs of Queenslanders in a changing state, national and global economic environment well into the future. They recognised clearly the challenges facing local government in this state, and indeed across this nation, as being those of sustaining the very things that we have heard from the opposition tonight—that is, social fabric and viability in locations of vast expansions and the transitioning of rural economies from the traditional agricultural practice to more robust, diverse and sustainable activities around myriad emerging industries and opportunities. We see this on a daily basis. The heightened activity generated by coal, gas, petroleum and mineral deposits that exists in this state also has to be taken into account.

Other challenges faced by local government include managing growth in regional cities in service industries servicing the mineral boom; managing growth in coastal regions stimulated by tourism and the sea change and the green change phenomena; managing the rapid growth in south-east Queensland; coping with the unpredictable and potentially costly impacts of climate change; and responding to community expectations for sustainable and economically responsible development while dealing with the costs of meeting ever-increasing demands for essential infrastructure and services. Given these changes, it is plain to see that the way forward is for larger, stronger and more robust councils with the possibility of full-time councillors who are responsible for their constituents not only for the outcomes for their divisions, where in place, but also to the whole council area.

There are those prophets of doom who would distort these necessary reforms and present them as the end of the world for those areas of the state that entertain nothing but a parochial point of view—those who cannot see further than the farm gate or the back fence. Others see these changes as a wonderful opportunity to establish large networks, develop symbiotic relationships, explore new options, extend their influence and seek a wonderful future together.

The services that local governments provide will have to continue. There is an unnecessary fear of massive job losses prophesied by those who are more interested in protecting their rear end than seeking new and expanded employment opportunities that these changes offer. Rural Queensland is not going to disappear. Employment may change over time, but it will not decline. These councils that accept the challenges first will win the day. I ask all amalgamated councils and councillors to focus on the future, not wallow in self-pity and grief.

Change is never easy and people should not expect it to be. People should work it through and look to the future. I commend this bill to the House. I see its passing as a start of a new era for local government in this state.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (10.47 pm): The Premier in his speech earlier tonight says he wants communities with grunt. He has his wish. There are plenty of grunts in regional and rural Queensland tonight as the Premier's jackboot sinks into my community's stomach. This is a very dark

and shameful day for democracy in Australia with the introduction of this Labor government bill which has been skilfully framed and named by the spin doctors as the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007.

This is not reform. There is nothing to do with reform in this bill. This bill should be renamed the 'Local Government Extinction Bill', or the 'Local Government Termination Bill', or the 'Local Government Kill Bill'. This legislation is a declaration of war on the democratic freedoms of rural and regional Queenslanders.

The Premier also talked about the large number of local government bodies Queensland has when compared with other states. Let us look at the numbers in an honest way. I received this table from the local government authority. With 72 shires and councils reduced from 157, Queensland local government bodies have an average area in square kilometres of 24,320. That is the largest average area per local government body in any Australian state. The next largest average area in square kilometres is Western Australia, with 142 councils at 17,515 square kilometres, followed by New South Wales at 155 councils with 4,568 square kilometres, Victoria at 80 councils with 2,841 square kilometres, Tasmania at 29 councils with 2,379 square kilometres, South Australia at 74 councils with 2,102 square kilometres and the Northern Territory at 64 councils with 1,453 square kilometres.

These figures mean that on average each Queensland local government body has 38 per cent more area to cover than Western Australia and over 530 per cent more area than New South Wales—850 per cent more area than the Victorian local government body. This is proof positive of just how badly democracy in Queensland is being diluted. Legislation which will have a profound impact on the future of my communities is being forced through this place without proper scrutiny in an arrogant, dictatorial and punitive manner. This legislation is irrefutable proof that the leader of this state is a vindictive, egotistical, out-of-control despot.

With this legislation the Premier has insulted our families once again and has tried to snatch the heart from the Queensland local government. The Premier and his Labor Party colleagues, the Treasurer, the minister for local government and the rest of the government, have ensured that in every city and region in Queensland there will be substantial increases in rates because of the cost of Labor Party legislative thuggery, the loss of vital services, SES—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, as I have ruled from the chair, you should withdraw the word 'despot' and the word 'thuggery', and I would ask you to say 'I do'.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw. The loss of vital services, the SES, the volunteer bush fire brigades, road repairs and construction, libraries, local government, healthcare facilities and initiatives, loss of workers' jobs, loss of democracy and local representation. Communities, workers and ratepayers did not need to experience all this unnecessary heartache and pain in managing the changes in local government boundaries. We all know that there had to be changes and helping local communities find ways of decreasing costs, increasing efficiencies and getting better value for money for their ratepayers' dollars.

We had a system of introducing change. In fact, this government introduced this system. It created this system of change. It was called the Triple S program, and we have heard about it from many members tonight—the Size, Shape and Sustainability program—and everyone was prepared to work with it. They did not like it but they were prepared to work with it. The Local Government Association signed up to it. It loved it. The mayors and councillors signed up to it; they loved it. The ratepayers were prepared to work with it. Why did all these people like this program? Because at the heart of the program was one of the most glorious of democratic tools—a referendum. It was a chance for the workers to be heard; a chance for the workers to have their say and express their wisdom. It was a chance for politicians to listen and to benefit from that local community wisdom.

Unfortunately, the Premier and his Labor Party do not like referendums; in fact, they hate them except when they are used as a useful political diversion—for example, 'Let's run a referendum on daylight saving.' This Labor Party fears a democratic referendum as much as a vampire fears sunlight. It has lost the ability to listen and did not like the process of change in Queensland local government under the Triple S program for a few selfish base political reasons. Firstly, the change was not fast enough for the Premier because the issue would still be alive at the next state government election. The issue would have been an electoral liability for Labor at the next state election. There was no need for this obscene haste in forced amalgamations. Boundary realignments, regional partnerships and shared services would have brought about greater efficiencies at a cheaper cost—cheaper in a monetary sense and cheaper in a social and an emotional sense.

Secondly, the process would still leave a significant number of local councillors in positions of community leadership who were capable of opposing, criticising and speaking out about the injustices forced on their communities by this Labor government. We only have to think of the reasons that we have to be on our toes. We have seen crisis after crisis. We have had child safety, health, electricity, water infrastructure and police crises. We need that local leadership to be able to speak out and alert us to those dangers.

Thirdly, because of the political ideology which drives the Labor government, it has an overall strategy that big is best, or the centralisation of power in the hands of a few. I have not only witnessed this policy in local government but also in other departments such as Education, where there is a policy to close small rural schools by manipulation of student numbers through the transport department; Health, where there is a policy to shut down small hospitals and the services that small hospitals provide; and we have heard examples of maternity ward closures.

I found a summation of the Premier's political philosophies. They are basically two—the centralisation of power in the hands of a few and the abhorrence of opposition and outspokenness. In a description of socialism by Brian Martin, who wrote the book *Uprooting War*, Mr Martin states—

The state bureaucracies are large, powerful and pervasive, and this is why this form of social organization is often called bureaucratic socialism.

Centralization of power in the early years of the Soviet Union also occurred as the Bolsheviks reconstructed the secret police and used it to help crush internal opposition groups.

The libertarian and democratic aspects of the revolution, such as the factory committees, were destroyed as political, economic and military power were concentrated at the apex of the state, especially in the communist party elites.

The principles that this sleazy Labor legislation is built on—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! That language is unparliamentary. Please withdraw.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. The principles that this Labor government is built on, the centralisation of power in the hands of a few and the abhorrence of opposition outspokenness, libertarianism, freedom of speech and democratic values are found in the worst excesses of socialism and fascism.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! 'Fascism' was ruled to be unparliamentary earlier in the day. Please withdraw.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am surprised that a word which describes the excesses of totalitarianism is banned from this chamber.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is a reflection on the chair. I have made my ruling and it is not the word; it is the way it is used. If you wish, I shall quite happily give you a lecture on it at some other point in time. I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The free world has fought, defeated and rejected on many occasions these perverted principles which I have outlined. The mums, dads, workers and battlers will not stand by and allow these perverted principles to take hold in Queensland. This bill marks the beginning of the end for this Labor regime. The Premier knows it. He will resign soon. The Treasurer, who is being groomed to take over, will be left holding this stinking, putrid mess.

The coalition has a solution. The conservative side of politics in this parliament has a solution to clean up this mess. Unlike Labor's socialist policies of centralisation, I am proud to be part of a coalition of conservatives who have a policy of decentralisation. As conservatives we value a re-empowerment of local communities and democratic freedoms. Local health and ambulance boards which have had the power to hire and fire all-powerful CEOs and also re-empower their communities is what we are all about.

The Queensland coalition will offer every local government a democratic choice. The Labor Party has arrogantly denied every community, every mum and dad, every worker and every ratepayer this democratic choice. If the communities so choose, when the National and Liberal parties are in government we will help them undo the damage that Labor has caused and de-amalgamate.

The people will have a number of opportunities to punish this Labor Party for its arrogant and dictatorial behaviour. The first will be at the next federal election. It is not '2007 is Kevin'; it is 'Rudd is a dud'. Kevin Rudd has made no effort whatsoever to intercede or influence Peter Beattie over this issue. Perhaps he does not have the influence, perhaps he does not have the political grunt. He had a chance to show leadership and help stop this Labor disaster, but instead he has been a willing participant in a sideshow, in a good cop, bad cop routine.

At the next state election, the people of Queensland will have an opportunity to punish this Labor government, this Labor regime. Bring on the next election. Peter Beattie has described the Prime Minister's guarantee of a referendum run by the Electoral Commission as political trickery. Since when is giving people a say in a vital and socially important matter 'political trickery'? It is absolutely ridiculous.

Under this Labor government regime, residents of Kolan, Burnett, Isis and Bundaberg local governments will be thrown together. I am not saying in this debate that all amalgamation is bad. No-one is. Some amalgamations would have been welcomed but we will never know whether the people of the day would have voted for them because this government, on page 45 in division 11, bans existing local governments from conducting a poll. The government is banning freedom of expression. It is absolutely outrageous. The government has already taken away my community's choice on such an important and fundamental issue.

Tonight, I had a chat with one of my hardworking councillors, the deputy mayor of the Isis shire, Tony Ricciardi. He told me that these vibrant local government members—the six councillors and one mayor—have worked their tails off serving the community of Isis and Childers and they have managed their ratepayers' money in a very responsible manner. With approximately 4,600 voters, they will be entitled to 0.8 of a representation on the Bundaberg supercouncil. The Isis council continually picked up the tab for state government services. If local government councils are going bankrupt as the state alleges and doing it tough financially, the only reason for that is that they keep on picking up the tab from the state government. The state government has walked away from its responsibilities.

This Isis council donated \$50,000 to the local state high school for a hot house so that its students could learn more about horticulture. It has once again made a significant investment in the state managed community sports hall attached to the public high school. It is managing state roads, funds to the SES and the volunteer Rural Fire Service. All these services are in doubt now.

I have received a number of letters from local constituents. Stephen W. Smith wrote to me and said—

These changes that you have forced upon us—

and he is referring of course to the Premier—

might be a good idea in your minds, but to carry out these changes in a dictatorial manner without asking the people of Queensland if they want to forgo their participation in the running of their local area, smacks of Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia and any other dictator run country.

In a democracy the people are the leaders and the elected representatives are their servants to carry out theirs, the public's wishes.

I have to ask what are the Labor governments ... real reasons for this move, to gradually take over a country—

and he used that word beginning with 'd' that I can't mention—'in a "d" way'—

is to slowly remove the peoples decision making powers and centralise all the decision making therefore allowing the country to be run by a dictator.

These moves are a step towards this objective and is undemocratic in its operation and way of being implemented. You all should be ashamed of yourselves and your resignation is demanded.

You've disenfranchised local government voter.

That was an excellent letter from Mr Smith. I received another letter from Vanessa Christi, who is the youth member of parliament for Bundaberg. She wrote—

Hi Rob

Just a quick note to say how opposed I am to the Local Government Reforms. I am glad that you are arguing against it in parliament. I see absolutely no point in the amalgamations.

Last week at the Bundy Youth Committee meeting we were shown a copy of the 'proposed' area of the new Bundaberg region. I was appalled. How on earth can people think that amalgamating Isis, Burnett, Kolan and Bundaberg will make the communities more stable, when the local council has been removed?!

In summary, on 27 July the Premier released the report of the Local Government Reform Commission. His announcement was heartbreaking and dictatorial because he failed to ask the people of Queensland through a referendum what they wanted and he has forced Labor's local government changes on the people of Queensland in an obscenely fast time frame. It is a report that was based on what Peter Beattie wanted, not what the people of Queensland wanted, and it has guaranteed that there will be less local representation, less democracy, fewer jobs and less service delivery in local government.

Some people may be happy with the latest boundaries, but many will not because there is no guarantee that these forced changes will make for stronger local government. Local government amalgamations and boundary re-alignments could have been brought about through decent, common-sense negotiations as part of the already existing state government's Size, Shape and Sustainability program.

The people of Queensland will have two opportunities to punish Peter Beattie and his party for their very arrogant and dictatorial actions. The first is at the next federal election. The people of Queensland should send a protest that 'Rudd's a dud'. The second opportunity is at the next state election, where a coalition government will give local government communities a say on amalgamation. If the community so chooses, we will de-amalgamate and fix Labor's mess.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (11.07 pm): I take no pleasure in rising to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. One by one, the obedient government members have lined up to support the Premier and the local government minister's madness in this bill. They predicate their opinions on a Brisbane model, but that does not work in the regional areas. I was interested to hear the minister for public works, Rob Swarten, talk about a call to, in his words, a Tory councillor to fix water running under his house but that the guy has not turned up yet. I have to tell the House that under the new predicated councils, we will not have councillors who live around the corner; we will have councillors who live 100 kilometres away, and in some cases 200 kilometres away.

Mr Swarten: Like local members do now. Like Jim Pearce.

Mr MALONE: Local members do not go and fix water pipes. I am sure you, Mr Schwarten, do not go and fix water pipes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Please direct your comments through the chair, member for Mirani.

Mr MALONE: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the reality is that local government is a different form of government to the state government. When those on the other side of the House try to compare the job that we do with that of a councillor, they are completely mistaken. If it is so simplistic that they can use that as an argument, we are in big strife, I have to tell you. We really are in big strife. We have a situation where the pioneer shire and the Mackay City Council were amalgamated when Goss came into government several years ago under the auspices of Kevin Rudd.

The situation was that the Pioneer Shire Council had quite a considerable amount of money and the Mackay City Council was almost broke. The people who live on the extremes of the Pioneer Shire Council, which was a rural council, today are lucky to see a councillor, they are lucky to see a grader, they are lucky to see their potholes fixed. Mackay City Council cannot even fix the potholes in the middle of the city. Guess how much they pay their CEO? We are talking about a reasonably small council compared to what we are talking about under the amalgamated situation. We are talking \$250,000 plus a year for their CEO.

The reality is that under the new Mackay City Council guidelines the Sarina shire and the Mirani shire will be combined with Mackay City. That area will cover north almost to Proserpine—those who know the geography will know how far away that is—south almost to Carmila down the Bruce Highway and west to the Eungella Ranges and even further out than that. It is a huge area. Even with divisions in the shire, some councillors will have to travel 100 kilometres at least to attend to a problem in their shire. The reality is that they will be called out to look at drainage problems and to talk to constituents about barking dogs and roosters crowing in the morning. That is what local government councillors do. If people think they will get the service they are getting currently they are in for a hell of a shock. There is an old saying and it is a very true saying: there is none so blind as those who cannot see. Unfortunately we have a group of nearly 60 members on the other side of this House who cannot see. Robert Mugabe would be right at home in Queensland right now.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! That is unparliamentary. Please withdraw.

Mr MALONE: Why?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Relating a dictatorship to a democratic debate in a parliament I believe is an affront to the dignity of this chamber. Please withdraw.

Mr MALONE: Can I have a ruling on that?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have just ruled. Please withdraw.

Mr MALONE: I withdraw. If this had happened 20 years ago Beattie would have been marching and demonstrating in the streets as he did under Sir Joh when the Springbok tour took place here in Queensland. This legislation is far worse than anything Sir Joh ever did, yet Labor members continue to be critical of his actions. What a joke. At least he had the best interests of Queenslanders at heart, which is more than can be said for those sitting on the other side of the House.

Currently I represent three full shires and three part shires within my electorate. Under the new boundaries I will represent three part shires. To give you some idea of that area, it covers from north of Mackay covering part of Mackay City to 30 kilometres north of Rockhampton and to the boundary of Moranbah. That represents three part shires. It is almost 400 kilometres long and over 300 kilometres wide. How ridiculous is that?

I will give members some examples and these, of course, are not exclusive or fulsome. I will talk about the little township of St Lawrence. St Lawrence is one of the most historic towns in Queensland. It was actually connected to the Adelaide to Darwin telephone line in 1865, and some of the posts that connected that line are still there. There are historic buildings in the town. The administrative centre for the Broadsound Shire Council is based at St Lawrence. I would assume that most members have driven the highway and travelled between Marlborough or Rockhampton and Mackay or Sarina and have seen the sign 'St Lawrence' off to the side of the road. Members would also be aware of the number of accidents that happen in that region. There is a dead region of 200 kilometres between Marlborough and Sarina. There is very little in the way of population and very little in the way of emergency services, except for those that are supplied by the St Lawrence people as volunteers. Most of those volunteers are actually employed by the shire council. The local honorary ambulance driver, who has an ambulance in a small shed in St Lawrence, is actually employed as one of the administrative staff in the council. I have seen that guy work almost all night and have to make a decision whether to fly a helicopter in and land it on the road to get people out of vehicles or out of trucks and be involved with the rural fire brigade as they put out the fires that are caused by some accidents and, of course, help out with extracting people from cars involved in accidents.

As I said, St Lawrence is only a very small town. The school struggles to hold a school population. They have done everything they possibly can to attract people to St Lawrence. It was once a major railway terminus. There is a small recreational area where caravans pull in on a regular basis and stay for a few days which helps create a bit more trade in the centre, particularly for the shop and the pub. If 10 or 15 people were taken out of St Lawrence, such as the administrative staff that will go to Moranbah when the new council comes into effect, it will be a ghost town. Who will supply the emergency services in St Lawrence? Who will look after the thousands of people who travel up and down that highway when there is an accident? Where are the emergency services going to come from? Is the government going to supply a helicopter to fly in the Ambulance Service or the firefighters? Not on your nelly. Those are issues right across my electorate in all the little centres up and down the highway and out through the Pioneer Valley. If members think there can be one councillor looking after 100 kilometres or more, they have rocks in their head.

The other issue, of course, is the services in those small towns. In St Lawrence we have recently had the sale of the Post Office. It is a go-ahead place. The Meteorological Bureau centre is there and gives four-hourly reports into the system. There is a major mail run of about 250 kilometres a day and, of course, the quantity and the critical mass of mail that actually goes through the shire centre makes it all work. The lady who has bought the Post Office is going to go broke. There is no doubt about that. As will the publican.

A government member: Why?

Mr MALONE: How dumb are you? The reality is that once the critical mass drops, the mail run will not be economical and basically she will lose her trade and the Post Office will close down. As I said, this scenario will be repeated time and time again.

In most of the rural areas—it is a little different in the city—the councillors get paid something like \$20,000. It is obvious that members on the other side of the House have done the calculations. Certainly we have a lot of councillors in Queensland. They do a lot of their work on a voluntary basis. They work with community groups, coastal communities, Landcare people.

An opposition member: Most of them pay someone else to run their business.

Mr MALONE: That is exactly right. Most of them lose money by actually attending council meetings. I have to admit that there are some councillors in the bigger regional areas who are probably paid a bit better, but the reality is that those councillors make things happen. I can talk about the two major shires that I have in my area that will be amalgamated with Mackay City, and they are Sarina and Mirani. I have had a fair bit to do with those shires over a long period of time. In Sarina shire we are setting up a skilling centre which is part of the high school. The funds that have been supplied by the education department and the federal government have gone a long way towards setting that facility up with lathes and welders. We have built a beaut shed. We have agriculture. We have goats. We have chooks, and you name it.

The reality is that, had not the council supplied their equipment, their manpower and their plumbers, that would not have happened. There is probably \$3 million worth of assets on that site for which the governments—state and federal—paid about \$1.1 million. Most of that is simply because we had volunteers doing the work and we had the councils stepping in helping out. I am sure that once it goes to Mackay city we will never see a backhoe or grader used on a project such as that again. That is the sad part about it.

It is the same with Mirani shire. They help out. We had a shed built at the high school at Mirani for the Kick-start project. The council and the workers went in, levelled the site, put the sand down and helped lay the concrete. I can imagine the guys from Mackay coming out or authorising off-site work from the council! It is not going to happen. All this is a cost to government. The reality is that it is not getting anything in return for the stupid legislation.

Once we move to the bigger shires, just as the CEOs' pay rises we will see the same with the tribunal; we will see councillors' wages go through the roof. The minister indicated that local members can do the same sort of work and if councillors are expected to do the same sort of work as members of parliament they would expect to get paid the same amount. They will need a car, a fuel card, a laptop, a phone and they will probably need about \$150,000 a year to do it. The government should start adding that up and see how much it is going to save.

Talking about the strength of councils, a lot of responsibility has been passed down to councils without the resources that would normally come with it. We have seen huge issues in terms of waste disposal, environmental issues et cetera that have been passed on to council and the council has not been given any extra funding to enable it to deal with those issues.

The SSS program that was begun almost two years ago was never going to be implemented properly simply because the state government was looking for a change of boundaries. It would not accept that single councils could stand alone, that single councils could be strong enough to do what they had to do on their own. The government was looking for a change of boundaries to achieve a fewer number of councils. It was fairly obvious right from the start that the SSS process was biased towards never being able to reach a conclusion.

I wonder—and others have raised the same issue—how amalgamations can help hospitals in our small communities or emergency services that even now struggle to gain volunteers. How will they help the Auxiliary Fire Service or the Honorary Ambulance Service? I see Michael Kinnane sitting over there. Michael knows exactly what I am talking about.

At the end of August this year Sarina shire will celebrate 100 years. Then a few months after that we will have to pull down the sign that says 'Sarina Shire'. That will be a sad day. We are having a celebration at the end of August for 100 years of the Sarina shire and it is going to be a very sad day to see the shire losing its identity. There have been some great projects in Sarina such as the Sarina Sugar Shed. It would not exist if not for the mayor, who basically travelled all over the world at his own expense to find boilers, milling equipment et cetera to set up a crushing and distilling plant so that the Sugar Shack could get a licence to sell liquor to visitors to the centre.

I am in receipt of an interesting Electoral Commission letter that created a new enrolment. The resident who sent it on to me actually lives in the township of Miriam, which is in the shire of Mirani. His enrolment date was 12 July 2007, and I will table this letter.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 16 July 2007, from P Ruddick, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Capricornia (Australian Electoral Commission) to a certain person regarding their application for electoral enrolment.

It indicates that this person lives in Miriam. His federal division is Capricornia, which we would recollect has just changed boundaries. The state district is Mirani and the local government area is Mackay city, remembering that he lives in the Mirani shire. The letter is dated 12 July 2007. Honourable members will recollect that the commission's report was only handed down on the 27th. I will leave them to make their own conclusions. The reality is that, unless that is a typographical error—and I find that hard to believe—the Electoral Commission certainly was well aware of the new boundaries even before the report was handed down. The whole thing is just a farce. If my understanding is correct, the commission only met a very few number of times to actually read something like 35,000 submissions. Quite frankly, it does not add up. It is a total farce.

Councils in my electorate are the very lifeblood of the community. Without those strong councils that I have in my electorate, I am sure there is going to be a degrading of services and of the liveability of those areas. There is a real need to make sure that the residents in those shires have a real say on whether they want to change boundaries or not. Whatever I can do by hook or by crook I will make sure that the people in my electorate get a chance to say whether they want to be in one shire or another or whether they want to expand it to a bigger shire. They need a say; they have to have a say. It is undemocratic for this government to force through changes to people's lives without giving them a say.

Mr FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (11.26 pm): One of the recurring themes in this debate has been the ongoing view that people feel that a very heavy-handed approach has been taken here. Interestingly, I was talking to a cab driver today—and cab drivers of course are always the absolute experts on things political. He made an interesting comment that he had been listening to 4BC during the day and they ran a phone poll that found that 80 per cent of people were against council amalgamations and felt that Beattie had gone too far. When I considered that these people are actually calling from Brisbane, which is not affected by council amalgamations, I was absolutely staggered to see the depth of feeling from people potentially not affected by the change.

When I checked their web page this evening in preparing my speech, the current results for the question, 'Council Amalgamation, Has Beattie gone too far?', were that 91 per cent of people said yes and nine per cent said no. I say again that that is a poll of people who are not affected by the amalgamation. So it is understandable why the depth of feeling is so strong in areas that are. I have polling software that I run on my own web page. I have been running the question, 'Are you in favour of State Government controlling Council amalgamations?' Currently, 87 per cent of people are against it and 13 per cent are for it. It must be said that there are still people who are in favour of amalgamation. In my area of Maryborough we have some very outspoken people, people in very influential positions who are very pro amalgamation. But by far, I must say, the majority of my community are very much against amalgamation.

Earlier one member—and I just caught the tail end of it so I am not sure who the member was—mentioned Bill Trevor, the mayor of Isis, and how he had spoken so strongly for amalgamation. That is absolutely correct. In fact Bill Trevor was one of the major voices pushing for amalgamation in our area. However, he has since become its fiercest critic. I wonder what devil there was in the detail that he saw that caused such a dramatic change of position. I say to members opposite, 'You cannot quote the statistics favouring it and then not ask what the current position is.' Bill Trevor is now vehemently against amalgamation, as I understand it.

I have an enormous amount of respect for the Premier's political ability. I think he is a very sharp player. I believe in this particular instance he has seriously underestimated the depth of feeling. I ask the Premier: what has happened to the listening Premier on this particular issue? Even people who are neither here nor there about amalgamation are very disturbed about the heavy-handed approach that the Premier has taken here.

I will get back to the local scene. My state seat of Maryborough currently has four local government authorities under it—Woocoo, Tiaro, Hervey Bay and Maryborough. I will give members the quick demographics. Woocoo is led by Mayor Councillor Gloria Banting who has done an absolutely fantastic job. She is a great mayor who has served that particular local government area for a very long time. She continues to do a great job.

The Tiaro mayor is Councillor Linda Harris. I ask the female members of the House to note that out of the four local shires in my state seat we have three women mayors. The women may be happy to hear that. Councillor Linda Harris has always been a staunch advocate for Tiaro. One of the major changes in Tiaro is that the southern section of the shire has been cut in half without any consultation and moved into another seat. That has caused a great deal of distress.

Obviously the Mayor of Hervey Bay, Councillor Ted Sorenson, is firmly for amalgamation. And I say: why would he not be. In this situation we are going to have 10 councillors and one mayor. The voting population of Hervey Bay is around 32,000, the voting local government population of Maryborough shire is about 15,000 or a bit more and then the two smaller councils have 2½ thousand each. Obviously, there are a lot more voters in the Hervey Bay area who can vote for Hervey Bay councillors.

We could theoretically easily end up with the situation where the 10 councillors and the mayor are all residents of Hervey Bay. I am not paranoid about that. But I make the point that if that is the case then the smaller outlying communities are entirely dependent on the goodwill of those councillors to make sure that they are appropriately funded. Anyone who thinks I am being paranoid about this only has to sit back and ask, 'How much money is spent by the Beattie government in the south-east corner compared to the rest of the state?' To say that it is not a possibility that parochialism will work in reverse and that the small areas will be largely ignored and left without an appropriate voice to fight is a real worry.

The Mayor of Maryborough, Councillor Barbara Hovard, was the first woman mayor of Maryborough. I have an enormous amount of respect for Barbara as a person. She has worked diligently to try to further the cause of Maryborough. She is a very hardworking mayor. I will encourage Barbara to stand as a candidate for the new merged council.

Again, underrepresentation is my major concern. It is a bigger concern for me than amalgamation itself. Local councils are the heart of the regional communities. The smaller communities I believe may seriously lose their lobbying power and have to compete for their share of the budgets while seriously outnumbered. In any council budget, whether it is a merged council or councils as they are at the moment, there are only so many dollars to go around. I really want to see that this process does not leave the smaller communities not only with their guts ripped out in terms of their identity but also getting the crumbs from the dinner table.

Politically the heavy-handed approach that I have seen here does not make a lot of sense to me. It seems about as popular as a sandstorm in a gearbox factory. I wonder whether this is not a square up between Kevin Rudd and Peter Beattie. Why would he do something that is so unpopular when it saves money via the financial assistance grants for the Beattie government's sworn enemies, the Liberals? That really puzzles me. Imagine this strong mental picture: Peter Beattie stepping in the poo to save money for John Howard. I would like to be able to figure out why it is that the Premier is so doggedly pursuing something that is so electorally unpopular when he is a very astute politician.

We should look at the Victorian experience with Jeff Kennett. We cannot say that council amalgamations are a Labor idea because they were led by Jeff Kennett as a Liberal. I have a lot of Victorians who move up to my area. Almost without exception they are violently opposed to council amalgamations and believe that it just did not deliver what it said it was going to deliver in the Victorian experience.

In summary, I do not want to say too much more. I want to register my concern particularly about two things: No. 1, the underrepresentation of the smaller shires in the merged entity; No. 2, the heavy-handed approach and the lack of listening by the Beattie Labor government on this issue.

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (11.36 pm): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. The local government reform process will deliver a stronger, modern and financially viable local government system that has a greater ability to provide services and infrastructure for all Queenslanders. For all communities large and small local government reform will deliver stronger councils, less duplication, better use of rates, a focus on services, not administration, smarter community planning and continued local representation.

The recommended boundary changes and council amalgamations will reduce the number of councils in the state from 156 to 72 requiring 724 fewer politicians. New regional councils representing key economic development hubs will be better equipped to deal with the challenges of growth and changes across a larger area. New laws will provide even greater protection to the state's natural icons in areas of the new regional councils.

Reform is being implemented in those areas where the potential benefits are most significant. This is not an indiscriminate change. It is not a change for change's sake but a considered move to improve the financial viability and effectiveness of local governments across the state.

There will be some consequential changes to the current arrangements in the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. These should be relatively minor. Claims by the member for Toowoomba South that fewer mayors as a result of reform would have a marked effect on biosecurity are absurd. Biosecurity Queensland has a close working relationship with local governments in the area of pest and weed management and this will continue. Indeed, stronger local governments will provide an opportunity to build even stronger relationships with Biosecurity Queensland not only in pest and weed management but for all biosecurity issues that impact on regional communities.

Biosecurity Queensland is working with the LGAQ to ensure that these relationships are maintained. I would not expect the relationship to be compromised. All local governments are required to have in place local government area pest management plans and also make payments to the Land Protection Fund through preset payments. These funds are used for a range of pest management activities including research. While the amalgamation process may cause some disruption to this process this should be only short term. There may be some need to review the process used for calculations of payments for the 2008-09 financial year.

In animal biosecurity, shire amalgamations will require a review of the current rules for amalgamation of land parcels under a single property identification code, otherwise known as PIC. The PIC is a key building block of the National Livestock Identification System. DPI is already working on this issue and it is not expected to cause any disruption to industry. In plant biosecurity, shire amalgamations will require some legislative changes to pest quarantine areas where these are linked to the shire boundaries. However, there should be no impact on industry. In animal welfare, local government plays a key role in animal control matters. This role is unlikely to be affected by shire amalgamations. It is clear that local government reform will bring many benefits to the people of Queensland. While minor changes will be necessitated on the part of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, they will only serve to strengthen my department's role and relationship with rural and regional local government authorities.

The Mackay-Whitsunday region will be significantly affected for the better, with eight councils becoming three separate entities. My home town of Mackay will see the merging of the Mackay City Council with Sarina and Mirani shire councils to form the Mackay Regional Council. A new Whitsunday Regional Council will be created consisting of the existing council areas of Bowen and Whitsunday. It is interesting to hear members opposite talking about a lack of consultation. Back in the early sixties the government of the day, led by Sir Frank Nicklin, decided that Wangaratta and Bowen shires should be amalgamated based around the same issues that we are debating here today on size, shape and sustainability. For people who do not know the geography of Bowen shire, Wangaratta took in the suburbs of Queens Beach represented by the member for Burdekin, Gumlu, Guthalungra, Collinsville and Scottsville. So back in the sixties this same issue of size, shape and sustainability dogged the government of the day. I believe that the Beattie government led by local government minister, Andrew Fraser, and his predecessor Desley Boyle have taken a holistic approach across the state to local government amalgamations. I think it is done in a way that is not piecemeal, as has been done in the past.

The other areas of the Belyando, Broadsound and Nebo councils will also join forces to form the Isaac Regional Council. This is based on the northern end of the Bowen Basin. I believe that stronger and more sustainable councils will mean more jobs, more opportunities and a brighter future for communities currently serviced by small and financially weak councils. The three new councils as a result of their merging with neighbouring shires will have a greater diversification in their ratepayer base, therefore increasing their ongoing financial viability. A broader economic base for the larger councils will emerge from the blending together of councils reliant on industries such as coal, sugar cane, beef, grain, cattle and more.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all three councils that will form the Mackay Regional Council which have met and moved to progress the formation of the Mackay Regional Council. I have personally spoken to the representatives of the three councils—Councillor Julie Boyd, the mayor of Mackay; Councillor Karen May, the mayor of Sarina shire; and Councillor Dave Price of Mirani shire. I look forward to working with the mayors and the transitional team to ensure that the new council in our region will continue to prosper and flourish after 15 March. The Queensland government is absolutely committed to building a robust, modern and economically secure local government system throughout the state. The government recognises that local government plays a crucial role in the planning and delivery of local services and infrastructure for Queensland communities. I know at times the reform may be difficult for some, but I believe the reforms will make local authorities stronger and more relevant. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (11.43 pm): The Local Government Reform Implementation Bill is a bill which really should be welcomed by all Queenslanders as it is a recipe for strong local government in the 21st century. That evident truth has not worried anyone in the opposition. We have heard so

much—and we will probably hear a lot more—diatribe and rot, but they know and will not admit that the actions taken are legal, correct and necessary. At the outset I congratulate the minister for his approach to this reform and his resolute action in the face of many actions by people in the community which were not only objectionable to most Queenslanders but verged on criminal activity. I also want to thank the Hon. Desley Boyle, the previous minister for local government, because it was on her watch that the Size, Shape and Sustainability review was implemented. She was the one who put this on its obvious course.

I want to have a word in the shell-like ear of the Leader of the Opposition: I do not have political masters. I am a member of, and very proud to be a member of, the Labor Party. I subscribe to the rules of the party and I answer to the people who elect me and whom I represent. Like the member for Rockhampton, I do not take my information from the media, the opposition or, as will be seen later, from the Livingstone Shire Council. I go out into the community and talk to the people who will benefit—the community organisations, places where ordinary people congregate like sports clubs. They are aware that their future lies in reform, and I will deal with my local councils in that regard later in this speech.

Claims have been and will be made ad nauseam in the House today that democratic rights of Queenslanders have been denied, but most of those claims are not based on truth or knowledge. Most opposition members obviously have no knowledge of what democracy really is and I would suggest to them that they put the word in Google if they can spell it and see what they come up with. Most of the claims seem to relate to a right to hold a referendum. That belief is ephemeral when we consider that that right was written into the legislation by a National Party government but the right could be overridden by the relevant minister if he or she did not accept the results. That actually was the next part of the speech which the member for Southern Downs conveniently omitted, although he was asked by the minister to quote the next section. Most of this is typical National Party jackboot tactics but actions which members will not speak about in this House.

It was also instructive to listen to the minister pointing out in this House to the National Party on a previous sitting day—and we heard this from the member for Pumicestone—that the opposition did not even support a 1988 referendum question which would have included local government as an arm of government in the Australian Constitution. The Beattie government recognised the wishes of Queenslanders and accepted the need for strong local government in the Constitution of Queensland and it is also recognised in the Labor platform. The recommendations are based on the independent findings of a commission and, contrary to a few of the allegations which were floated by the members for Nanango and Gladstone, I would hazard a guess that I and many members of this government have a deeper knowledge of rural and regional areas than a lot of the people who stand and try to condemn us. I say to you lot: grow up and act like adults!

I am amazed at the beliefs raised by people like the member for Noosa, who had some difficulty in telling us where Noosa is going to end up or where it is going. He seemed to claim that it will disappear, but he shows his lack of reality and I can guarantee him that it will still be here in March 2008. In the Gladstone area the city had been stunted in its growth by the doughnut shire of Calliope. It is a special area for the Queensland government and money is spent there without any effort by the current member. I have had conversations with the Mayor of Gladstone, Peter Coronas, whose council is continually frustrated by the actions of Calliope. I hope that he is interested in running for the mayoralty of the Gladstone Regional Council.

It should come as no surprise to this House to know that the member for Gladstone used to be on the Calliope council and she would oppose any decision which would impact on those she left behind. The deputy mayor is the president of the Central Queensland Local Government Association and has tried to misrepresent the wishes of the member councils of that association, which includes my area, in this whole debate. I said in this House on 7 August that Calliope ratepayers were the losers in an advertisement placed in the *Courier-Mail* by their councillors and signed by and on behalf of the Central Queensland Local Government Association. They had to meet the cost because no authority was given by the member councils for the spending of those funds. We heard today from the member for Gladstone about Calliope paying that. There was never any doubt that it paid it. The sadness of it was that the Calliope ratepayers were the ones who had that imposed on them.

We hear continual claims in this House that the National-Liberal Party are the natural supporters of local government, but I say to the various mayors and councillors, whether of continuing or amalgamated councils, that if you believe that you will also find fairies at the bottom of your garden. From the time of the failure of councils—and mostly through their own actions—to meet their obligations as agreed under the Triple S review, we have had an hysteria whipped up by the coalition in its endeavour to cover its lack of policies and to cause fear to Queensland people.

The claims of towns closing down, people losing jobs and schools closing are just spurious nonsense. People could have spoken to the member for Gregory about Stonehenge, which is a remarkable little community. He would tell members that this small community fluctuates according to whether a new family comes to town. This town has persisted because of the pride of the people who live there. Jericho shire has contained two towns, Jericho and Alpha, for many years and they have

thrived. It is the people in those towns who have worked to keep their communities alive. The population of towns throughout Queensland fluctuate even with strong local councils and will continue to do so. One of the real effects of the fear campaign is that people who had concerns about employment in regional councils have gone out and obtained alternative work. Now that many of those councils will continue, they have the added problem that their actions have reduced their own council's workforces.

This bill gives the lie to the dishonesty peddled by the coalition and those mayors and councillors who have danced to their tune. On 8 May in Barcaldine we had a march and claims and counterclaims were made by ill-informed people about decisions that had not even been made. We had Shane Webcke visit and the doomsayers have continued to use him in advertising, but he should return any fees he has been paid. If members checked his enrolment they would find that he lives around Eatons Hill. He may own a hotel at Leyburn, but he does not live there. Support for the country from the country? Come on, Shane!

The member for Warrego particularly has been using fear to try to force financial support from councils to this campaign. He should hang his head in shame. He should also tell this House whether his son was the ringleader of the disgusting exhibition at Barcaldine where water and an egg were thrown at the Premier and the minister. The member for Warrego should also tell us whether he contributed to the script, because if he did he should hang his head in shame. Some mayors have apologised for the actions of the rent-a-crowd on that day as that is not the way that country people act.

It is not only those mayors and councillors but constituent bodies such as the LGAQ and the CQLGA that have peddled those fears. If anyone has received any electronic transmission from localdemocracy.com.au, they should check the domain register. They will find under the registry ID that that site is registered to the Local Government Association of Queensland under the registrar ID of R00015-AR on 23 April. Why does the site not just operate as the LGAQ?

We then had the spectacle on 8 June where a Kelsey Neilson, who I understand is a Boulia councillor, besmirched our Anzacs in calling for the desecration of our cenotaphs. To their everlasting shame, the LGAQ and the National Party supported this stance. Even the RSL condemned their actions.

Mr Johnson: That is not right.

Mr HOOLIHAN: The member has seen the advertising. Those people who have continued to wear red as a consequence of that campaign also deserve condemnation.

We have continued to be bombarded by these distortions and half-truths right up to the handing down of the commission's decision. After that decision, most councils knew what was proposed and they were supportive. Only a small number of mayors and councils who want to be the big frogs in little puddles have continued to peddle fear.

In my local area the Mount Morgan shire, through Mayor Gavin Finch, and Rockhampton City Council, through Mayor Margaret Strelow, and probably Fitzroy shire—although they are a bit ambivalent—were prepared to participate in the Triple S review. Despite that, Livingstone shire obfuscated and the review got nowhere. Self-interest reins supreme and the Livingstone Shire Council has continued with that attitude despite some very forward-thinking councillors on the Livingstone council who were supportive of reform. The mayor and his deputy have continued and still continue to endeavour to frustrate sensible proposals. Going from the latest email that was published by the mayor to local groups, that council deserves to be sacked under the new legislation.

We heard from the member for Rockhampton about people from all sides of politics supporting amalgamation in our area. Some of them are successful ratepayers and businesspeople who know the benefits of having larger entities. The mayor of Livingstone Shire Council was described as self-interested, but how do we really describe him when we consider that the Livingstone Shire Council anti-amalgamation advertising was paid for by a land developer? Why did Livingstone Shire Council want to stand alone as a rump when no person would have been able to afford to live there? Land development could then proceed apace.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I will take that interjection by the member for Gregory. I am way ahead of the race in that instance.

We now have a so-called community rally in Yeppoon to be held on Sunday where more community funds will be poured into the promotional antics of the mayor of Livingstone shire aided and abetted by the CQLGA. Quite clearly, the mayor of Livingstone shire has continued his breaches of the Local Government Act and he should be dealt with.

Amalgamation will give my whole region an opportunity to advance. The current proposals are welcome. I have never been against reform as I know that, despite some misgivings, it has worked well elsewhere. We have heard about Victoria, but nobody has mentioned that in the *Courier-Mail* on 30 July there was a report from the executive officer of that state's local government association that, 15 years on, the councils work well and there has been, in fact, an increase in employment in local government. That was on the reduction in the number of councils from 210 to 78. Only two of those councils have applied to stand alone, and I understand the number now stands at 80.

As we have heard from so many people who approached the debate from a realistic and truthful perspective, each town will still exist after 15 March. People will still live in those towns and they will be cared for by regional councillors who come from the same region and, hopefully, have the same love of the regions as the other people who live in those towns.

The Beattie government has shown its support for Queenslanders of all political persuasions since 1997 and it will continue to do so, because they put their faith in this government. As I said at the outset, this opposition cannot come out and say that local government reform is beyond the legislative capacity of this House, because it knows that it is not. It is beyond the opposition's capacity to understand. That is why it is such a disorganised rabble and deserves to be where it is. I support the legislation, I support the thrust of the reforms and I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (11.55 pm): I welcome this bill into the parliament. The objective of the bill is to restructure some local governments in Queensland. As a background, the electorate of Kallangur that I represent is located in the new Moreton Bay Regional Council. That new council encompasses the areas covered by three existing councils: Caboolture, Pine Rivers and Redcliffe. I believe that this proposed merger will create a substantial economic driver for future growth, infrastructure, social services and, I think importantly, urban planning. This area is experiencing a substantial growth in population. These new boundaries create a massive economic unit with the power to drive economic growth and attract business from interstate and overseas to invest in this growth corridor.

Tonight there has been some discussion about the issue of redundancies. Certainly in the situation of the Moreton Bay Regional Council, there should be no redundancies in this local area for council workers. Owing to the growth forecast, I think it would be silly to argue that council jobs would be at risk in this new Moreton Bay Regional Council.

I have been struck by the enthusiasm that some local people have found with the formation of this new council. The opportunity to create social cohesion in the new area has actually quite astounded me. I want to use what happened to me last Saturday night when I was at the rugby league match between Caboolture and Gympie as an example of this. A lot of members of parliament would understand that when someone walks up to you at an event like that and says, 'Ken, I just want to discuss with you the local council boundaries,' you immediately think, 'Here's a nice problem coming up.' But I found that when a couple of people came over to me to talk to me about that, I thought the context in which they were talking about it was very interesting.

The issue they raised with me in relation to the new boundaries was about strengthening social cohesion through sporting contact. People spoke to me about the opportunity presented by the new council region for a whole new rugby league competition in the area taking in districts and areas that previously were not part of the area—Caboolture, Bribie Island, where the member for Pumicestone is, Beachmere, Deception Bay, Burpengary, Pine Rivers and Dayboro, which could come into the area. The point that was made—and it was said here tonight by the member for Redcliffe—by these people was that council amalgamations presented an opportunity to develop social cohesion, to put together these sides which play in either the Sunshine Coast competition or the Brisbane competition. Some of them play in the second division competition—whatever. It was an opportunity for them all to be together in the one district regional competition.

The point they made was that the main feeder club for these teams would be the Redcliffe Rugby League Football Club. So everyone understood just what it all meant and how it all worked. They were telling me about how out of this they could have a representative side—the Moreton Bay side—they could play the Sunshine Coast and on and on it went. So I was excited about that sort of enthusiasm that people felt about the development of something like that for the social cohesion in a local community. I thought it was great with such an issue going on that people would be thinking and talking about stuff like that.

Of course the area is a growth area. They talked of issues such as a more concentrated local identity that would develop through a competition such as this. There is a history to this. There is a reason people think about this. For instance, two years ago when the Redcliffe district rugby league side tried to set up a dual relationship with the Caboolture team which plays within the Sunshine Coast Rugby League competition they were knocked back by the Sunshine Coast Rugby League on the basis that they were not allowed dual registration. When you think about it, how insane is it that a young man cannot play for the Caboolture district team and have dual registration to have an opportunity to play for Redcliffe within the Queensland cup because of some mad boundaries and bureaucratic decisions that occurred?

The idea of the new Moreton Bay council, these people were saying to me, presented an opportunity to address these issues and to really develop that social cohesion—as the Deputy Speaker, who used to live in the area, knows so well—in our local area. The example that I used is probably a small matter but it is not small matters that a lot of these issues are about. It is about understanding what can come out of the new councils that are developed.

I have had an opportunity sitting here tonight to listen to a lot of the debate, and I have been in this parliament for a number of years, as has the member for Gregory and a number of other MPs. Some members have spoken tonight about the fervour and the aggression that apparently exists locally. There have been a number of debates in the time that I have been in this parliament where you look up—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr HAYWARD:—and the member for Gregory knows this—into the gallery and it is packed full of people who have come to see what the debate is about. The one thing that has struck me about this debate tonight is that, if it is so emotional and it is so important, how come nobody was here in the crowd to come and have a look at what was going on? How come nobody was here? If it really was an emotional thing that was occurring, where were they? There were one or two people who were here and that is all.

The point I want to make is that I strongly support the new Moreton Bay Regional Council that has been established in our local area. I can see how out of that it is going to have substantial economic development and growth but, as local people are now discovering and talking to me about, it will present an opportunity for great social cohesion in the area with something as simple as the sport of rugby league. I support this bill strongly and look forward to its passing.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (12.03 am): The bill before the House this evening, the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill, has created more real anguish, anger and disruption amongst regional communities than any other single act Queenslanders have yet seen. It has been aptly called the amalgamation jackpot—jackboot.

Government members interjected.

Mrs MENKENS: Yes, a jackpot for you people. Today we see the implementation of the worst case of control, of centralism and devastation of democratic principles that I thought I would ever live to see.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mrs MENKENS: That is right. Socialism is alive and well in Queensland. At the time of Federation, Australia was blessed with a very sensible and sound framework for a three-tier government—federal, state and local. This bill sees the socialist Labor government taking advantage of a power it believes itself to have—namely, power over the very existence of local government. In 1922 the socialists destroyed the upper house, or house of review, and today they are destroying the magnificent fabric of local governance.

Today we are watching the manipulation of local government in country Queensland in a way never imagined by our forefathers. This bill takes the word 'local' out of the term 'local government'. From now on it will become a quasi-government body and all councillors from today onwards will know in no uncertain terms that if they do not obey the state minister they will be under threat. We see the tactics this government uses to threaten, the tactics they use to control and the tactics they use to frighten their departmental public servants. These same tactics are now going to be used to control councillors and councils. A council is no longer going to be a servant of the people but a vassal of the state government.

We see in this legislation that the minister has the final say on the actions of the council before and after the changeover date. The minister has been given the power to be able to remove local transition committee members at any time. This bill also gives the interim chief officer the right to override the council CEO and can direct staff to do whatever that chief officer wants.

Councils will be in caretaker mode from the moment that this legislation is passed through to March, so they will be unable to make any major policy decisions. Councils cannot sack a CEO. They will not be able to employ a CEO. Councils will not be able to make decisions over \$150,000 or one per cent of their last annual report. These legislative decisions are being made by a Premier and a minister who are totally out of control. They are just like the bullyboys down the road. They think the people have picked on them because they are demonstrating and they are going out to get them. The people have had the temerity to express their disgust at this and the Premier cannot cop it.

Because the community has demonstrated their feelings, the minister and the Premier do not want this, and so the minister thinks he is going to make them pay. He is going to punish the regional people by inflicting all these totally unnecessary rules to perfectly law-abiding institutions. It is the most despicable behaviour. It is un-Australian, it is undemocratic and it is not worthy of any leader in this fine state. We are seeing a Premier and a minister who are totally out of control. In fact, I almost fear for them both because the community's anger is very real and it is not going to abate. For the government to move in and suggest that the appointed interim CEO in these councils has far more local and operational knowledge than the very professional CEOs who are currently doing a perfectly satisfactory job is arrogance of the highest order.

What will come about as a result of this will probably be total bureaucratic bungling. No local government is going to be local anymore. The word 'local' is gone forever. I have been listening to some of the incredible statements being made by members on the other side while they espouse the benefits of this appalling legislation and I really cannot believe their hypocrisy. Those on the other side belong to a party that promotes the rights of individuals, yet here we see this government going to extraordinary lengths—and they really are extraordinary lengths—to ensure that regional Queensland people cannot voice their opinion. Tonight's debate is not about amalgamations. We are hearing lots about amalgamations. It is not about whether individual councils should amalgamate or not; it is about principles. The argument tonight is about principles. It is a free country where we have a democratic right to free speech and a democratic right to voice our opinions but, more importantly, a democratic right to vote on government decisions.

Tonight we are seeing that right being denied to the people of Queensland at a local level. The legislation here tonight is about the impact on communities; it is about the impact on families. It is a complete insult to Queensland people.

I used to teach leadership skills to vocational students in another life. We discussed the many kinds of leadership. We discussed and described styles of leadership. When we discussed leadership, we would discuss the autocratic leader, the democratic leader and the dictatorial leader. The perfect example of a dictatorial leader was one Adolf Hitler but, by golly, we have hatched another one here in Queensland. You have just about outdone Adolf Hitler now.

We have seen that there will be no appeal process. Even a prisoner on death row has the right of appeal, for heaven's sake. This is the most devious and underhanded legislation to hit this parliament. It is un-Australian. There have been no genuine facts used to come up with this legislation. The majority of these councils are not broke and they are certainly not on the point of extinction. We have heard lots of wormy words to cover the real story.

What is needed for this legislation is fairness and justice in an unfair and unjust bill. There are thousands of Queenslanders out there who have not been given an opportunity in any form to voice their opinions, their objections or otherwise to this situation. The heavy hand of control has taken over the councils' industrial relations as well. Councils will have little freedom to define their own industrial relations future. Basically, the councils' industrial relations will be controlled by the unions. Unelected union officials will have a disproportionate ability to affect the outcomes of any IR initiatives and will be able to lock the councils into outcomes. Through this arrangement, the government and unions will have a chance to bring all council employees in Queensland under their preferred IR model.

Councils of course will not be able to determine the rate of pay of councillors or whether they are full-time or part-time. This of course will come under the Remuneration Tribunal and the Remuneration Tribunal will have the final say on the pay of councillors. These types of decisions were always made at a local level. They were always influenced by the council's budget, and the decisions were made by the councillors themselves. They were always part of the local decision-making process. Again, this could have major economic ramifications. I thought this type of government control went out when the Iron Curtain came down.

Today's amendment that all councils will be sacked if the decision is made to hold a referendum is just an appalling indictment on this Beattie-led Labor government. It really is the most incredible piece of legislation. I am intrigued to know what on earth the minister is frightened of. This government is running scared and it is bringing in more and more bullyboy tactics every day. As the shadow minister for women, I must applaud the women of the bush.

Mr Johnson: Hear, hear!

Mrs MENKENS: Good on you, member for Gregory. We certainly do applaud the women from the bush. The bus load of women and children who travelled 28 hours to come into parliament last weekend to valiantly state their case and the concerns from their communities was a desperate gesture. Imagine the strength of their feelings and their desperation to take this kind of action. I dips me lid to them.

Families are the heart of all communities, and it is the women who are the backbone of every family. They are the nurturers, they are generally the accountant and they are the major force behind the family. It is the women who feel the pain and try to cushion the anxiety that is caused when the breadwinner's job and livelihood is threatened, and that is the tragic reality of this issue—it really is.

Right across regional Queensland, thousands of council staff and council workers are now very unsure about their jobs. More than that, right across Queensland there are small businesspeople whose businesses are reliant on the council presence in their town. Nobody has really taken into consideration these people and what impact it will have on them. There have been no economic impact studies done on these issues, there have been no social impact studies done, and there are so many towns that will soon wilt and die as a result. We just have to look at the western line that goes through to Mount Isa. I remember when places like Maxwellton and Nelia were thriving communities.

Mr Johnson: Absolutely.

Mrs MENKENS: They were.

Mr Johnson: And Prairie.

Mrs MENKENS: Absolutely—all of those communities were thriving because they had railway workers living there. Then we had the centralisation of the railway and those towns died. I can actually tell a story of a young man who bought a house a few years ago in Hughenden for \$5,000. This is a true story. Give him his due, he thought it was a bit of a hoot because he got a \$2,000 refund from the federal government's first homebuyers grant, but it is not a joke. That is happening right across the western area.

This type of scenario will become an even bigger issue in so many more towns. Family homes will have no value and there will be no way these people will be able to afford a new home in a larger centre. Quite seriously, I really wonder if members opposite who live in their comfortable suburban homes—and good for you—who each year look at the value of their homes going up have ever really thought what it is like to live in these small communities where every year the values go down.

An opposition member interjected.

Mrs MENKENS: Absolutely. I do not know if members opposite can possibly comprehend what these people are going through. On a local issue, Bowen shire is part of my electorate and I feel for the people of Collinsville. I am aware of their concerns; I have spoken with a lot of people in Collinsville. They will be tacked on to Airlie Beach, which is a marvellous area but there is absolutely no community of interest. That is where the population is. Who will take much notice of Collinsville and Mount Coolon? For the people living way out at the other end of Mount Coolon, there is absolutely no community of interest. Poor old Collinsville. Every time there is a state or federal electoral redistribution, Collinsville gets tacked on to a different electorate. The people there have again been forgotten and they have been tagged on with Airlie Beach.

I was proud to stand up with the women of the west in the red bra campaign. Okay, I was suitably disciplined for this, but the red bra campaign is still alive and well across the state. As members have heard, the colour red was used to celebrate the bleeding of the bush, and certainly the use of bras highlighted the need for Queensland women right across the state to connect with each other and support and nurture Queensland communities. That is what they have been doing. As I said, that whole campaign is still alive and moving right across the western communities. Okay, it was perhaps a provocative campaign—it still is—but it was designed to highlight a very serious issue and bring understanding by raising the profile of women's stories and all those who are deeply affected.

I will quote from what the president of the Local Government Association of Queensland, Councillor Paul Bell, said today. He said—

Premier Peter Beattie's announcement that the government would legislate to dismiss without notice councils which chose to give their communities a say in the amalgamation debate was a sick, reprehensible action.

It is. I think he explains it extremely well. He then went on to say—

It's a dark day for democracy in this state and it is unprecedented in the history of this proud nation.

We are hearing sniggers and laughs from the other side, but this truly is unprecedented in the history of this nation.

Mr Seeney: It's all a joke to them.

Mrs MENKENS: It is seemingly a joke. I strongly oppose this bill. This truly is a sad day for Queensland.

Mr STEVENS (Robina—Lib) (12.20 am): This bill has nothing to do with the betterment of local government. The genesis for this bill is Labor Party ideology from the brains trust of the Labor Party, and none of those are here tonight, I can tell members that much. It is all about the ideology that brought about the legislation that prohibits sitting councillors from running for state government. They have to resign their post which makes it a very difficult impediment to running for parliament—except if one is a Labor Party guy who wants to run for federal government. They can stay in there and compete.

There are two different standards. It is all about Labor Party ideology. Why is it about Labor Party ideology? It is about reducing the training ground for conservative politicians. If members look through their books they will see where the majority of this side of the House get their training. We get our training from local councils through Queensland. The mob on that side come through the union movement, hanging around political offices. There are a couple of teachers over there—I see Phil Gray smiling, well done! That is where those opposite are trained. This is ideology. It is legislation that is designed to reduce the opportunity for other people to get their political training through local government. That is what the brains trust—the Damian McGreevys, the Bill Ludwigs, the Peter Beatties—see for this legislation.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr STEVENS: It was not a spur of the moment thing. The genesis for this started a long time ago. I will tell the member for Southport that we had a meeting in 2005. Councillor Paul Bell came to the Gold Coast City Council and he brought with him senior officers of the Local Government Association. He

said to the council and the mayor at the time, 'You had better talk to Logan City under the Triple S program because Logan City really covet your areas of Beenleigh and Yatala; they would like that for their rate base. You should talk to them because if you don't our advice is that after the next election the government will legislate and push through amalgamations.'

Guess what happened? I forgot all about it, to be honest, but in April of this year the minister stood up and brought in this new Local Government Reform Implementation Bill out of nowhere. Everything was going forward under the Triple S program. There was \$25 million in the budget and then they said, 'Right, it is time for us to act. Why would we do it in April straightaway? We do it because we have to get it off the agenda,' member for Gaven, 'so that we have a chance to win the election in 2009. We don't want these things hanging around. We will cut off Cook, we will cut off Redcliffe. We have to do a bit of damage so that we can get rid of these training grounds. We will get rid of this now and get it over and done with. People will forget about it. They do get comfortable.' I will tell you a little more about that afterwards.

Why is this legislation being rushed through this House by the local government minister? A document was waved around which the minister said was the reason for this local government legislation. This PricewaterhouseCoopers document said, 'Isn't it terrible? There are 43 per cent of councils that are not financial.' Aha, we forgot to say 'through the rest of Australia.' The PricewaterhouseCoopers report, as the minister would know, included those councils from Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales—those councils that have already been through this amalgamation process that he is now proposing. They are the ones that were financially unsustainable. When the report came down and showed the actual state of the nation and the financial situation of councils, it showed about 12 councils—which is less than 10 per cent of the local councils—which everyone knew were under stress, and we had to address those matters. But that was not the reason we had to proceed with this wholesale amalgamation of 155 back to 72. It is all about the politics and the training ground for conservative politicians. It is even in the editorial in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* today. I congratulate the *Gold Coast Bulletin* on its perception in this matter.

There is no financial reason to do this. Is Redcliffe under pressure? Is Noosa under pressure? No, they are not. Are the other councils on the eastern seaboard under pressure? No, they are not. It has nothing to do with financial pressures, which was the reason the minister gave when waving the document around in the House saying, 'It is desperate. I have to save these councils.' It has nothing to do with that at all. They are all financially successful councils. We have now moved on to the point: we have got back to our 72 councils. Some of them were going to amalgamate anyway. We know of the doughnut councils. There are some councils that were quite happy to talk to each other—Caloundra and Maroochy on the north coast, for instance. But why not leave Noosa on its own? Is it in financial stress? No. The reason for including Noosa is unbelievable. Those opposite will pay. It has turned our friend here from a marginal seat into a major seat, and we are glad the member for Noosa will be back after the next election. And we will get Redcliffe back. I do feel sorry for the very good new member for Redcliffe. Unfortunately it will end up being one term for her.

It is really disappointing that for political expediency the government of Queensland is showing a lack of concern to people in councils right across Queensland. I should know, because in 1994, when the current minister for local government was in short pants, the Labor Party came up with this same little trick for amalgamation. They thought, 'Let's amalgamate. We'll get rid of that Albert shire. It's home for a lot of conservative councillors. It is a breeding ground for a lot of money for the National Party, which they keep belting us around the head with. So let's get rid of Albert shire.' They ran this silly amalgamation process down there. So I have been through the process. I happened to be mayor at the time of the amalgamation of the Albert shire and the Gold Coast city. I happened to win then, as other doughnut mayors did right throughout the State—Tom Pyne beat Kevin Byrne and Johnny Nugent from Moreton won Ipswich. It was not necessary for those areas to amalgamate to have financial strength. Albert shire was a fantastically run council—very strong. The Gold Coast city was very strong. It was about the politics of putting conservative areas together so they would not get any problems from conservative politicians in the future.

At the time of that amalgamation process—the same process that the government is now going to put all of these councils through throughout Queensland—there were 2,298 workers in both councils. Today there are 2,900 workers. Did we save in the number of workers? Was that where we got our financial benefit? Are we going to save our—

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr STEVENS: I can hear an echo down there. Would the government put the member on the front bench, if he can make it up there? It is a half marathon for him, but we would like to see him get up there. He has been up the back forever.

There are no opportunities for cost saving with these amalgamations, as the Hoffman report stated in 1994. It said we would save \$3 million if we amalgamate Albert shire and Gold Coast city. It was a lot of bunkum. It does not become reality. We are not sacking staff. Are we sacking staff? No, the Labor Party does not sack staff. Jobs are guaranteed for three years. They are not going to sack them.

So we are not going to save money by sacking staff in these communities. We are not going to sell the graders because the graders have to be there to do the work. There are still two jobs to do out there, so we are not going to sell the graders. What are we doing? We are getting rid of a lot of councillors, a few mayors, a couple of CEOs and that is all this is about. There will be no financial benefit to these areas that are amalgamated. Local government is about local issues. It is about getting close contact; ringing your local representative.

We have a local government area down there now that has over half a million people. There is no way that they do not go through the myriad paper pushing and all the checks and balances that are necessary in big organisations. Big is not necessarily better. If we want to keep the 'local' in local government we have to keep that contact with the people. They have to feel part of their council. I can tell honourable members that that died the day the amalgamation went through in both Gold Coast and Albert. Honourable members will find that most of the people who were around at the time—and obviously there have been a lot of new people since then—regret to this day, even in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* commentary on the matter, the amalgamation of those two successful councils. I can assure members that once they are amalgamated there is no unscrambling the egg. We tried unscrambling the egg and it will not happen again.

Mr Fraser: The LGAQ says seven per cent want to go back. Seven per cent of people want to go back. They are not my figures—the LGAQ's.

Mr STEVENS: From where?

Mr Fraser: From the LGAQ.

Mr STEVENS: From Albert shire, Gold Coast?

Mr Fraser: Yes.

Mr STEVENS: That is almost impossible to gauge without doing a survey and they have not done one.

Mr Fraser: That's what they did.

Mr STEVENS: Where is the survey? I have been on the Gold Coast and there has been—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! I remind the member for Robina to direct his comments through the chair.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would you also remind the minister?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Robina, resume your seat. The chair decides who needs to be called into line. I have asked you to direct your comments through the chair. The minister was interjecting. You took his interjection, but you need to continue make your comments through the chair.

Mr STEVENS: I look forward to directing my comments to the minister through the chair. There has not been any survey of the Gold Coast. There was one survey done and that was the survey to deamalgamate and it was not carried. It was carried in one particular area of the Gold Coast, but it was not carried in the Albert shire area and did not proceed. They are the realities of amalgamation.

The new areas that they have proposed have been moved. I said in April of this year that Beenleigh would be going up into another area. What has happened? Beenleigh has gone into another area. Whether they like it or not, the local member in the area will find out that the people of Beenleigh did not want to move into Logan City. That will be another issue. For many years in the Albert shire we put a lot of money into making Beenleigh into a great city for people to live in. It did not have the funds at the time to become a city on its own. When the amalgamation came to the Gold Coast we still kept funding it to grow it so that it would become a city in its own right in the future and then Beenleigh could have had its own identity. But no, we are going to throw it out to be the bottom end of Logan and let Logan do with it what it will. It will not get the funding from Logan City that it has enjoyed from Gold Coast city. Mark my words and ask the people of Beenleigh whether they want to go into Beenleigh or not.

However, the government has not asked anybody about anything. This has been rushed legislation without any consultation. The amendments that were brought in today by the minister show somebody who is very frightened about letting people have their say in the state of Queensland. If the Prime Minister and the feds would like to fund the opportunity for people to have their say, I believe that a very appropriate time would be on the day that the federal election is called across Australia. This is the Kevin Rudd message to them: we do not want any referendums held about your amalgamations ruining life in those areas on the day Kevin Rudd wants to try to win the federal election. That is what those amendments that were brought in today are really saying.

If some duck hunting legislation were to be introduced, we would consult with all the environment groups. We would even consult with the gun clubs and the shooting groups to a minor degree. But do we consult people on the most radical changes for 100 years, as stated in the Bradman TV ad, which cost millions of dollars, when Brisbane is not getting amalgamated? It has nothing to do with Brisbane,

but that is where all the people vote. There are some 35 seats in Brisbane and Labor has 33 of them and these people want to know why we are belting the daylight out of their cousins in the country. They cannot understand why the government is running advertising featuring Bradman in Brisbane. It has nothing to do with the effective audience at all! It is just a political ploy to sell this absolutely disgusting political move to push Labor ideology throughout Queensland.

Again this is some of the most disappointing legislation that I have seen a state government bring in, along with that legislation that says people have to resign their jobs as councillors to take part in a state election. It is the same thing: Labor Party ideology. People will wake up to these matters. The electorate is very smart and it does not like being hoodwinked; it does not like people not having the chance to have their say. Why can they not have their say about these matters? Why are we blocking a referendum that the state government does not have to pay for? Because we are frightened about the result. Quite simply, we cannot have the truth being told that all these communities do not want these forced amalgamations. There will be some that we supported for amalgamation. We have never walked away from the fact that local government can be improved. But this government is not about improving local government across Queensland. It is about getting its way by any nefarious means possible and as quickly as possible before the fallout comes through Redcliffe, Cook, Waterford and those other areas that might cop a little bit as well.

We will see who is hoodwinked by this local government improvement rubbish that is put forward to us. The amendments that have come through on referendums are unbelievable. It is legislation done on the hop, which ultimately brings people undone. Honourable members will see that no-one supports democracy being completely shut off. The government will see out there in the electorate that even their media people and sometime friends will say, 'This is not fair; it is not justice for the Queensland people.' I am sure there are people over there who are not convinced that this amalgamation stuff is a great idea. They do not know why they are doing it because they are not privy to the discussions at the higher levels that basically guide the direction for the Labor Party. While they are toeing the party line, going out there and doing their best, I hope for their sakes that they do not get beaten too heavily at the 2009 election when their constituents have a chance to tell them what they think of the sneaky tactics and skulduggery that they employ to further their ideology in the state of Queensland.

The referendum will tell the Labor Party in Queensland exactly what the electorate thinks of it. There is no reason to be frightened of hearing that story. Yes, it will be done; the amalgamation will have finished. However, everyone in this state is entitled to their say and what this legislation is doing is denying democracy in Queensland. It is a very, very sad day.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (12.39 am): I move—

That the debate be now adjourn.

Division: Question put—That the debate be now adjourned.

AYES, 54—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Remaining Stages; Allocation of Time Limit Order

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (12.47 am): I move—

That under the provisions of Standing Order 159, and notwithstanding anything contained in standing and sessional orders, the following time limits apply to enable the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill to be passed through its remaining stages at this day's sitting—

- (a) Conclusion of all second reading speeches, except the Minister in reply by 1.30 am;
- (b) Conclusion of second reading by 1.50 am;
- (c) Consideration in detail to be completed by 3.50 am;
- (d) Third reading by 3.55 am; and
- (e) Long Title agreed to by 4.00 am

If consideration of the Bill has not been completed by the times specified, Mr Speaker shall put all remaining questions necessary to pass the Bill, including clauses, schedules and any amendments to be moved by the Minister in charge of the Bill en bloc, without further amendment or debate.

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (12.48 am): I second the motion.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.48 am): Of course the minister would want to second the motion because he wants to run and hide from the scrutiny that should be the rightful province of this place. That is what a minister of the crown is supposed to do—bring legislation into this House for the scrutiny of the people of Queensland. It is no wonder the minister jumped to second the motion—the shameful motion that has been moved by the member for Rockhampton. It is a shameful motion.

It follows a shameful record that has been the government's method of addressing this issue from the start. Every effort has been made to deny the people of Queensland any say, any hint of democracy, any knowledge of what is happening in this parliament tonight. This legislation was introduced in here on Tuesday. Nobody has had a chance to properly scrutinise it. None of the councils have had a proper chance to look at the impacts of the legislation. The minister has been on the radio telling deliberate lies about what is contained in this legislation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! The word 'lie' is unparliamentary. You will withdraw it.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. The minister has been on the radio telling deliberate untruths about what is contained in this legislation and somehow suggesting that it does not constitute the threats that we know it does and that we will illustrate that it does in this parliament if we get a chance to debate it. There have been a lot of references in the debate tonight to the lack of democracy. There have been a number of references to fascism and Nazism.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right! There was a ruling from the 1940s declaring references to Nazism and fascism as unparliamentary. I direct the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. There have been a number of references in the parliament tonight which members on the other side found offensive. Notably the member for Rockhampton found one particularly offensive because he said his father had fought against such things. It is just as well his father did because he would not. He would not lift his finger to protect democracy. He and all of the other spineless Labor members who sit over there would not lift their fingers to defend democracy to ensure that the people of Queensland communities have any sort of a say.

The government has gone to extraordinary lengths to do the opposite. The government has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure that nobody gets a say. The only person who gets a say is the Premier and the people who are behind him who want to wreak vengeance on local government for what they have done over the years. Those opposite want to wreak vengeance before the Premier packs his bag and toddles off to his retirement home. We all know that that is not far away. This is his revenge.

The motion that has been moved seeks to deny this parliament the right—the proper right—to fulfil its proper function. There has not been in my view a more devastating piece of legislation introduced into this parliament for the communities that I represent or that members in this chamber represent, especially the members who represent regional communities. There has not been a piece of legislation that has the potential to have such a profound effect on those people, and we have a right to scrutinise that legislation in this House to the fullest possible extent and the minister and the government have a responsibility to come into this place and withstand that scrutiny and explain to those people who will be affected by this legislation why it is that the legislation is as it is.

The member for Rockhampton seeks to ensure that the government escapes that scrutiny. The member for Rockhampton has moved this shameful motion to ensure that the government's record of running from democracy, of hiding from democracy, of denying the people of Queensland democracy continues with this proposal. Ever since this government has introduced it, that has been the approach. It has been dishonest from the start. It has been deceitful from the start, and it has been about denying people their right to have a say from the start. And well might the minister squirm uncomfortably in his seat, because that will be his legacy—a legacy of shame, deceit and denying people the rightful democracy that we should all treasure and protect.

This is a shameful motion. It is a shameful motion, and we will oppose it. We will oppose it because we want to scrutinise the legislation that will profoundly affect the people that we represent—the people that we care about in Queensland communities, the people who were motivated enough to come down here and march in the streets of Brisbane, the women and kids who were motivated enough to spend 26 hours on a bus to come down here to get their message across to people who refused to listen. But we were there to listen and we were there to care, and we will be here in this parliament to represent those people for as long as it takes. If it takes all night and if it takes all day tomorrow and all night tomorrow night, we will be here to represent those people, because they care. They care about the future of their communities and we care about their future and their communities. Every member who makes up this government should be ashamed. You should all hang your heads in shame at what is happening in this parliament tonight! None of you should seek to go home and sleep easy in your beds,

because you should forever be ashamed of this whole legislative process that has brought us to this point. But more than anything else, you should be ashamed of the way that this will conclude because it represents no credit to any of you. You should all be ashamed!

Mr HOBBS: Mr Deputy Speaker—

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (12.54 am): Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! I call the Leader of the House.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr Hobbs: Oh, come on! I was on my feet first!

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (12.54 am): I move—

That the Leader of the House not be heard.

Mr SEENEY: I second the motion.

Mr Hobbs: I'll third it!

An opposition member: I'll fourth it!

Division: Question put—That the Leader of the House not be heard.

AYES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seene, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Elmes

NOES, 54—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

Resolved in the **negative**.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is the first time in all my years in this parliament that people have actually formally moved to tell me to shut up! The reality is that I was trying to do the right thing by members opposite, and they can thank the Leader of the Opposition for taking up a half an hour of the time that they should be speaking, because the way the motion was worded was to allow that to occur.

By the time this debate concludes, it would have gone for 13 hours, 45 minutes. It is one of the longest debates that this parliament has had in recent history. I have been here since 1989 and very few times—

Mr Hobbs: It's about time you left.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! The member for Warrego.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I know they have not taken their ADD tablets and that it is getting a little bit late for some of them. I think some of them should put a bit more water with it.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the House, that is unparliamentary. Withdraw.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Whatever it was that was unparliamentary, I withdraw it. As I was about to say, I have been here since 1989 and I have sat very few times in this parliament until four o'clock in the morning. If members go through the history of this parliament, that is certainly the case. This matter has been debated widely in the community. It is not going to change one iota. There is no possible chance that the government is going to accept any amendment from the opposition or any—

Mr Seene: How do you know?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I have had a look at them. They contradict the bill. The reality is that the opposition is not going to change its mind either by going any further. This is common sense. This instrument is available to parliaments all over the world, all over the Westminster system, and it is used for just this purpose.

Division: Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

AYES, 55—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Rickuss, Seene, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Elmes

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Incorporation of Material in *Hansard*

Mr SPEAKER: Just before the member for Hinchinbrook commences his speech, I indicate to the House today that I had a request earlier in the afternoon from one minister to incorporate his speech if required. I gave permission for that to occur. I have been asked by the member for Hinchinbrook whether he can incorporate part of his speech and I am allowing that as well. But I am going to get a copy of the speech to ensure that the rule that I look at the speech before incorporation occurs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 2585.

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (1.11 am): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. In doing so, I want to place on the record my deep-seated opposition and concern for the way that this bill and the bill that preceded it, the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, have been rammed through the parliament of Queensland by the Beattie government. I might be a relatively new member of this place but in my opinion it is a disgraceful way to treat this House, particularly when this legislation will have such a significant and widespread impact on local communities right across the state, including those communities in my electorate of Hinchinbrook.

What is particularly outrageous is that this whole local government reform process inflicted on Queenslanders by the government has been rushed from the very moment that the Premier and the minister for local government announced they were throwing out the Triple S process. The bill in April was rushed through the parliament in the same way that this bill is being rushed through. There was a short consultation period during which the Local Government Reform Commission undertook a total of zero public consultations throughout Queensland. Then with over 30,000 submissions the commission reported early to the government and now we have this disgraceful piece of legislation.

Premier Beattie and his local government minister have completely ignored the strong and clear message from thousands of Queenslanders across the state who oppose forced amalgamations as well as those Queenslanders who simply believe that local communities have the right to determine their own futures through referendums. Mayors and councillors planning to hold referendums have been threatened with the sack and \$1,100 fines if they try to give their ratepayers and residents an opportunity to exercise the fundamental democratic right to have a say. The government has mastered the art of political thuggery.

In contrast, the Queensland coalition has listened to the people of Queensland. We respect local communities and we understand the important role of local government. We believe local decisions should be made locally and not be forced on us by George Street. The Queensland coalition has made a commitment that if we win the next state election we will guarantee local communities the opportunity to hold a referendum if that is what the people want. I am proud of that commitment. I am proud that as a representative of my electorate my colleagues and I in the Queensland coalition will give those communities the opportunity to have a say. In view of the limited time available to me, I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in *Hansard*.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Hinchinbrook, if you would not mind, I am still reading your speech that you wish to incorporate.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: No, fair enough. The member for Hinchinbrook has asked to incorporate. I am still quickly reading it, so if you would not mind keeping on giving your speech for a moment. I have not as yet cleared your speech. If you wish to do this, I have to quickly read the speech to allow it to be incorporated. I think this is quite a fair and equitable situation we are dealing with here.

Mr CRIPPS: In view of the limited time available to me because of the actions of the government, I do not wish to seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech into *Hansard* if the processes will not allow other members to speak tonight.

Mr SPEAKER: Excuse me, look—

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House indicated that the debate—

Mr SPEAKER: Can I say to you that you have just given me your speech. I have said that I would incorporate this. That is being fair and equitable to you, but I wish to have a few more moments to read through it. Do you have the rest of the speech there?

Mr CRIPPS: I do, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: If you go for another couple of minutes I will probably let you then incorporate the rest, but it is up to you.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker. The member has already indicated that he wants to withdraw his request to incorporate his speech.

Mr SPEAKER: It has got nothing to do with you. That is not a point of order. If you want to keep on wasting time like this, I will simply take your suggestion. I am reading your speech and I find nothing wrong with the incorporation of it, but I need to go for a few more pages.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Speaker, I respect and thank you for the opportunity to incorporate, but if I continue to speak other members who wish to speak to the bill will not be given that opportunity.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Hinchinbrook. I call the member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (1.16 am): Mr Speaker—

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Darling Downs!

Ms JARRATT: I rise in support of the bill, and I will keep it very brief. I want to put on record my thanks and explain the reception that the amalgamations have had in my electorate, where the mayors and councillors have accepted the changes with grace and dignity. In the north, the Bowen and Whitsunday have merged to form the Whitsunday Regional Council in recognition of the common sense in creating a very diverse economy.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Go back to your seat.

Mr Hopper: Well you just said I didn't have brains in my head.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Go back to your seat. If you are going to argue with me, you will be out of the chamber. You said something which was very disrespectful to the chair. When the chair is trying to rule in a fair and equitable way, you do your side no credit at all—absolutely no credit at all. If you want me to say it that way, I will say it that way. Sit down and let your members have a go. Your remark was an insult to the chair—a very big insult to the chair—and I will not cop it. I am being fair here and if you cannot understand that that is up to you. The member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the bill and want to put some brief comments on the record. Thankfully in my electorate the mayors and councillors have accepted the changes brought by the amalgamations with grace and dignity. In the north, the Bowen and Whitsunday councils have merged to form the Whitsunday Regional Council. Their acceptance, I am sure, is in recognition of the common sense that creating a more diversified economy brings with it. The mayor of Whitsunday shire, Mario Demartini, to his credit, was more concerned about his staff than he was about the politics of the situation. Mike Brunner also supports the moves and is eager to begin the process.

I also note that in the south the Mirani and Sarina shires are to merge with Mackay to form the Mackay Regional Council. I cannot pretend that all the mayors in that area were happy. Dave Price from Mirani and Karen May from Sarina would rather not have had amalgamations, but they have shown the true spirit of leadership by accepting the umpire's decision and working together to gain maximum benefits for their constituents. I congratulate them on their good behaviour and good grace. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women) (1.18 am): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill before the House. In doing so I recognise that building stronger communities across Queensland by reforming local government boundaries and structures is difficult and challenging work. It is not easy for the Beattie government and it is certainly particularly hard for the many communities across Queensland that are affected by change. But when faced with tough decisions in responding to the challenges of our state's growing population, whether it be planning for water infrastructure, health services or climate change, the government has a strong track record of never shirking from its responsibilities.

In the electorate of Albert, which I have the privilege of representing in this House, the recommendation by the independent Local Government Reform Commission means that the area north of the Albert River will be amalgamated with Logan City Council. For many residents living in Beenleigh and its western suburbs, this news has been received with a range of reactions, including surprise, disappointment and anger. I thank the many people who have contacted me at my electorate office to express their concerns at the boundary changes. In fact over the past six years, no other issue has so raised the passion of my constituents. I seek leave to have the rest of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

In listening to my constituents, two issues of particular concern quickly became evident.

Firstly, residents told me the Commission's recommendation on undivided divisions for Logan City Council meant that our area would be unfairly represented in the new regional council.

Secondly, given the comments in local media from some Gold Coast City councillors, residents held real concerns that Gold Coast Council would attempt to abandon their promised budget allocations and services.

In following up on their concerns with the Premier and the Minister for Local Government, and later with further meetings with Mayors Ron Clark and Graham Able, I have been pleased to report back to my constituents that the Logan City Council election in March 2008 will be on divisional boundaries, which is a real win for Beenleigh residents.

I would also like to thank the Minister for responding so quickly to the concerns I raised with him about the continuation of services to northern Gold Coast residents during the transition period.

My neighbour the Member for Waterford and I are significantly reassured by Minister Fraser's statement to this Parliament where he said that Gold Coast City Council has an obligation to ensure that it sticks to its budget, sticks to the program of works that it has, and ensure that the money it has gained from my constituents in rates is invested appropriately as it has decided.

In acknowledging the disappointment and concerns of many of my constituents, I also recognise their resilience and positive attitude when it comes to adapting to change.

We have done it before and we will do it again.

Over the past six years the electorate of Albert, after decades of neglect by the National Party, has at long last been receiving the quality and quantity of services it deserves.

Whether it be road upgrades, extra bus services, new police beats at Jacobs Well, Logan Village and Ormeau, or the latest new state primary school at Coomera North, the Beattie Government will continue to deliver for the people of Albert who call one of the fastest growing areas of all of Australia home.

As Tourism Minister, I've noted particularly the claims from some from Noosa and Port Douglas about the effect the council mergers is likely to have on their tourism industries.

In extensive consultation with leaders from our tourism industry, I am confident that the Noosa and Port Douglas communities have nothing to fear from being part of larger regional councils.

Both domestic and international tourists are important to sustainable jobs in these regions.

There is no research which indicates that visitors make decisions on holiday destinations based on which council they are in.

The tourism product and supportive infrastructure, easy air access, marketing campaigns, and attractive and exciting experiences are all issues of vital importance in attracting more tourists to Queensland.

With the Government's intention to introduce iconic legislation to protect the natural assets of the destinations, we will ensure the very things that make Noosa and Port Douglas so unique and so attractive to tourists to be protected.

The Government recognises the unique natural attraction of Queensland's tourist destinations, and is committed to working with local government and the tourism industry to make sure they are not damaged by overdevelopment.

The formation of larger councils will allow them to pool resources and market themselves as a destination, a region, rather than separate entities fighting for the same tourist dollar.

I encourage all councils and regional tourist organisations to focus on the significant benefits there will be for the tourism industry from regional councils.

The formation of larger councils will help the industry streamline campaigns designed to attract tourists, giving them more bang for their marketing buck.

It will also support the development and promotion of regional and themed tourist experiences to attract visitors.

More coordinated destination marketing is a key initiative of our \$48 million, 10-year Queensland Tourism Strategy.

Under the QTS a Local Government Tourism Strategy will be developed.

We work closely with councils on the provision of tourism infrastructure, to increase awareness of the industry within local government and aligning tourism opportunities with local government planning.

Queensland's tourism industry provides about 140,000 jobs throughout our regions, and a lot of them are on the Sunshine Coast and in Far North Queensland.

Mr Speaker, a strong and sustainable tourism industry relies on strong and efficient local government—that's exactly what amalgamated regional councils will deliver.

I commend the bill to the House.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (1.20 am): The local government reform process that this state has undergone has been nothing less than a disgrace. It has been a disgrace since day one, and it remains a disgrace tonight. All the communities in my electorate are directly affected by this, and this reform process is not supported by them. Because of the actions of the government tonight, I do not have the time to go through and place on the record the very representations that I have been elected here to make. I am not able to do that because there are other members who also want to make what will now have to be very, very brief comments.

We should have the ability to stand up here and represent those communities because those communities have not had a say. At every turn, they have been stymied by this government and have been unable to express anything about this process. They have been stopped, they have been threatened, they have been bullied, they have been threatened with the sack. These councils will be summarily dismissed if they even go out and ask for a poll. The only reason this government does not want a poll is that it knows what the answer is, and the answer is no—no to this reform process, no to the arrogant way this government has been treating people and no to the absolute bullying dictatorship which we now have under this Premier, this Deputy Premier and this government. It is a disgrace.

I wish I could stand up here and go through all of the issues that I had to raise on behalf of my constituents, but I cannot because this government has guillotined this debate. This means we cannot represent our people. This issue has been a disgrace from day one and it remains a disgrace. The anger that is in my community will continue long after tonight.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (1.22 am): Until now we have prided ourselves on being a popular democracy. However, to claim that title we have to acknowledge that it occurs when the people are the government and when the people retain and exercise their governing authority on a perpetual basis. It is when the people retain and exercise the policy-making and the law-making initiative, rather than being subject to it. In this form of democracy, the government is the servant of the people, not their master. It is the job of the government to listen, respond and deliver that which the people demand.

The word 'democracy' comes from the Greek word 'demos' meaning people. In democracy, it is the people who hold sovereign power of a legislature and government. We will remember this day not because this bill was passed, but because people will not forget—and we will not let them forget—that democracy in Queensland died on this day. It did not just die in this bill, but it died by the actions of this arrogant, cruel government which has not let members on this side of the House speak from their hearts and minds. A government that is terrified of the people and avoids the will of the people has been there too long. The Beattie government qualifies under all headings.

Mr GIBSON (Gympie—NPA) (1.23 am): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr SPEAKER: I know we had a talk about this, but after hearing you in action I think you should read a page or two of your speech and then incorporate the rest.

Mr GIBSON: I am happy to, Mr Speaker. In the course of history, there have been dates that have certain meanings. In fact, 9 August is already a dark day in our history books as the day that the second atom bomb was dropped on Japan by the United States at Nagasaki, resulting finally in Japan's unconditional surrender. In Queensland, this day will also go down as a dark day for democracy, a day when the democracy death squad goosestepped into this parliament and attacked the right of Queenslanders to have a voice.

This morning the Beattie Labor government dropped its second bomb on local government amalgamations by introducing amendments that threaten to dismiss councils which 'take any action to request, arrange, assist, facilitate or cause a poll to be conducted by the Australian Electoral Authority'.

My electorate covers two councils. The people who live in Cooloola are generally supportive of the recommendations of the commissioners as they apply to the new Gympie Regional Council. The people of Noosa have spoken loud and clear that they do not want to change. What all people in both the Noosa and Cooloola shires are united in is that they are not supportive of the forced nature of this merger. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The essence of a democracy is that people have a right not only to elect persons to represent them in the Legislative Assembly but also to have a direct input into the laws that affect their lives. This is a fundamental right in a democracy, and is often called participatory democracy.

In contemporary world politics, democracy has become a significant concept, with most nations in the world claiming to adhere to the broad principles of democracy. However, there is significant diversity among nations describing themselves as democratic in the modern world; for instance, the North Korean constitution describes North Korea as a democratic state.

The politics of North Korea take place within a nominally democratic framework; in practice, North Korea functions as a single-party state. It is widely considered to be a totalitarian dictatorship. North Korea's political system is built upon the principle of centralization, and whilst their constitution guarantees the protection of human rights and democratic government, most power is within the hands of the ruling elite. The comparisons between Queensland and North Korean democracies are obvious.

Democracy is something we must never take for granted. There are those who remember the days of the Fitzgerald inquiry, an inquiry which in part aimed to restore the public confidence in our democratic process.

It is appropriate to draw some quotes from the Fitzgerald Report because as they hold the same valued advice today as they did 20 years ago.

Page 127 of the Fitzgerald report states—

"A fundamental tenet of the established system of parliamentary democracy is that public opinion is given effect by regular, free, fair elections following open debate."

Here in lies the crux of the issue.

If I am to believe the Minister and his slick advertising campaign then these changes have been identified as being needed for some time.

If I am to believe the Minister then the SSS process started by the LGAQ in 2005 was not working.

If I am to believe the Minister he only became aware of the Problem in March 2007 when he wrote to the Councils to find out how things were progressing.

Ah if only I could believe the Minister.

He expects us to believe that Labor didn't know how bad things were going before the last State Election.

I would accept this bill if these changes had been put to the people in at the last state election as Labor policy. Had that occurred I would be duty bound to accept that the Government had a mandate, that the people of Queensland had spoken, but they have not. They were not given the chance.

If you didn't know there was a problem in Sept 2006 I can not believe that a mere 6 months later you find out that are so bad you must take drastic action.

We are each responsible for our own behaviour and the image we project as members of parliament, and we are only trustees of our democracy. It is our individual actions as trustees that will determine the health, wellbeing and shape of our system of democracy for future generations. The bully boy actions of this Government tonight by threatening to dismiss elected representatives for giving the people a voice smacks of Hypocrisy.

The latest appalling step by this Beattie/Bligh Labor Government to close down any council daring to test public opinion on his council amalgamation plan confirms the megalomania that has infected Queensland Labor.

When councils said they wanted to put the issue to the people through referenda, Labor said they would fine individual councillors—and presumably send to jail those who refused to pay.

Now that the Australian Government has stepped in to fund referenda through the Australian Electoral Commission, Labor today amended the legislation to sack any council daring to ask their ratepayers what they really think about amalgamations.

This is absolutely unprecedented in Australian history. An entire level of government has been shafted, and with it hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders who care about the future of their communities.

It is interesting to see who are now speaking out against this latest amendment

- Bob Oakes, the mayor of Nebo shire in central Queensland, said he was willing to be sacked
- Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) president Paul Bell is reported in the media to have branded Mr Beattie a "dictator", saying the threat of dismissal would not stop mayors and councillors.
- Les Tyrell, the mayor of Thuringowa, said the amendment was "over the top".
- Noosa mayor Bob Abbot has likened Premier Peter Beattie to Sir Joh over his threat to sack councils who try to hold a referendum on mergers.
- Caloundra Mayor Don Aldous asked "Why would Beattie be doing this—is there another agenda?"

The Premier even said this week that he could rule Queensland for another century if he wanted to. There you have Labor's born to rule approach, in a single statement.

I note the information that a court challenge had been thrown out. I'm unaware if my concern is the basis of the court challenge however I would ask the Minister to address my concern that this bill is a breach of sections 77 of the Queensland Constitution

77 Procedure for Bill affecting a local government

- (1) This section applies for a Bill for an Act that would—
 - (a) be administered by a Minister who administers a provision of the Local Government Act 1993; and
 - (b) affect local governments generally or any of them.
- (2) The member of the Legislative Assembly who proposes to introduce the Bill in the Legislative Assembly must, if the member considers it practicable, arrange for a summary of the Bill to be given to a body representing local governments in the State a reasonable time before the Bill is introduced in the Legislative Assembly.

Speaking Points

Member for Cook made some bold statements about this chamber and with regards to State Government. I understand his frustration, under this Labor government many people are wondering what does a State Govt do?

I look forward to seeing the courage of his convictions by resigning from the house and standing for Local Government—anything less is hypocrisy.

Many have spoken of having the courage to 'make the hard decisions'. The real courage would be in standing up against the Labor Party and represent the people who elected you not some faceless factional boss.

Premier has made much about the independent commission and the qualities of the commissioners. He has tried to imply that somehow we are reluctant to criticise our own. Let me make this very clear this is not about the commissioners this is about the abuse of democracy.

- The commissioners fulfilled their duties are required.
- But the Commissioners did not recommend the fining of councillors for giving their communities a voice.
- Did not recommend the dismissal of councils.
- Do not tarnish the good name of the commissioners by invoking their name to hide Labor attack on democracy.

Member for Springwood raised some important points regarding viable and reflective communities of interest as being the factors for reform—so why then were they ignored for Noosa. If we are to believe her assertions why then was Noosa included. It clearly was viable, has a strong community of interest and should have been left alone.

Sustainability issue—under the treasury rating Cooloola was rated as very strong. Why then is the remedy for 'distressed and weak' councils being applied to a 'very strong' council.

Premier spoke of building a 'new Queensland'. On this I find myself agreeing the Premier but it will be a New Queensland in an Orwellian way. Not a free society where free speech is welcomed but one where ordinary citizens are threatened with fines for seeking a voice, or dismissal.

The Iconic Legislation is only necessary because of the Amalgamation it is in fact an admission of the failure of this process that under the current system these iconic areas are protected. The Premier has admitted that a failing of this bill is the fact they the State now needs to protect what was already safe under the existing small, weak financially distressed councils with no grunt. Give me a break.

Premier spoke of the boundaries being in place before the Wright brothers first flight. Well reform of boundaries was also being spoken about before the first flight. This is not a new topic.

Professor Dollery makes several observations with regards to the Local Government Reform document stating the government has selectively drawn on elements of state and national studies to justify their cause.

"Federal and State governments have a mandatory role in financing local government and to suggest that forced amalgamations are going to be the cure all for local government financial sustainability is fundamentally flawed",

"The State Government has deliberately distorted the pervasiveness of financial unsustainability in Qld local government by misinterpreting the findings of the Qld Treasury and omitting inconvenient aspects of its financial assessments.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers national study which the government refers to in its Local Government Reform document states that while efficiency gains from structural reform, regional networks and shared services are attained, it stressed that amalgamation had proved disappointing and shared services appeared more promising."

Member for Gaven—spoke about opportunities and managing growth. This is not about parochial views—why would you want to be a councillor in these new councils and shires when this government appears to have a tendency to apply draconian fines if you don't toe the ALP line.

It is interesting that "Me Too Kevin Rudd" has come out in support of the Federal Coalitions desire to give the people a voice by referenda.

I'd like to update the Member for Keppel on what the Federal Labor Party think on this issue. Today in the Senate, Labor moved the following motion

Senator Lundy: To move—That the Senate—

(a) notes:

- (i) the stated opposition of Federal Labor leader Mr Kevin Rudd to forced local government amalgamations in Queensland,
- (ii) Mr Rudd's stated view that increased cooperation, including common purchase practices, can achieve improved efficiencies at a local government level, and
- (iii) Mr Rudd's stated support on 17 May 2007 for local ballots ahead of any proposed non-voluntary local government amalgamation;

I must ask what is the urgency. Why have we held back the workers here at Parliament to get this bill through tonight. Surely we could have adjourned the debate and returned tomorrow to complete the debate and thus have shown compassion and consideration not only to the Parliamentary staff but also their families. This is not how a Parliament should run in the new millennium. One more sitting day for the benefit of the parliamentary staff would have been a gesture that spoke louder than any union sponsored ad that we care for the workers.

Conclusion

I opened this speech referring to how important dates become in history and how this day will go down. There is also another date that I would like to refer to January 10th 49BC.

On this date Julius Caesar apparent said—

Alea iacta est Latin for "The die is cast".

These words were spoken when Caesar crossed the river Rubicon in Italy. A point of no return which was known to all Roman Generals that if they crossed the river with an Army deliberately was considered an act of war.

This bill tonight is to the people of Queensland also an deliberate act of war, war on democracy and the rights of Queenslanders to have a say.

Whilst this Premier may have and feel like Julius Caesar he is invincible, the crossing of the Rubicon resulted in a long civil war.

Caesar's civil war resulting changes in Roman government all but swept away the political traditions of the Roman Republic, a blow which eventually lead to the Roman Empire.

I only hope that history does not repeat itself and we see the further eroding of democracy in Queensland and the establishment of a Labor Empire.

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (1.25 am): It very often happens that when an old order gives way to a new and better order there are some aspects of the old order whose passing is regretted. So it is with this bill which I support. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Mr SPEAKER: I just ask the member to read a little bit more. I am trying to be a bit fair here.

Mr WELLS: So it is with this bill which I support because of the efficiencies it brings across the state, including to my own region, even though I regret the passing of the Redcliffe City Council. I wish the independent commissioners had seen their way clear to keep Redcliffe City Council, but the umpire has made a decision and it is best that politicians do not tamper with it. If this parliament started meddling with the boundaries suggested by the independent commission, Redcliffe would not be the only place that would receive attention. We would end up with a set of boundaries drawn across the state by politicians rather than independent commissioners. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I'm not suggesting politicians would do this job badly. They would do it too well. When Bjelke-Peterson and Hinze were drawing boundaries they drew them so well that they would have been there forever if they hadn't made certain other mistakes. There are some things politicians should delegate to others, and accept their advice warts and all. Electoral boundaries are one. So while I regret the recommendation that Redcliffe will not continue as a separate Council, it is much the best to treat the Umpire's decision as final.

I do have reservations about the name which the present local councillors have chosen for the new Council, even though, I note, the councillors preferred name has the strong support of my friend the Member for Redcliffe. When you think about it, any of the Councils that have a shoreline on Moreton Bay could have called themselves "Moreton Bay Council." The name does not capture what is unique to our region. Geographically the name does not individuate the new local government entity. Historically however it has certain ill starred associations. "Moreton Bay" was the name of the original convict settlement, which was essentially a place for recidivist offenders. We Australians are good at inverted snobbery, and we often romanticise our convict origins. But Moreton Bay was a place for people who typically, after being convicted by a jury who found them guilty beyond all reasonable doubt were sentenced to transportation for life to New South Wales and then committed another crime. The harshness of the Moreton Bay penal colony reflected that sociology. Members may recall the words of the song Brisbane Water:

"I've been a prisoner at Port Macquarie
At Norfolk Island and Emu Plains
At Castle Hill and at cursed Toongabbie
At all these settlements I have worked in chains
But of all places of condemnation
And penal stations in New South Wales
To Moreton Bay I have found no equal
Excessive tyranny there each day prevails"

Now whether excessive tyranny will prevail in the latter day "Moreton Bay" which will come into existence after next year's council elections will, I suppose, depend on who wins those elections. But when the members of the three Councils met to choose a name, they chose one which presents an interesting challenge; how to build an earthly 21st century paradise in a place named after the closest thing to hell on earth that the 19th century could arrange. But since this is the name the Councils have chosen, so be it. I dare say the convicts who graced the first white settlement in Queensland near the banks of Humpy bong Creek at Redcliffe would feel some sense of vindication.

Mr Speaker the Commission did not draw the boundaries I would have drawn, and the Councils did not choose the name I would have chosen. But sometimes, in a democracy, getting exactly the right decision is less important than allowing the decision to be made by the right people. In this case the boundaries decision is for the Commission and the name decision is for the Councillors. I therefore commend the bill to the House.

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (1.26 am): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. To have a true amalgamation, we need openness, transparency, consultation, respect, decency, the courage to listen to the people of Queensland and a process of unity. The people of Queensland do not need forced amalgamations that go directly against the true spirit of this parliament. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Many councils have done nothing wrong, are financially stable and have worked hard to give their young citizens a bright future and a special cultural identity to the place in which they were born and raised.

This government states it is a government assisting our future citizens, but they forget the first lessons we teach our children are trust and truth, and how can we trust this government if it does not involve the people and their opinions?

These councils are now being forced to give up all that they have worked for through a process forced onto them. I have even heard one government member here today justify forced amalgamation due to climate change and that this person thinks that there will be no job losses.

No investigation, no study—just a feeling, and this is the type of thought process that has been involved in this forced and unnecessary fearful decision. Fines of over \$1100 and legislation to repress the voice of the people is not the Australian way and is not what local people have given in blood, sweat and tears and copious volunteer hours to see thrown away.

The signs and symbols of these small communities and the identities and social fabric of these communities will now disappear with the flick of a pen. These social fabrics are entwined into the spirit of the people that blanket this vast land of Queensland in a unique way to make Queenslanders what they are today.

True blue Queenslanders that love their identity will not be pushed aside by a dictatorial Labor government that has forgotten about the working-class person and the rights of all Queenslanders, not a chosen few.

The Size, Shape and Sustainability process which the Bundaberg City Council and many other councils had embraced was taken away without consultation. The SSS process had been supported by the Bundaberg City Council and both sides of state parliament.

The Bundaberg community was already involved in their own amalgamation debate and was moving forward in a very positive manner. Bundaberg is a very proud and democratic community and do not appreciate being taken for granted through a forced and rushed process with representation taken out of their hands.

The Bundaberg community is very resourceful and was well on the way to amalgamation because they are hardworking, community-minded citizens who see the benefits, but now know there is no other option but to accept this outcome without true participation in the process.

We have also seen other councils embrace amalgamation in the past and we would have seen them in the future as these local representatives have the interest of their community members at heart and believe in partnerships and cooperation. Competition is not a negative aspect of true growth and prosperity, but conformity and annihilation is.

The fact that there are three union representatives on each transition committee does not represent a balanced view of the community. I believe unions should not be abused to act as a fear of not conforming to this state Labor government. People do not like to be told what to do or be pushed to the side and their thoughts not taken into account.

If we follow this state government's lead we may as well conform to Aldous Huxley's novel "A Brave New World" and live without individualism and be controlled by the state.

In our modern society, community members do not need extra stress and fear added to their lives. They need consultation and confidence in governments being there to help and listen to their constituents.

Fears to a person's job security by this state Labor government are unnecessary and reflect the uncaring nature where we see this government respond quicker to press statements and financial controls ahead of people's rights.

If we keep taking the local out of community we will eventually put more responsibilities onto government bureaucratic departments. Government departments already have enough interference in people's lives and, by reducing local government representation, citizens will hand over their freedoms to Labor bureaucrats—bureaucrats that cannot even manage their own state government departments.

We have had unprecedented protests in petitions and demonstrations against this decision, and the train of democracy is coming from the yards, and it is the voice of the people of Queensland who want to be heard. Governments should never restrict the voice of the people they represent.

To justify one's actions by fraudulent and misleading means is to defraud and be disrespectful, and this cash grab by this government through its self-righteous ideology is a sad reflection that this state is heading into bad debt at a time when this nation is experiencing its greatest prosperity.

This state government states that these new supercouncil governments will now be taken seriously and be able to bargain with this government and large mining companies. This comment identifies the contempt this Labor state government has for local councils.

If we apply this same argument to state governments then when will we see states amalgamating to get a bigger, better deal. The sad fact is that people's democratic rights are being taken away to pay for these so-called better deals.

Family values and community values are not represented by dollar values but they are observed when we see people pulling together when the times are tough because they have a common community interest.

This government is saying to the people of Queensland that they want super regional councils and to do this they are willing to give up on democracy and take away Queenslanders' right to free speech.

The democratic rights and convictions of the people of Queensland to have a say in their future are symbolised by the women and children of rural Queensland that travelled on a bus for 24 hours to speak to this government and it is represented in the words of Theodore Roosevelt when he said:

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat."

Let Queenslanders have their say.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (1.27 am): Today we have seen a remarkable demonstration from the Premier, who a couple of days ago said he would be here for 100 years because we do not have the ability to get rid of him. That is unbelievable arrogance from the Premier. The government is saying that when the local governments are made councils they will be far stronger and will be far more able to negotiate with the government. I can tell the House that when the Gold Coast and Albert councils merged there was no sense of any strength. In fact, the Deputy Premier and Treasurer today bagged the Gold Coast's preparation and plans for the desalination plant. So much for a stronger regional council that was able to achieve a lot more because it had been enlarged. It puts a lie to the argument. I can also tell the House that rates on the Gold Coast have certainly not gone down since we had the amalgamation in 1996. There will not be the efficiencies that are claimed and rates will not go down. This reform definitely represents a false dichotomy.

The Premier and local government minister have said many times that many of the local governments of Queensland are unsustainable. They have stated that, because a handful of councils are not financially viable—and I note the skewed analysis they have based this reform on—the state government should conduct a sweeping reform of the age-old council boundaries and build stronger councils for a stronger Queensland. We know this not to be true, as I just demonstrated in my earlier remarks.

Once again, this policy demonstrates the short-sightedness of the authoritarian Beattie government. This all or nothing approach has disenfranchised Queenslanders from all sides of politics. This all or nothing approach is unnecessary and, worse, it conceptualises the fine line between democracy and its binary opposite, tyranny.

It is quite clear where Queenslanders stand on the issue of council mergers. They do not want their local governments ravaged by the Brisbane-centric Beattie government. The Premier presides over the second biggest state in Australia. We would not find two towns the same over the length and breadth of Queensland. Every shire has its own unique character. Over the past year that I have been in this place, I have had the opportunity to travel to some of these places and meet the locals. As everyone knows, the differences between Toowoomba and Townsville, and Mackay and Mareeba, are more than geographical. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

This bill seeks to carve up Queensland in a way that is going to destroy the diversity of this state. The Premier and his Local Government Minister have taken a marker to the map of the state and in a few strokes have overwritten more than a century of tradition.

The manner in which the Beattie Government is forcing council mergers has inflamed Queenslanders from Coolangatta right up to the Cape. Mr Speaker, over the past few months and certainly last week we have seen how passionate people are about their home towns. The anger in these communities such as Redcliffe, such as Noosa is palpable.

Thousands of people have taken their fight to our doorstep of Parliament because clearly their cries to the Premier and the Local Government Minister have fallen on deaf ears. But the Beattie Government cannot ignore the masses. Whilst the true test of a politician sometimes requires unpopular decision-making, we cannot forget the fundamental reason why each of us was elected to Parliament. Each one of us is here to represent our constituents. We are public servants. We are here to serve the interests of the public. When constituents travel on a bus for eight hours to stand outside the Legislative Assembly opposing this change, they are clearly not being represented.

The Premier has publicly stated that the majority of Queenslanders support council amalgamations. I wonder on what basis our gallant Premier substantiates his claim. The people of Queensland are vehemently opposed to any move by the State Government to wipe out their local government, as is the Queensland Coalition and the Federal Coalition government.

Ten years ago the Goss Labor Government forced amalgamation upon the Gold Coast and Albert Shire councils. If the Local Government Minister wanted to look at streamlining local governments and was fair dinkum about this reasons for doing so his first stop should have been to the Gold Coast to consult with the Member for Robina, Ray Stevens about the proposal. My Coalition colleague was the first mayor of the Albert Shire and later became the mayor of the amalgamated Gold Coast City Council. He has experienced such sweeping reforms on a ground level and is better placed than anyone opposite to be the authority on the realities of forced amalgamations.

The Member for Robina has said that bigger does not necessarily mean greater efficiency. In fact, when I was canvassing my constituents on what they thought of the local government reforms I spoke with many who were concerned bigger councils would mean bigger bureaucracy. The experience on the Gold Coast shows that the cost of administering these 'super shires' is actually more expensive than the bill for running individual councils.

Despite the interests of Gold Coast and Albert residents, the Goss Labor Government imposed forced amalgamations on residents in the same despotic way the Beattie Government will dispose of local governments right across Queensland. Wayne Goss tried to justify his complete disregard for the democratic systems in this country with the same sycophantic arguments the Local Government has dredged up this time around.

The former Labor Premier, under the misguidance of former Local Government Minister Terry Mackenroth and no doubt his wannabe Prime Minister advisor at the time, pushed ahead with the amalgamation of the Gold Coast and Albert Shires, arguing that it would make council more economic and efficient.

Well Mr Speaker, experience is testament to the mistruth of these statements, the same ones driving this latest of great Labor failings in Queensland. Instead of diminishing the bottom line for administering local government in the southeast, the cost of administering this new entity blew out by \$70 million. \$70 million in 1996. Multiply that by 72, the number of new 'supercouncils' in Queensland, down from 156, and adjust it to today's fiscal terms. The potential cost blow-out is billions not millions—to borrow a line from the Health Minister.

Mr Speaker, the Premier's arguments about penny-pinching simply do not stack up. This move is not only going to cost tax-payers money, it is more likely than not going to spark rates rises as well. Because they certainly didn't go down with the new Gold Coast City Council I can tell you that now.

If the Local Government Minister had bothered doing his research he also would have discovered that the unceremonious forced merger of the Gold Coast City and Albert Shires did not in fact increase efficiency. Rather, it created more bureaucracy. Building their 'economies of scale' not only cost us \$70 million more than the combined price of running the council independently it also added time to the procedures. It takes a lot longer to get anything through council now than it ever did under separate shires, discounting population growth.

Merging these councils also had an irrevocable disenfranchising effect on residents. It's a lot more difficult for individual rate-payers to see their local representative or town-planner nowadays, and it is a near impossibility trying to influence council decisions.

Mr Speaker, if these reforms are rolled out across Queensland we will see a situation where constituents are having to travel for an hour just to see their local council representative—and that's assuming they even have a representative under the proposed undivided councils. Local government is supposed to be local. It's not supposed to be regionalised. That's why we have three tiers of government. That's why we have the state government.

There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that community services will suffer as a result of this Labor brainwave. Lex Bell, the former Member for Surfers Paradise and veteran Gold Coast City Council councillor and mayor described the forced amalgamation of the Gold Coast and Albert Shires as an "unmitigated disaster". And that's exactly what this bill will achieve.

As we have heard from the Member for Robina council staff and residents now face an enormous upheaval of their local government institutions. All this while the Premier and Local Government Minister sit back in the plush Executive Building offices making decisions they have no idea about the practicalities of. Queenslanders are entitled to the essential services provided by local governments. I would think they expect more from their state government than this self-serving, power-grabbing exercise that will destroy the last bastions of community in Queensland.

Despite the representation of non-government stakeholders on the review committee the final report cannot be apolitical because it satisfies Labor's agenda down to a tee. Beattie and friends have accepted the recommendations of the reform commission but they haven't accepted them *carte blanche*.

This is demonstrated by their scatty indecision about divided councils and undivided councils. First they wanted no divisions, now they're prepared to negotiate with councils. The Premier and Local Government Minister say this is because they are listening to the people of Queensland.

Mr Speaker, Premier Pete and his Minister for Local Government over there must suffer from an acute case of selective hearing because they have both failed to pick up on the very audible cries of councils and constituents all over Queensland who are disgusted with this autocracy. Sure, the Beattie Government is listening, but only when you're singing to the same tune. While Queenslanders are trying to fight this Goliath battle and chanting war cries against the State Government, the Premier, his deputy and their Labor mates are haphazardly divvying up Queensland all while dancing to My Sharona. It's a disturbing image.

The Beattie Government may not be listening but our federal counterparts on this side of the house are. Can I just say thank God someone's got some commonsense about this, because clearly the Labor State Government hasn't. The Federal Government has had to step in in order to give Queenslanders a right to an appeals process.

Apart from the abhorrent approach of this Beattie Government in forcing these reforms and imposing them on four million voiceless Queenslanders, the Premier—true to his union bully boy roots—has threatened those who do speak out and gauge the real sentiment of Queenslanders on council reform with hefty fines and redundancy.

Queensland, under this arrogant government, is becoming more and more a socialist state. That's the unfortunate aspect of the unicameral system in Queensland. Well Premier, you're on notice: Mr Speaker, they may have the power to call the shots and drive their agenda but sooner or later they will fail in the same spectacular way socialism did. Those opposite are hoping that Queenslanders have short memories. Mr Beattie, you are underestimating the public furore over these reforms and it may well haunt you at the next election.

I would also like to put to the members opposite: where is Kevin Rudd in all of this? Where does he stand? We know he is dead-set against forced council amalgamations in Queensland, though he's a lot less concerned about the detrimental effect it will have on communities than he is about his own election chances I can tell you that. Labor's latest 'great white hope' has been silent on this issue from the beginning. I implore Mr Rudd, the would-be Prime Minister: show a little leadership and let's see where you stand on the issue. Queenslanders have a right to know what they might be getting themselves in for if they vote Labor at the next federal election. If he's anything like his conceited, state counterparts or the unionists, God help Australia.

In summation, I will leave you with a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt which conceptualises what we seek to lose out on in this bill. "The motivating force of the theory of a democratic way of life is still a belief that as individuals we live cooperatively, and to the best of our ability serve the community in which we live, and that our success, to be real, must contribute to the success of others." With this, the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007, the Queensland Government is not working cooperatively with councils nor serving their constituents. And whilst this power-grabbing exercise might add weight to the Premier's pull, in effecting this legislation his government's success is at the detriment of not only local government but every Queenslanders. Today's the day community died in Queensland.

Mrs KIERNAN (Mount Isa—ALP) (1.29 am): While no council in the Mount Isa electorate has been recommended for any change, I do however feel compelled to put forward some comment on this historic legislation. Contrary to the beliefs of the member for Robina, I have some 16 years of local government experience under my belt.

He does not have the monopoly on experience here and obviously in his eyes I would be well qualified to contribute to this debate. There are 36 councils in western Queensland that have remained unchanged given the report handed down by the independent commission on 27 July. There are 10 of these councils in the electorate and the state seat of Mount Isa. The commission's report outlined the rationale for its recommendations for boundary change. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

It highlighted that the Commission rejected a notion of a "one size fits all" This statement was continually reinforced by the Minister for Local Government and myself during the review period.

Throughout the past months I as the Member for Mount Isa maintained my faith in the independence of the commission.

That there is no change to western Queensland boundaries does not mean that our Western Councils can remain complacent given the challenges confronting local government in the next 20 years. The reality of the sustainability of our vast western councils will need close monitoring in the coming years.

From my region I congratulate the wisdom and dignified actions of many of the mayors and councillors. I spoke to many of them individually over the past couple of months. There are within my electorate some great leaders and I look forward to working with them in the years to come. My sincere thanks to the Mayor of McKinlay—Paul Woodhouse who over the past two months has continued to work very hard towards the North West Regional Planning process.

Can I say that there was a tinge of disappointment by the some of my councils, Carpentaria and Croydon who wanted to join with Etherage Shire; these councils put forward a submission to in fact amalgamate. They went so far as recommending their new name 'Gulf Savannah'.

To Mayor Ron McCullough of Mount Isa City, congratulations for your continued voice of reason which you injected into the debate.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said of others, namely the eight minute men and women on a couple of very clearly identified National Party pockets within the electorate. When the Premier and Minister made the statement of some Mayors and Councillors being self serving, I personally did not agree with this statement across the board, and quite frankly in my electorate I have a great respect and admiration of many people who stand and are elected to their councils. The vast majority are there for the right reasons. However there are some standout exceptions and the 8 minute men and women stood out on their own.

Mayors and Councillors who have used this issue to launch their political careers, to those who intend to use this matter to further their political career, take heed. The majority of our community have your measure.

Mr Speaker, it is not my intention to denigrate other speakers of this house during this debate. I do however take exception on the Member for Warrego's disgraceful outburst in this house tonight. That was the exact same behaviour which was hurled across the floor of the Shire Hall in Cloncurry, and indeed this dreadful behaviour circulated in pictures a day later. Do you have any idea the disgust that this generates?

I also ask Western Councils to take a long hard look at the new map. Have a long hard look at the future strength of the eastern seaboard and hinterlands, have a look at the regional strength which will be gained when these regional councils begin to develop over the next few years.

I am aware that the suggestions to the Commission, from my region argued for the retention of current boundaries the catch cry being that 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.—Well hears a newsflash, remove the vast amount of funding through roads and many other services funded by the state government, I would suggest you will discover that it would be beyond broke.

Given the decision on our Western Shires, it is very apparent that the commission did not attempt to define a minimum level of financial sustainability for local government in Queensland. The Commission was obviously strongly guided by its Terms of Reference.

Western councils have strong links to all part of Queensland, in particular I am very sure that the residents of the Winton Shire will retain its strong links to the people of Redcliffe. Redcliffe City may now be Morton Bay Regional Council but the relationship is between people not entities.

This legislation is about building a stronger, more financially viable system of local government throughout Queensland.

I acknowledge that change may not come easily to all; however I know that the Government is committed to providing our state with a more sustainable local government structure.

As the state member I do not see my patch on individual boundaries, I work for the residents of my electorate across the board without fear or favor.

I was elected to do a job.

My electorate knows me and knows that I have and will represent them 200%. I give them credit to actually understanding that when they elected me it was with the full knowledge of what side of politics I belonged to. They know without doubt that my first priority and commitment is to the people who live in our electorate. They also know that there are also times when hard decisions will be made that affect the lives of all Queenslanders. I have every faith in the people of my electorate to trust that I have, am and will continue to represent their interests, and I am more than confident that my constituents fully appreciate that as a member of the government and the parliament of Queensland I have the responsibility to represent the interests of our state.

I have no hesitation in concluding with placing on record my thanks to the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport Andrew Fraser and his dedicated staff my sincere thanks to you all for taking on board the mired of questions and representations I have made to them over the past months.

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (1.34 am): I rise to speak to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. On the Channel 10 news tonight the mayor of Noosa, Bob Abbot, made the statement that when he heard what Peter Beattie and his government were doing he was reminded of the bad old days. How the worm has turned, how power has changed the ideals of the Labor Party. The act of forced council amalgamations, commonly called an act of political bastardry, is in direct breach of a promise not to force amalgamations on communities, a promise made to the people of Queensland by the laughing minstrel of Queensland politics, Peter Beattie—Mr 100-Years.

Many would agree that the structure of local government needs to be looked at. Many agree that some shires and towns could be amalgamated and that those services that they do deliver could be differently delivered, but almost all say the way that this government has proceeded with its untrammelled arrogance is wrong. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in *Hansard*.

Mr SPEAKER: We have agreed on some changes. Can I see the changes you make before it is incorporated?

Mr NICHOLLS: Yes.

Mr SPEAKER: I am happy with that. I think we have agreed. Let me just see those final changes.

Mr NICHOLLS: As agreed with you, Mr Speaker.

Leave granted.

To cruelly hold out hope of consultation and agreement and to then rip it away in a single bureaucratic act is to display the worst of the Labor Party and its minions. Truly the commissars are back in town and the bureaucrats are in charge of the asylum. The Whitlam model is alive and well in the Queensland branch of the ALP. Huge borrowings and regionalisation.

And if you don't agree it is off to the gulag with you comrade, courtesy of the amendments introduced this morning.

The free will of the people cannot even be sounded out courtesy of this heavy handed arrogant government. A poll conducted by the local authority is now illegal. To ask the people their view is now verboten, forbidden and nyet. The apparatchiks say no!

Let the people speak—never.

How could they know what they want! We know what's best. These are the same people who said there was no problem with the action of Jayant Patel. This is the same show as that bought to you by the same crew that brought you Jayant Patel in Bundaberg, the electricity crisis, the water crisis, the infrastructure crisis. Now the brains trust is turning it's attention to fixing councils.

God help us all Mr Speaker.

Truly as Hunter S. Thompson describes it we are dealing with a Generation of Swine. Vote down this legislation.

Mr Speaker,

In April I travelled to Barcaldine, Blackall and Longreach. And I met the Mayor's and Councillors impacted by this dastardly act of an arrogant government.

I am a city boy. I make no excuses for that. But I am a believer in democracy as well. And when I met my country friends and talked about the issues that affect them I gained a new respect for the work they do.

The services they offer because this State Government does not do them. Burial services, road services, health services, community services. Services that the local councils supply because those opposite don't care for the bush. They hate the bush, always have and always will.

A hopeless State government that doesn't have a Blueprint for the Bush but are more like rank amateurs that pull down the old 308 Cleveland V8 and don't know how to put it back together. All they are left with is a bundle of parts and greasy hands and a sheepish apology for getting it wrong.

So like the health department, like the water crisis, like the electricity industry the people of Queensland are subject to yet another socialist experiment with no real thought and no real consultation.

And it is in light of this that the Federal government wants to hear How could they know what they want! We know what's best. These are the same people who said there was no the views of local people and supports local governments rights to ask their citizens what they think about this heavy handed deal.

So while Peter Beattie and his Labor Mates play a political game with the future of local communities it is the Howard Government that seeks to hear the views of local communities in Queensland, continuing the role of effective representation they have delivered for over ten years.

But a Premier drunk with power can't believe that the people know best. And he vetoes the process.

And how is this change going to be effected.

Transition committees. Dominated by the Labor mates. And moving council employees on to the state payroll.

A sop to Kevin Rudd. The Premier talked about a deal yesterday. Well here is the ultimate deal. Kevvy, don't give us too much grief and we will help with the union comrades. Get some more affiliation fees for you. You say nothing much and we'll do the dirty work.

Mr Speaker this is a shameful act that ignores the promises previously made. It exhibits all the hallmarks of an arrogant government.

Mr Speaker I oppose the bill and amendments.

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, under the provisions of the resolution agreed to by the House and the time limit for the conclusion of all second reading speeches having expired, I call the minister.

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (1.31 am), in reply: At the outset I thank all members for their contribution. I also take the opportunity to formally record my thanks to the seven members of the Local Government Reform Commission who I think undertook one of the more important tasks that has befallen any group of people in Queensland in living memory. The substantive report comprising the two volumes that they have produced is not only an affirmation of the skills, experience, wisdom and application to the task of those seven people but also, I believe, an affirmation of the process that was undertaken by the government to ensure that the sort of sensible and timely reform that was required for local government in Queensland was, in fact, achieved. I believe that this report that the Local Government Reform Commission has produced, and which the government is implementing in terms of its boundary recommendations lock, stock and barrel tonight, will stand on its own two feet for many years to come as evidence of the sort of policymaking and rational decision-making about the future of Queensland that was required in these circumstances.

I formally record my thanks to those seven people, in particular to Bob Longland, the former Queensland Electoral Commissioner and former Electoral Commissioner at the Commonwealth level; to Sir Leo Hielscher, the chair of the Queensland Treasury Corporation and a man who knows more about public finance in this state than anybody; Terry Mackenroth, the former local government minister; Di McCauley, the former local government minister; Bob Quinn, the former Liberal leader and member of EARC in the 1990s; Tom Pyne, the former president of the LGA and the former mayor of both Mulgrave and then the amalgamated Cairns City Council and an original opponent of amalgamations; and also to Kevin Yearbury who has served both sides of politics as a director-general.

I want to clear up a couple of substantive issues that were put forward in the debate tonight. While this debate was a passionate one, and we certainly saw a lot of passion during the debate tonight, there was, however, a distinct lack of substantive issues raised about the machinations of the bill during the debate given the primacy that has been placed on this debate over the last 13 or 14 hours. Those two matters that were raised related, firstly, to the composition of local transition committees. In that regard I clarify for the member for Nicklin that the local transition committee membership of community representatives will be totally at the discretion of the committee itself. It is not necessarily one representative; it may be more than that. But that is a matter that will be determined by the members on the local transition committee themselves. Secondly, in relation to the provision of intervention powers and oversight powers on behalf of both the minister of the day and also the CEO of the department, there was an issue raised by both the member for Nicklin and also by the member for Gladstone. I want to provide some commentary on the exercise of those powers and the way in which they are envisaged to operate. Members will notice that through the drafting of the powers we have adopted the caretaker provisions and the caretaker triggers that exist in the Local Government Act now which would enliven from the start of next year in the normal course of events. We have used those same trigger points but brought them back to this point—not as a trigger point that requires my intervention per se or my approval, but that the local government must notify me of a decision.

So it is not a permission-seeking exercise; it is not a fetter on their power. What it is is business as usual but where they do meet the threshold of either the greater of \$150,000 or one per cent of their general rates or there is an issue with their CEO, it requires a notification to me. It does not require anything beyond that. What it means is that as a government we are able to see circumstances where a council is perhaps acting beyond the pale and that means that that information is before us so that if we have to act we can. It is using the same trigger points that exist in the caretaker period but as a notification regime rather than an intervention regime at that point.

I acknowledge that the powers then do provide for resolutions to be overturned and so forth, but I believe that that is what the community expectation is: that if through that notification process there is clearly a matter that requires intervention, then those powers are necessary. But I do emphasise the difference at the outset.

I make particular mention of a number of government members whose contributions are worthy of note. In particular, the member for Cook gave one of the more forceful and passionate speeches that have been delivered in this place—at least in my short time here. I believe the conviction with which the member for Cook gave that speech is entirely worthy of anyone who wants to walk into this place and represent an electorate with passion. I certainly believe that what we are doing in relation to the Torres Strait—moving to have a regional level local government in the Torres Strait—will be an ultimate stepping stone for the ambitions of the Torres Strait. It is one part of the move by the government to implement the report that I think will go down in history as one of the more significant aspects. I acknowledge the member for Cook's utter determination and conviction that this not be the end point of reform in the Torres Strait but that this be the first point for the proud people of the Torres Strait whose legitimate aspirations should be more fully recognised in due course. This is clearly a step along that path and in no way the end point.

I also acknowledge the optimism of the speech by the member for Fitzroy. It is very easy in these circumstances, and we certainly saw it in spades during the course of this very long day here in the parliament, for people to invent imagined worst-case scenarios and to talk about an imagined reality. I believe that in all circumstances it is often the case that the actual reality is a very different thing from the imagined reality. Certainly it is the case, when one looks at the contribution from the member for Fitzroy, that he drew it back to the reality of life for all Queenslanders when he said that this provides great opportunity for many communities. I know that his advocacy in relation to the issues that have confronted many mining communities in his electorate and the pressures that are upon them is at the forefront of seeing real policy change and real attention within the government. I think his contribution gave great credit to his work as a member of parliament. He is well known by everybody in this place to be sincere and to never be shy about making sure that he always puts his community first. I think that his contribution to the debate provided further evidence of that.

The member for Redcliffe provided a grounding speech which really drew this whole debate back to the quick—that is, what defines a community. The member for Redcliffe rather eloquently set out what it is that is great about the community of Redcliffe. The fact is that there are many wonderful communities—and the member for Redcliffe drew a parallel with Wynnum—that have a great sense of

belonging but do not necessarily have shire council chambers in the main street. That does not mean that those towns are any less communities than those places that do have it. We can look at places like Wynnum and Sandgate where my mother grew up. There is the old Town Hall in Sandgate. I know from visiting Sandgate regularly as a child that there is no way that Sandgate cannot be defined as a community with its own sense of place, history, knowing and belonging. I believe that with the change to the Moreton Bay Regional Council long will be the day that Redcliffe is recognised as a distinct community with its own shared history, its own ability to draw upon that shared history and a continued sense of community and belonging. Certainly while the current member for Redcliffe serves in this place I think we can be sure that that will forever be the case.

I would like to make particular mention of the notion of democracy which I think has been bandied around in this place tonight somewhat foolhardily. I would like to talk about what this bill achieves and what democracy actually means and requires. In my view democracy at a mature and robust level of government has three distinct elements. The first element is that there is independent boundary determination; the second is that the salary of those people seeking elected office is not set by those people in elected office but independently; and the third is that elections are conducted independently.

The facts of life for local government before this bill hit the deck in this parliament this week under this government were that those three elements were missing from local government. When this bill passes through the parliament later on tonight we will have true democracy in local government; we will have an independent boundary mechanism; we will have the salaries of people who are elected to local government determined independently; and we will have the Electoral Commission conducting the election.

Local government has long aspired to be recognised as the third tier of government, despite the fact that the Tories opposed that in the referendum in the 1980s yet walked back in here—

Mr Gibson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gympie, you have been here all day listening to my rulings. I ask you to withdraw the comments you just made.

Mr GIBSON: I withdraw the remarks.

Mr FRASER: The fact of life is that local government has long aspired to be recognised as a true and robust third tier of government despite the fact that the Tories, in their utter hypocrisy in the arguments they have advanced tonight, opposed that in the referendum in the 1980s. When governments aspire to be robust and true levels of government, that requires that they have independent boundary determination, that they have the salaries set by those people who are not the elected representatives and that the elections are conducted independently. Upon the passage of this bill tonight those three key elements will now be a feature of local government.

I think that represents not only a new chapter but a new dawning for local government in Queensland. It can rightfully aspire to be recognised constitutionally down the track as the third tier of government, and the hypocrisy of those opposite in trying to appropriate a notion of hypocrisy to their own arguments tonight fails the test of true intellect. I think it fails the test because they know full well that the notion of the referendum which they hold so dear does not apply to boundary determination at a state level, the notion of a referendum does not apply to boundary determination at a federal level and the notion of a referendum should not apply to boundary determination at the local government level. It only applied in Queensland since 1996 when the National Party in this state moved amendments to the Local Government Act to insert it. What its members never talked about through the whole debate—through the hours of this debate, despite my entreaty to the member for Southern Downs—was that when they put that referendum provision in the Local Government Act, not in the Constitution, not since time immemorial but only since 1996, they put in that dirty little subsection that they never talk about. They put in that little subsection which says that the minister of the day can overturn the referendum.

They want to pretend that they hold true and holy to this notion of the referendum. What they put in the legislation when they put that motion through the parliament was the dirty little subsection to reserve for their own minister of the day the ability to overturn a referendum. And they say that we are afraid of what the public would say about a referendum. Only three referendums have been conducted under those provisions since 1996. All three of those referendums were for de-amalgamation proposals. And how many of those referendums passed? The answer is none. The truth is that, when there have been three votes, the three votes said, 'No, we do not want to go back. We do not want to go back to the time of fragmented local government.'

We saw one of the more remarkable contributions from the self-important member for Robina who, by the way in the *Courier-Mail* on 2 May 1996 at the time he was mayor for the Gold Coast said that he believed most residents were starting to see the amalgamation process performing and that people did not want to return to the past. How unique it is that sometime later in a different place with a different set of compulsions and a different set of circumstances we see that the member for Robina adopts an entirely different approach.

While we are dealing with utter nonsense, let me talk about what the member for Mirani has been talking about for the last 24 hours. The member for Mirani, in one of the more stunningly stupid contributions that I have ever heard in public debate, has been trying to pretend that the enrolment letter he had provided the evidence that the results of the Local Government Reform Commission had been determined some time ago. He put on his own web site the letter that he was referring to. His suggestion is that the error that the federal Electoral Commission has today said was an administrative error—and therein lies the point. If it was in fact the case—this ludicrous notion that is advanced by the ‘grassy knollers’, by those people who respond to the sort of conspiratorial notions that see the type of debate that we have had here today—I point out that the AEC does this. That means that John Howard knew. If John Howard knew, why did the member not know? The answer is that that has to be one of the more stunningly stupid contributions in public debate matched only in my view by the outrageous claims by the LGAQ today in suggesting that this was somehow linked to the state redistribution. I think that both the member for Mirani and the LGAQ in their contributions today should hang their heads in shame at the notion that they are in any way contributing to proper public discourse in this debate. They responded with the sort of conspiratorial grassy knoll arguments that do this parliament and everyone who serves in it a great disservice.

I want to say that today truly is a historic day. This is a historic sitting of the parliament. It certainly is the case that in implementing the findings of the Local Government Reform Commission we are ushering in a new chapter for local government in Queensland. It certainly is the case that when you look through their report it is an affirmation of the independence and transparency of the process and how they provided for different courses of action in different parts of the state. I said from the start that, despite the fact at every point in time around the state it was denied, one size does not fit all, and certainly the result of the report says that one size does not fit all. There are different decisions for different parts of the state. Members opposite all try to pretend that the terms of reference were narrow and could only lead to one result. We saw boundary alignments, amalgamations and councils left completely alone. I believe that the arguments to suggest that the terms of reference were anything other than enabling are falsely proven by that fact.

It is worth putting on the record that 36 councils had their boundaries untouched by the Local Government Reform Commission. It is also worth putting on the record that no council about which the independent Local Government Reform Commission made recommendations—and which we will pass into law tonight—is either greater in size or greater in number than the councils that presently exist. The argument to suggest that we are creating in some way unworkable councils by dint of population or area is denied by the fact that presently, on both counts, there are existing councils in this state that are larger in both area or size. The fact of the matter is that that disproves the argument at its base.

Members opposite have tried tonight and through the day to say that this is legislation that is typical of the Labor Party. I certainly believe it is—

Ms Bligh: Moving forward.

Mr FRASER: Absolutely; it is always Labor who are the reformers. It is always Labor in government, whether at a state or federal level, that is always prepared to undertake the difficult decisions to try to build new frameworks, to build new systems, to make the decisions that ensure that people into the future can have a great deal of confidence in the fact that they have a government prepared to front up and take the sorts of decisions that are not necessarily the most comfortable decisions for all of us, that are not necessarily the decisions that come without their waking moments during the night. These sorts of decisions that are taken by Labor in government, whether at a federal or state level, are the sorts of decisions that all of us who joined the great Australian Labor Party and sought to serve the people in Queensland in this place sign up for. We are here to make the decisions that provide for the future of Queensland.

I want to thank every single member of the government—all the other 58 members of the Beattie Labor government—who tonight are part of a historic sitting and are taking a historic step forward for the great reform that we are achieving in this bill. It has been my rare privilege to enjoy the support, the contributions and ability of all other 58 members who joined with me in this great journey to see this historic moment of reform achieved for local government in Queensland. This, I say to every other member of the government, is in fact entirely typical of the Labor Party, and we are proud of it.

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, the minister has now had the right of reply. As we know, under the provisions of the resolution agreed to by the House, the time limit for the second reading has expired.

Division: Question put—That the bill be now read a second time.

AYES, 55—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seene, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1 (Short title)—

Mr HOBBS (1.57 am): I move the following amendment—

1 **Clause 1 (Short title)**

At page 8, line 4, 'Reform Implementation'—

omit, insert—

'Community Destruction'.

This amendment relates to the short title of the bill. This amendment more truly reflects the destructive outcome that will be achieved by the legislation with the new title, the Local Government Community Destruction Bill. That is what it is. It is a purely destructive bill. It is not a reform bill. If it had been a reform bill some cost-benefit analysis would have been done to see what impact there would be on the community. There has been no professional or academic study done that proves it is a reform bill. There has been no economic study. There has been no social impact study done. The impacts vary from region to region.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr HOBBS: All it has been is a direction from the Premier. This is purely a political decision. There have been no studies done to assess what the impacts are likely to be. We have already seen a model like this. We have seen the health department under Labor go down this regionalised model. What did we get? We got Dr Patel. Health is an absolute disaster. What are those opposite doing? They are sending local government down the same path. This bill before the House is truly a destructive bill and not a reform bill.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to support the amendment that has been moved by my colleague the member for Warrego and shadow minister for local government. This amendment seeks to change the title of the bill to something that more clearly represents the outcome. I was motivated to speak about this amendment as a result of the comments made by the minister in his summing-up. He alluded to the situation that exists at Sandgate and said that that proves the point that it is not going to destroy communities.

The minister once again illustrates just how little he understands the communities that will be impacted upon. This bill will not reform local government as its title suggests; it will destroy communities. There is no better example of that than the community of Taroom. The Taroom shire will be split in half. The Taroom community will be split in half. Half of the shire will be attached to the Banana shire and a town that is centred 250 kilometres to the north. The other half of the community will have to look for its local governance to a community that is located some 200 kilometres to the south.

It is a lot different to the situation at Sandgate. It illustrates very clearly that this is a bill that will destroy local communities not reform the local governments that have been successful in enhancing those communities for so long. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr HORAN: I would like to give another couple of examples of how it is going to destroy communities. We only need to look at some of the towns on the downs that the shire councils are based on. Some of those towns are where they buy the tyres and the fuel. That will not happen in the future. That will all get centralised in the big centre.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Member of Hinchinbrook, there is a member of your own party on his feet. The member for Kallangur, settle down. I call the honourable member for Toowoomba South.

Mr HORAN: Once again there will be a loss of business for small businesses because eventually that will all go to a centralised big centre. I heard of an example just today of Goombungee where the local shire uses the plumber, the tyre trader and the fuel retailer. No doubt that will all go and it will all become centralised. Another way it will be destroyed is that we will lose local leadership. The important fabric of these communities has been the local leaders, and I give the House the example of Anzac Day in these towns. That is a precious and sacred day, as it is all over Australia, and those occasions are led by local leaders in not only the bigger towns but the smaller towns that have their ceremonies that people go to. This will destroy days like that, the annual show day and school sports days. The very fabric of these places is going to be destroyed. What our shadow minister has said is exactly spot-on—that is, it will be destroyed and it will be lost forever.

Mr GIBSON: I rise to support the amendment and to make a few points, because it is clear that we are not the only people who think that this bill is about destruction. In the federal Senate today I note that Labor senators moved a motion, and I want to read the motion into the record. Senator Lundy moved—

That the Senate—

(a) notes:

(i) the stated opposition of Federal Labor leader Mr Kevin Rudd to forced local government amalgamations in Queensland,

- (ii) Mr Rudd's stated view that increased cooperation, including common purchase practices, can achieve improved efficiencies at a local government level, and
- (iii) Mr Rudd's stated support on 17 May 2007 for local ballots ahead of any proposed non-voluntary local government amalgamation ...

We heard the minister try to tell us what Labor's position was. Obviously Labor is suffering a bit of schizophrenia here. At a federal level it is on our side, but where is it at the state level, Minister? Where is it? It is destroying the communities at a state level. I would find myself very rarely agreeing with Kevin Rudd, but on this occasion I actually say Kevin Rudd has got something the minister has not. Kevin Rudd has something the minister does not have and he will never have, and that is an understanding of what local government is about—not destroying it.

Mr CRIPPS: I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Warrego. In doing so, I want to put a few comments on the record in relation to how this bill will affect some of the communities that I represent. I represent a large geographical area of division 1 of the Thuringowa City Council made up of numerous towns and communities collectively known as the Northern Beaches area. I am very concerned about the future of local government representation in the Northern Beaches area of the present Thuringowa City Council following the recommendation of the Local Government Reform Commission to merge the Thuringowa City Council and the Townsville City Council without divisions.

I represent towns and communities like Mutarnee, Paluma, Rollingstone, Balgal Beach, Mystic Sands, Toomulla Beach, Bluewater, Toolakea Beach, Purono Park, Yabulu, Saunders Beach and Black River in division 1 of Thuringowa City Council. When you mention those towns, you cannot mention them in the same breath as Thuringowa or Townsville because they are small, discontinuous communities up the north coast from the city of Thuringowa. I am very concerned that they will find it difficult to secure effective representation in a combined council and I am concerned that they will be swamped by the suburbs of Townsville and Thuringowa.

Currently, Thuringowa City Council has two divisions with three division 1 councillors coming from the Northern Beaches area of the city, giving these smaller communities an opportunity to have their voice heard in council. With respect to the decision by the Local Government Reform Commission to force the amalgamation of the Johnstone Shire Council and the Cardwell Shire Council with this new government authority to be known as the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, I want to offer a few comments about that. This recommendation of the commission is particularly complicated and it continues to have significant uncertainty associated with it as regards the well-publicised issue of the accumulated monetary and infrastructure debt of the Johnstone shire. The local community in both shires, the councils and I as their representative in this place want to know what will happen to the debt situation as far as the Johnstone Shire Council is concerned.

It is true that the Cardwell Shire Council carries some debt, but at the moment it has a very careful and proactive debt recovery plan. The Cardwell Shire Council has comprehensively addressed this issue and attracted a rating of moderate from the Queensland Treasury Corporation in its report—a report which has been manipulated and perverted by the government for its political purposes. The unknown situation in relation to the debt of the Johnstone shire is not just relating to its monetary debt but the infrastructure debt, and by this I mean, for example, all of the bridges over the many creeks and rivers that exist in the Johnstone shire. There is significant work to be done on the water and sewerage systems to bring them up to date in the Johnstone shire, but the burden of funding probably needs now to be shared by those people in the Cardwell shire. How does the government propose to address this inequity? Minister, the question looms large over the future of the so-called Cassowary Coast Regional Council. I hope that the minister will be providing an answer to that dilemma sooner rather than later.

Mr FRASER: On Tuesday we saw one of the more spectacular own goals from the Leader of the Liberal Party. On Wednesday the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party own goal by being outed for his support of amalgamations. It is a shame that it is already Friday and we could not finish with three own goals consecutively because we have skipped a day in this process. If one looked at the 24 amendments that are to be moved by the opposition tonight and if one imagines for a moment that we would contemplate adopting all 24 amendments, the effect of those amendments would be this: that all of the reforms proposed that are contained within this bill would not occur, that in fact the system of local government would be left as it is and the bill would be called the community destruction bill, and, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that is pretty much the case.

Division: Question put—That the member for Warrego's amendment be agreed to.

AYES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Elmes

NOES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Finn

Non-government amendment (Mr Hobbs) **negatived.**

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.

Clause 2, as read, agreed to.

Clause 3—

Mr HOBBS (2.14 am): I oppose this clause on the basis that I want to remove any reference in the bill to the term 'regional council'. The term serves no purpose and so adds a class that is unwarranted. This bill clearly takes the 'local' out of local government.

A while ago we talked about the regional government approach of this government in terms of the health department. It did not work there and it will not work in local government. Quite clearly, the Labor model as proposed for local government will not work. We do not believe that regionalisation is the way to go and we strongly oppose it.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to support the comments that were made by the member for Warrego. This particular clause sets out the government's true intent with this whole legislation. It is about creating these so-called regional councils. It is about taking the 'local' out of local government and turning them into regional governments, or regional councils. That in itself destroys the very fabric of what we are trying to protect. It destroys the very fabric of the local communities that the people who came to Brisbane to protest, and those who protested so enthusiastically all over Queensland in recent weeks, have been trying to protect.

Local government should be about local communities, not about regional government for entire regions in which local communities lose their identity and lose their purpose. It is important that these words are struck from the bill and that we ensure that local communities have the local government that has served them so well for so long.

Mr FRASER: The government will be opposing the amendment. As I suggested—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, there is no amendment.

Mr FRASER: The government, obviously, will let the bill stand as it reads now and not accept the proposal from the opposition to oppose having the class of regional council put into the Local Government Act for the following reason. The Leader of the Opposition just sought to advance an argument that suggested that we were changing the system of local government through the new class. I point out to him, as I did in my summing-up, that no council that has been recommended by the independent Local Government Reform Commission and therefore no council that we are legislating for here tonight is in fact larger in size or larger in population than councils that exist presently. So to suggest that this moves away from local government presently as defined in the bill is, in fact, not borne out by the facts.

More to the point, we on this side of the House and in the government believe that the Queensland story and the Queensland economy has been built on the back of strong regional economies. That has been a proud part of Queensland's history. We believe that the creation of strong regional councils will usher in a new prosperity for the regions that sit within the backbone of Queensland's economy and society.

Mr SEENEY: I say to the House that the more the honourable minister speaks on this subject, the more he illustrates his own ignorance. The concept of a regional council is something that does not exist currently. The comparison that he draws with councils that are currently bigger in both size and population somehow warrants the creation—

Mr Fraser: No, Separately.

Mr SEENEY: Separately. I accept that that is the proposition that the minister is putting forward, but it is an erroneous proposition, if he will listen to the explanation that I will give him. What is being created is something that does not exist. At the moment there does not exist a situation where a council encompasses six or seven separate communities that previously had their own local governments.

The minister used the Brisbane example where a person can ride a bike from Sandgate to Manly, or whatever other similar suburbs he might like to choose. But that bears no resemblance and serves as no comparison to the situation of, for example, the North Burnett Regional Council that the minister has created with six separate communities where the two that are on the extreme ends are a three and a half hour drive apart. These six separate communities, all of which are about the same size, have their own particular community of interest, their own character and their own particular sense of community. The minister has put those communities into a regional council with a regional government to replace the six local governments that have been an important part of the fabric of those communities.

That is not something that currently exists in the Queensland system of local government. This is a fundamental change. It will fundamentally change the fabric of those communities, and that is the bit that the minister does not understand. It is becoming increasingly obvious in this debate that the minister does not understand that.

With respect, I suggest the minister needs to spend some time in those areas listening to people who understand those communities—not just the people who serve in the local governments but the people who understand and value the sense of community that exists in those six communities that I used as an example, and there are plenty such examples all over Queensland. That way the minister would understand the difference between local government and the regional government that this bill sets out to set up.

Mr FRASER: At the risk of advancing one of the more absurd and esoteric debates that might be imagined in this place, if we look, for example, at the Mackay City Council as it is presently constituted, not the way in which it is envisaged to be at the end of this process, we see a local government area that goes from Midge Point, a place I do know reasonably well, to the city of Mackay, passing through such communities as Calen and Kuttabul and other communities along the way.

Mr Mulherin: Bakers Creek is halfway down to Sarina.

Mr FRASER: Bakers Creek. It certainly is the case that that city council was part of that Local Government Association polling research that was talked about earlier tonight so vehemently, of which seven per cent of people said that they would like to turn the clock back.

Mr HOBBS: What evidence does the minister have that economically or socially a regional based council is better off than what we have at the present moment? What evidence does the minister have?

Mr FRASER: As I was concluding my remarks before sitting down, the evidence is twofold. That is, I do not think anyone would suggest that through this debate the Local Government Association has been the patsy or the advocate for the government or our view about what needs to happen in local government reform. It is their own research on the amalgamations that occurred in the 1990s that shows seven per cent of people want to go back. That is the first plank. The second plank I would offer to the member for Warrego is this—and it is one which I have also already mentioned in this debate—there were three referendums held to deamalgamate areas that had previously been amalgamated in 1996 and all three of those votes failed.

Mr HOBBS: I asked the minister what evidence he had. What I am again asking is what professional evidence the minister has, not what he thinks or what he was talking about regarding referendums. I am talking about what professional evidence—cost-benefit analysis or whatever the case may be—there is that proves what the minister is saying. There must be some academic reports that talk about regionalisation or sustainability. Can the minister give us something of a concrete nature that quite clearly says that the government's model of regionalisation is better than what we have at the present moment?

Mr SPRINGBORG: I take the minister back to a regional ministerial forum in Goondiwindi a few months ago where this issue was a hot topic during the course of the day, because it was just after the government announced its intention to jettison the Triple S process and establish its so-called independent Local Government Reform Commission. If I remember rightly, the minister was questioned during the course of the day and provided assurances to people that there was no intention on the part of the government to establish regional councils; that regional councils were not a part of his agenda.

That was certainly the conclusion which other people came to during the course of the day. I was very surprised recently when I read the reform commission report which basically said that we are going to have regional councils. Obviously the minister either misled them during the course of that ministerial forum that day or he had absolutely no idea what the reform commission was up to. Now I doubt the latter and I would subscribe to the theory of the former.

I really endorse what the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister said about the whole notion of regional councils. You can sit there in isolation and say that this does not change anything and that it really encompasses a particular area. It does not work like that. I can tell the minister about the effect the application of the term 'Goondiwindi Regional Council' is having on the Inglewood community at the moment and the effect that the Toowoomba Regional Council tag is going to have on the people of that particular region from Millmerran, which probably has more of an affinity with Goondiwindi than it does with Toowoomba. It is the same with the Emerald Regional Council.

The minister has failed to fundamentally understand the notion of localism in local government. That is what he has failed to do. He has failed to understand that quite deliberately and quite dishonestly. People have been at pains and have been concerned all the way throughout not to have regional local government in Queensland because we have unique community identities. Those unique flavours which have developed have allowed our councils throughout Queensland to cater for people who want to live in an area or who enjoy a particular area. We are not a generic society. We are Queenslanders. No-one is arguing against that, but this generic tag which the government is trying to apply destabilises and pulls apart the whole notion of localism.

The minister gave assurances that day at the regional forum about the notion of regionalisation in local government and regional councils. Regional is not better. We have seen this with the new district structure in health in Queensland where now the districts have, in effect, become the old regions, and we have completely taken away any sense of control and input that used to exist to the point that those staff are being demoralised. We are going to see the permeation of exactly the same thing with the establishment of regional councils. The minister in a smart way and a dismissive way is not understanding the argument and the connections that these communities have with their local area. The minister did mislead those people in Goondiwindi that day. He indicated to them that there would not be regional councils and now this legislation creates them.

Mr COPELAND: I would like to rise and support my colleagues on this issue. The Toowoomba Regional Council, as the name is going to stand, is probably the worst affected case, I suspect, across Queensland given that there are eight councils going into one regional council.

Mr O'Brien: I have 15.

Mr COPELAND: I take that interjection from the member for Cook. In his electorate there are people who are more intensely affected than in my electorate.

An opposition member: He doesn't care.

Mr COPELAND: He does not care, and he wants more amalgamations not less. The member for Cook is on the record as saying that he wants more amalgamations in his area. He probably has the area that is most affected by these amendments. In my area where we have eight councils going into one, there will be very great differences in the way that a shire like Millmerran will be affected by being a part of the Toowoomba Regional Council. Millmerran is not, has never been and never will be a part of Toowoomba. It never will be. Yarraman is not and never will be a part of Toowoomba. Nor will Bringalily, Pilton or Oakey—we can go through all of those places that are now part of the Toowoomba Regional Council.

Seven out of the eight councils voted for a unique name, a generic name that would have been a bit more inclusive and would have sent the message that this was not about takeovers, that this was not about focusing on the big centre, that this is about wanting to deliver better services for the entire region. But that is not what happened. We had seven councils wanting a different name, but Toowoomba decided it did not want to lose its identity. It was okay for all those other places to lose their identity, but Toowoomba did not want to lose its own identity.

I live in Toowoomba. I have no problem at all with the Toowoomba City Council, but Toowoomba city will always be Toowoomba city regardless, as the member for Toowoomba South said, of whether it is part of the 'Toowoomba and the Downs Council', the 'Darling Downs Regional Council', which is what the other seven councils promoted, or the 'Eastern Downs Regional Council'. I really do not care what name they use from that list, because all of those suggestions are a generic form that would have been a lot more inclusive than Toowoomba Regional Council. Further to that, Toowoomba brings something like 80 per cent of the debt to the new regional council. It has 65 per cent of the voters, 58 per cent of the income and 80 per cent of the debt. Even people who live in Toowoomba feel bad about that.

Mr Springborg: What a great present!

Mr COPELAND: What a great present indeed. I have got no criticism of the Toowoomba City Council and what they feel is appropriate in their circumstance, in their city and in their budget. They have made those investment decisions and I have no criticism of that. What it means now under the regional council that we have got is that the rest of the ratepayers of the new Toowoomba Regional Council will have to pick up that debt. I would like to put on the record that the debt of the Toowoomba Regional Council will be \$85 million, and the Toowoomba City Council brings \$69 million out of the \$85 million.

Mr Springborg: Merry Christmas!

Mr COPELAND: Merry Christmas to all those other ratepayers. The report says the following about the debts: Cambooya Shire Council, minor; Clifton Shire Council, minor; Jondaryan Shire Council, \$6 million, which is the next biggest debt; Millmerran Shire Council, nil; Pittsworth Shire Council, \$1 million; Crows Nest Shire Council, \$3 million; and Rosalie Shire Council, \$6 million. So \$69 million of the \$85 million debt comes from the Toowoomba City Council into the Toowoomba Regional Council. If we look across the state, those councils that have actually advocated for amalgamations are the ones which are looking over the boundary at a bigger rates base. They are the ones that have got the debt.

Mr Springborg: Money, resources and water.

Mr COPELAND: Money, resources and water; that is exactly right. That is what the regional approach will bring. It is certainly what it will bring in our area; there is no doubt about that whatsoever.

I have serious concerns about the lack of divisions in our city council. I note that that has been a matter of disagreement between the council members. I think it would have been more preferable to have divisions so that representation was available across all of those areas, but that is not available. We have got different levels of debt being brought in, and I know the member for Gladstone raised this on a number of occasions.

Time expired.

Mr HORAN: Our shadow minister asked for some examples and specific research from the minister. I can give some examples of where this has failed. The first is in the health system when the Goss-Rudd junta introduced about 14 regional health authorities. There were about 25 to 28 people in each regional health authority, and we gradually saw the development of more forums, more cars, more meetings, more bureaucrats. They all had to invent something to do.

Mark my words, after a number of years we will see a hierarchical structure in local government, with deputies, assistants to deputies, more vehicles, more strategic meetings, more navel gazing and all the rest of it. Compare that to the very flat system we have now where there is hardly any structure and they just do the work. They get out on the tractors and slash the sides of the road and do all these things without all these consultants and all these other people who build up the structure. That is what will happen. Gradually, a concentration of all these things will come into the centre bit by bit and there will probably be another big building needed in the middle of town for that.

The other example is the regionalisation of banks. That failed because people out there want service. It is going back the other way now. These little banks are being put back into these towns because people want service where they live in their own individual and unique township. That is what will happen in the future. This will cost money. There will be more bureaucracy. It is a Labor Party philosophy of centralised, heavily bureaucratic systems without getting the job done. There will be plenty of reviews, plenty of looking at this and looking at that but no-one will get out and dig the post holes and do the work.

Mr FRASER: I will answer some of the points made by members of the opposition in turn. Adding to what I said to my previous answer to the shadow minister, I believe this report contains nearly two inches of analysis of what the blueprint is, what the advantages are and the way in which decisions should be made about the future. It is made by seven people whose opinions I happen to respect.

Secondly, for the benefit of the member for Warrego, I commend to him the work of Professor John Rolfe from the Central Queensland University. I table for the benefit of the House a radio interview from 6 August this year.

Tabled paper: Transcript from ABC Tropical North Breakfast Program, dated 6 August 2007, with Dr John Rolfe, Prof for Regional Economic Development, Central Qld University regarding council amalgamations.

I take the opportunity to defend Professor Rolfe's reputation against the somewhat baseless attack that the member for Warrego just suggested upon his professional reputation.

I believe the member for Southern Downs in the original debate on local government reform in April and in his contribution earlier today based his contributions for the most part on a position of reasonableness. However, I do not think the contribution he just made can be categorised in the same way. His question was, 'Does it provide evidence that I did not know at all what the Local Government Reform Commission was doing?' The answer to that is absolutely yes.

Mr COPELAND: We have just had the statement by the minister that this report is the analysis, that this is the be-all and end-all. But what we have seen is that this government has not accepted all the recommendations in this report. It has rejected at least three and maybe four—things like names, divisions, Wujal Wujal. There are a number of issues where the government has rejected the recommendations by the reform commission.

The government has accepted in toto the boundaries that were in this report, so that has gone from being a recommendation to a decision by the government because it decided not to accept all of the recommendations. The government decided that a number of the recommendations were wrong, that the recommendations were incorrect. So the government has made its own decision on names and all those other issues, but it has accepted the boundaries.

The boundaries that the government is now endorsing—and which we do not endorse—is a decision of the government. It is not a decision of the reform commission, because those other decisions of the reform commission were rejected by the government. So let us have none of this rubbish that we have seen from the member for Redcliffe, the member for Toowoomba North and various other members who have said, 'We do not agree but the independent commission said this is what we should do,' because the government rejected those other recommendations and said, 'This is not acceptable to us.'

We now have the boundaries being adopted and decided by the government. So it is a decision of the government that not all of the recommendations should be accepted. So let us get rid of the rubbish that it is a decision of the independent commission. We are talking about decisions by this government, we are talking about decisions that this government has made, we are talking about boundaries that this government has decided it should implement.

Some of us disagree with those boundaries. I suspect many of us on this side of the House disagree with those boundaries. I know that I disagree with them, but the government does not. It agrees with the boundaries and it is implementing them lock, stock and barrel, as we have heard government members say. But the government has not implemented the recommendations of the commission lock, stock and barrel. Let us have no more of this talk about the independent commission.

The minister likes to quote the professor from Central Queensland University. I am sure that he is a very capable professor. I am sure that he has done a lot of studies. But there is a growing number—certainly more than one—of people who have studied in this area.

A government member: Name them.

Mr COPELAND: Professor Dollery for one; Scott Prasser for another; McGovern from QUT. There is a growing list of people who have disputed that. The shadow minister quoted Professor McGovern from QUT when it came to this. The government is putting up one professor from CQU. There is the study by PricewaterhouseCoopers in the other states where amalgamations have already happened that stated that sustainability is a problem. Holy hell, there is something going on here. Bigger is not necessarily better. They did not look at Queensland, but sustainability is an issue. Sustainability is an issue in Victoria—amalgamated there; New South Wales—amalgamated there; South Australia—amalgamated there. But it still has not worked.

The regional approach raises very serious questions. There are very serious questions when it comes to representation, when it comes to delivering services, but also when it comes to efficiency. We have even got the Premier saying this is all about efficiency. It is not about savings, he said in this parliament. It is about efficiency but not about savings. Explain that to me. I do not understand that. If it is about efficiency it has to be about savings. There has to be some benefit to it. Unfortunately the benefits are not real; they are political. That is all it comes down to. This is a purely political decision by a government which made the same decisions back in the 1990s and got turfed out in 1995-96 largely, in my view, because of regionalisation. People like the member for Southern Downs and the member for Robina have lived through it. My electorate covers part of that area that was amalgamated in the early 1990s. The bottom end of my electorate goes into the Warwick shire, and guess what? They have to be amalgamated because they are not sustainable.

Time expired.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I am still not sure of the minister's answer in relation to whether he deliberately misled or did not know or should have known in regard to the issue of regional councils when he was at the Goondiwindi ministerial forum. The minister assured people there during the course of that day that regional councils were not part of the agenda. If did he not know he would have been better off saying 'I do not know' and he would have got a far better response from those people. What it did was to falsely reassure some of those people that they were not facing something which inevitably they were going to be facing. If they had known that there was a very real possibility of the establishment of regional councils in Queensland today then they would have taken a totally different approach to the way that they submitted to the commission and they would have launched a public campaign, probably a la what we saw with some of the western Queensland councils.

The minister can say he was naive and he did not believe that that was going to be the case, but he basically sought to give people the impression that regionalisation was not on the agenda as far as councils were concerned. When I walked out of there some of those people sat back and thought, 'We are not going to have regional councils. We may just be amalgamated here where we want to be with Goondiwindi or Waggamba council. We do not have to worry about up here at Inglewood. Stanthorpe will not be a problem. This whole scenario which is being talked about through the Triple S process, the softening up of this great big regional council across the Darling Downs which was initially proposed as Toowoomba plus 12 others, really that was a big cock-and-bull story. Let us not worry about it. We have been assured today by the minister that regional councils are not on the agenda.'

It was always on the agenda of those facilitators. I can guarantee that those people would have taken a totally different approach to the way that they engaged with the government and took the government—wrongfully they now find—at face value. This government pulled their leg from day one about what to actually expect through this process: 'Sit back, relax, put your submissions in, it will be okay, we have a process which is based on QTC data. It is all about financial viability. It is all about efficiencies and that sort of thing'.

As other colleagues and I have been able to demonstrate here today, it was not about efficiencies, it was not about financial stability; otherwise those opposite would not have amalgamated the likes of Peak Downs and Emerald and those councils which were the strongest in Queensland and then left the weakest ones because they had cultural identity issues. It makes no sense. Are the cultural identity issues in Queensland based on the colour of your skin, not whether you have some other unique identity? That is what we have seen happen here.

Big is not better. I am very concerned because I have seen the disaster of this in New South Wales. I have seen the amalgamation of the councils into the Moree Plains just over the border from Goondiwindi. We now have roads that were bitumen turning into gravel as the administration of that council is costing up to 70 per cent just to run. I ask members to look at the debate about Northern New South Wales where there was amalgamation some years ago of the Rural Lands Protection Board areas to which landholders pay precepts for a whole range of natural resource management and administration. They are in a pitched battle with the New South Wales government on the issue of deamalgamation because they cannot get the services locally. Everything they were promised about regionalisation in this amalgamation has not been delivered.

That is the sort of thing that the minister seems to be failing to understand. If the minister did not know what this so-called independent commission was actually going to come up with, why was he so hard and fast that day? Why did the minister give them that impression that day? That impression

tailored the response that they then sent in to the commission and the way they interacted locally. The minister basically threw them off the trail, deliberately or otherwise. I have been through this experience with a council with the amalgamation of the Warwick shire. They have good council officers and councillors. As I said, there are issues.

An opposition member: Sue Kelly did her damndest.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That is right. The haemorrhaging goes on in Allora. The haemorrhaging goes on and on. When we put the referendum in place to deamalgamate them in 1994 a lot of those shire areas did vote but it did not actually suit the methodology.

Time expired.

Mr HOBBS: A while ago I asked the minister to table what evidence he had that regionalisation was the way to go. I asked what professional information he had. I have had a look at what he tabled. It is a radio interview! He tabled a radio interview with some bloke from up in the Central Highlands.

Mr Cripps: Did you table the 4BC one?

Mr HOBBS: Where is the 4BC one? Minister, for heaven's sake, we are talking about a professional arrangement here. We have so many professional academics saying that what you are doing is wrong, we ask you to provide some evidence and you give us a radio transcript, for heaven's sake.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Member for Warrego, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: I cannot believe the unprofessionalism of the intellectual giant we have here who is leading local government. You are, in fact, the minister against local government. It is an absolute disgrace that you would use a radio transcript as the basis for these forced council amalgamations. What sort of a show are you running? What a disgrace.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Member for Warrego, please do not refer to the minister as 'you'. Direct your comments through the chair. Speak about the minister in the third person, please.

Mr HOBBS: I apologise. I am absolutely astounded that this is the evidence that you are providing. Surely you can do something better than that. Surely you can do better than a radio transcript. Do you want us to actually run the 4BC ones? We might as well use those. I think this is an absolute disgrace.

Mr FRASER: I appreciate the opportunity to reply because I wish to provide further figures for the record. When the member for Cunningham was talking about the debt that Toowoomba brought to the Toowoomba Regional Council, he quoted the figure that Toowoomba brought \$69 million worth of debt to the \$85 million that would be the debt bill across the Toowoomba Regional Council.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! You will clarify that?

Mr FRASER: It is \$69 million of a total of \$85 million. I think it bears thinking about in the context that, of the total assets for the Toowoomba regional capital of \$1.8 billion, Toowoomba brings in \$1.3 billion.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Member for Cunningham. The minister is on his feet. He has the call, not you.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lockyer, if you wish to interject, please return to your seat.

Mr FRASER: This is akin to the argument that someone who gets given a million-dollar house with a \$100,000 mortgage is in some way worse off than someone who gets given a \$200,000 house with a \$50,000 mortgage. What obviously matters is the net position of what is acquired not considering debt by and of itself.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left!

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Lockyer! I gave members on my left all the protection and you were heard in silence. Please give the minister the same consideration.

Mr FRASER: I see no useful purpose in responding further to the utter fantasy that was provided by the member for Southern Downs. In relation to John Rolfe I did, as I said—and I tabled that example of an opinion from John Rolfe—commend the works of John Rolfe to the members of the opposition. I note in that regard the claims of victory by the members of the opposition. When I asked them to name a series of people who they thought provided opinions and in support of the antediluvian argument that they are progressing tonight, they named of course Brian Dollery who is well known as being on that

side of the debate. The member for Darling Downs took much delight in screaming the name of Scott Prasser at me. In the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 30 July the following article appeared. It states—

Better planning, less red tape, more bargaining power, better promotion and one vision for the region.

That is the picture one local government expert has painted for the Sunshine Coast under the state government's amalgamation plans.

The key, according to Dr Scott Prasser from the Sunshine Coast University—

I say to the member for Darling Downs and the member for Warrego: thanks for coming.

Division: Question put—That clause 3, as read, stand part of the bill.

AYES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Finn, Male

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clause 4, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch3, pt 1B)—

Mr HOBBS (2.58 am): I move the following amendment—

4 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 9, line 11 to page 46, line 23—

omit, insert—

'Part 1B Parliament's response to report of Local Government Reform Commission

'159Z Purpose of pt 1B

'The purpose of this part is to provide for how the reform commission recommendations are to be dealt with.

'159ZA Application of pt 1B

- '(1) This part does not apply to the Brisbane City Council.
- '(2) This part applies to Torres Strait Islander local governments.

'159ZB Definitions for pt 1B

'In this part—

composition, of a local government, means the number of councillors, including the mayor, of the local government.

existing local government area means a local government area as in existence on the commencement of this section.

reform commission recommendation means a recommendation of the reform commission included in the reform commission report.

reform commission report means the report of the reform commission under part 1A, given to the Minister under a letter of 27 July 2007.

significant change means any change to a local government that would give effect to a reform commission recommendation and that is, or that is in substance, any of the following—

- (a) the abolition of its local government area and its inclusion in the area of a new local government area;
- (b) the inclusion in its local government area of a part of another local government area;
- (c) the exclusion from its local government area of a part of its local government area.

'159ZC 2008 quadrennial elections to proceed on current boundaries

- '(1) The 2008 quadrennial elections for all local governments must proceed on the basis of the local government area boundaries in existence on the commencement of this section.
- '(2) However, the elections must be held on 15 March 2008 instead of 29 March 2008 as otherwise provided for in section 269(2).

'159ZD Consideration of recommendations of the reform commission by referendum

- '(1) This section applies to a local government if it would be affected by the implementation of a significant change.
- '(2) A referendum must be held in the whole of the local government area on the question on whether the significant change should be implemented.
- '(3) Part 1, division 7 applies to the holding of the referendum as if it were, under that division, a compulsory referendum to be held in relation to a commission's proposed determination of a reviewable local government matter.
- '(4) The referendum must be held in conjunction with the 2008 quadrennial elections for the local government.

'159ZE Implementation of significant changes approved by referendum

- '(1) A regulation may be made under this part to implement a significant change if all local governments affected by the significant change have approved the change by a referendum held for the purposes of this part.

- (2) The regulation may include the implementation of other matters related to the significant change, including the division arrangements and composition of local governments, if the local governments affected by the significant change have been consulted on the matters.
- (3) The 2012 quadrennial elections must be conducted as if the significant change and related matters had been implemented, but the change and other matters do not take effect until the conclusion of the elections.'.

I am amending clause 5 by removing the 'Implementation of the whole of Queensland local government boundaries reform' and replacing it with a more reasoned response of the parliament to the report of the Local Government Reform Commission. The amendment allows for local governments to go to the next quadrennial elections on their current boundaries and for those for which amalgamations have been recommended to conduct a referendum as to whether the amalgamation should occur. If the referendum asking the people if they wish to amalgamate is carried, then the transition to the amalgamated council would occur over the next four years and the new boundaries would take effect at the 2012 quadrennial elections.

This is a far better process to undertake. There is really no rush. The amendment takes into consideration that any significant change must occur with a referendum of the people and that change does not need to be rushed. If two councils decide to amalgamate with the support of the majority of the people in the areas polled, then the political will is present to amalgamate the council. This major change will be much easier to implement than forced amalgamations that are conducted in a rushed manner. This is a reasoned approach; it is a sensible approach. It does allow people the time to do it properly.

We have had a rushed process so far. We have had the government running around talking about the independent reform commission, but the reality is that it gave that independent reform commission terms of reference so that it had no choice but to draw up the current boundaries. In other words, a group of people were given a set of instructions and anyone could have drawn those boundaries. I drew the boundaries in my area and that is exactly the way they turned out. It was very simple to do. All I had to do was look at the terms of reference and then draw around them, and out they came.

It would have been a catastrophe in the far west if it had not been for the Premier getting in touch with the reform commission and telling them not to amalgamate the big councils out there. The campaign did work. We do not want to hear anything more about this independent reform commission. They were given a job to do and they did it. I believe this amendment will be a far more reasoned approach to local government in Queensland.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to support the amendment that has been moved by the member for Warrego, the shadow minister for local government, and reinforce the comments that he has made. The amendment that he has put forward is a much more reasoned, measured approach to the report of the commission that was set up.

What I think the government has failed to understand is the enormity of the task that faces councils that are considering the types of amalgamations that are being proposed. There are two issues that are addressed in the amendment that has been put forward by the member for Warrego. The first is the time frame around which those tasks of amalgamation have to be considered and completed. The second is the issue of giving communities that are involved in those recommendations an opportunity to have a say about whether or not they accept the recommendation and whether or not they can be convinced that the recommendations are the best for their community.

The latter has certainly been well and truly argued through the second reading stage of this debate. I do not believe the government has advanced any real reason those communities have not been able to have their say except to come up with some notion about the Electoral Commission having to rush through some consideration of divisions. The need for that excuse disappears if this amendment is accepted because it does what is an eminently sensible thing. It allows the local governments to go to the next election on their current boundaries.

I believe there is no reason that has been put forward in all the public debate that has occurred since the government embarked on this process that suggests there is any reason councils cannot go to the next election in March on their current boundaries and then deal with the complexities of the commission's report in the four-year period that will be available to them after that. They will have an opportunity to carry their communities with them. They will have an opportunity to allow their communities to come to terms, firstly, with the recommendations and, secondly, to express some sort of opinion, some sort of acceptance of those recommendations. Then, assuming that those recommendations are accepted and at least some form of community support is indicated, the councils involved will have a reasonable period to put in place the mechanics that will be necessary to amalgamate the different councils.

It has been completely underestimated, I would suggest to the House, the extent of that task. When they have to take seven or eight council areas, seven or eight different operations and combine them into one it is a monumental task. It would be a monumental task whether we are talking about councils or about corporations or company takeovers or whatever comparison we would like to draw. To take seven or eight existing operations that all have their own cultures, their own methods of operation and try to combine them into one from a manager's point of view is a huge task.

I think it is time that some consideration was given to that task from a management point of view rather than a politician's point of view. While it might suit the government's political agenda to jam this through and get it off the political landscape and out of the headlines there are people out there in those communities, in those councils who will have to deal with the practicalities and deal with the realities. To try to suggest that they can do that between now and March is ludicrous. The sensible way to do it, to allow that to happen and to allow it to happen in a way that protects those communities, that carries those communities forward with them, that brings the people along, is to allow those councils to go to the next election on their current boundaries as this amendment suggests. There is no reason that cannot happen.

As I—and a number of members have said this—said in my speech during the second reading debate there is no imminent financial disaster facing these councils. Another four years is not going to bring on a financial disaster. It is going to allow a transition process that will produce a lot better outcome in the end. It will allow the people who are involved a reasonable chance of completing the task.

Time expired.

Mr CRIPPS: I rise to support amendment No. 4 to clause 5 of the legislation which relates to the implementation or the facilitation of referenda. When the original bill, the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, went through the parliament in April it soon became clear to many Queenslanders that this bill was dictatorial and that the public consultation was going to be inadequate. Inevitably councils and communities started to talk about referenda. So the Premier and the minister cynically moved to threaten them with the sack and with fines.

In contrast to those threats by the government to sack and fine mayors and councillors who run their own referenda the Queensland coalition has guaranteed councils the opportunity to hold a referendum if the local government demonstrated its opposition to the forced amalgamations. Subsequently, the federal coalition government announced that it would offer councils the opportunity to conduct those polls on council amalgamations through the AEC.

The Beattie Labor government has ridiculed this as a waste of money but what members opposite do not understand is that a lot of people value things in different ways. Have the members opposite considered the possibility that Queenslanders collectively might value the opportunity to have their say despite the monetary cost. What about the value that we place on things like the environment or the value that we place on things like spending time with our families or the value that we place on having clean water and food to eat. We do not always value things based solely on their monetary value. I reject the flippant, arrogant and narrow-minded point of view of the members opposite that it is going to cost too much to give people a vote.

Australia is an egalitarian democracy. We value that in this country. That is why so many people have expressed their strong desire to have their say. Today the minister walked into the House and introduced an amendment that provided for councils to be sacked if they invited or cooperated with the AEC and conducted polls in their local council areas to give those residents and ratepayers a say.

In doing so, the government unveiled its utter contempt for those local communities. The Premier is drunk on power. I agree with the Prime Minister: this Premier is out of control in almost every aspect of the governance of the state of Queensland. This government is out of control driven by ideology and spite. I join with my colleagues in the coalition in opposing this legislation in the strongest possible terms and I urge the people of Queensland to maintain their rage and remember that the Australian Labor Party today declared itself opposed to Queenslanders having a say in the future of their local community.

Mr COPELAND: It is somewhat ironic that the government at every turn has been saying what a waste of money it is to give people a say, what a waste of money it is to give them a poll, to give them a referendum, to give them a plebiscite, what a waste of money it is for the federal government to offer a plebiscite to those communities that want to have a say in this process—a say that is being denied by this government in this state. It is somewhat ironic in that context when there is an advertising campaign run by this government about this process trying to build support for itself, trying to build support for its own argument, trying to build support for its position when it does not want the real position measured by a plebiscite or a referendum or a poll in those areas.

That advertising campaign was dishonest on a whole lot of levels, and the member for Robina went through those issues a little in his contribution tonight. It was dishonest in the fact that it was targeted in Brisbane where there is no effect whatsoever of this legislation. It is immune from this because the City of Brisbane Act is not included in the amalgamation process. But that is where the 35 seats are of which 33 are held by the Labor Party. That is what the cynical political move was in that advertising campaign. I ask members: is that a waste of money? Is that a cynical ploy? But, what is more, it was dishonest from the start because it was referring to boundaries that had been in place since before Bradman, since before the Wright brothers, since before Jesus was born. It was an unbelievably dishonest campaign, because the boundaries have changed during that time. We have seen new local governments created. We have seen amalgamations happen. We have seen boundaries change on a regular basis.

Where have those boundary changes worked? They have worked where community consultation has been undertaken over a period of time. They have worked where the community has been taken along with the local government commissioners who were determining those boundary changes, and I know that because my father was a local government commissioner. I know that he was involved in that process—the realignment between Boonah and Ipswich, Brisbane and Ipswich. He was involved in that process. It took a lot of work to take those communities with them, but they were successful realignments. They were successful changes to the boundaries. To say that no changes to those boundaries has happened has been completely dishonest.

Where changes have not worked is where they have been pushed through in a hurry—places like Warwick Shire Council, which the member for Southern Downs and myself have some experience with. That is where they have not worked, because they are people who were pushed into the process who did not have a say, did not have any contribution to make, were not allowed to have their say and were just put at the hands of a Labor government in that case—and again in this—and were pushed into that situation. That is where it has not worked. For those members on the other side who think that amalgamation is the be-all and end-all, come to our electorates. Come to places like Leyburn and Allora—the places that feel like they have been left behind in this whole process.

Mr Horan: Killarney.

Mr COPELAND: Killarney and those places that feel like they have been left behind in this process, because they have been, notwithstanding the very best efforts of those councillors who represented them. I interjected on the member for Southern Downs earlier about Sue Cowley. She is a fantastic lady and an absolutely brilliant representative for Allora. You would not get a better person. She worked her backside off trying to represent that community in the new shire council, but still the heart and soul of Allora was forever changed, and anyone will tell you that even if you go there today 14 or 15 years later. It has irrevocably been changed. It is the same if one goes to Leyburn in my electorate or Karara. There is no doubt that the people of Leyburn feel that they have been left behind. There is no doubt about that, notwithstanding the very best efforts of the people who represented them over that time. They have been left behind in this process because it was rushed, it was forced on to them and it was something that they had no say in.

There is no imminent danger of financial collapse of these local governments. That is simply a false assertion that this government has been trying to perpetuate during this entire debate. It is absolute rubbish! There is no local government that is going to go broke tomorrow. There is no local government that is going to go broke in four years. There is no reason whatsoever that we cannot go to the next local council elections on the current boundaries and work through this process and have some improvements made and some changes made, because there is no doubt that those changes are needed. There are a lot of areas that need those changes, and my electorate is one of them. The Toowoomba Regional Council is going to go from Yarraman to Bringalilly and out to Cecil Plains and up to Pilton. It is an absolutely ridiculous situation. We can go to the next elections on the current boundaries. We can work through these issues. We can make the changes where they are needed. As I have always said, there are some changes that are needed, and the Jondaryan shire is a perfect example of that.

Time expired.

Mr FRASER: The effect of the amendment that the opposition is proposing to move at this point is to essentially remove the whole section of the bill which deals with implementing reform. In that regard, it is seeking to re-prosecute the argument that we had for about 13 hours during the second reading of the bill and a vote upon which we have had. I note in that regard that it was opportune that the member for Hinchinbrook took the opportunity to enter into the debate with his own second reading speech. The fact of life is that this notion that we should at this point, at the moment before which we pass this bill into law, revert back to the point at which we were at in April is absurd.

Mr COPELAND: Mr Deputy Speaker, that is not right. What the minister has said is not right.

Ms Keech: It's still a waste!

Mr COPELAND: I am glad to hear that the minister for fair trading thinks that this is a waste of time. I am really glad to hear that and the people who live in my electorate will be really pleased to hear that—that this is a complete waste of time. That is just an absolutely astounding display of the arrogance with which this government is treating this debate and this issue. It is an absolute disgrace that the government thinks that this is a waste of time, because it is not—not to the people who live in my electorate, not to the people who live in those shires, not to the people who live in those towns, and the minister should know better. The minister should know better and I gave her more credit than that. But for her to say that this is a waste of time is an absolute reflection of what this government thinks of our communities and of our system of local government. I am just absolutely dumbfounded by that statement.

The Triple S program was actually going through this process, but the problem for the government was that it was not delivering the outcomes that the government wanted. The government wanted a set of outcomes, and we now know what they are because we are debating them tonight. But

in true form the government is trying to find a way of delivering those outcomes without it being seen to have actually made the decision to deliver those outcomes. The Triple S process was a way of doing that. It hoped that the Triple S process would deliver wholesale amalgamations. But the Triple S process was actually delivering a whole lot of things. In my electorate it was delivering shared services models; it was delivering potential amalgamations. It was doing a whole lot of things, but it just was not what the government wanted it to deliver.

So now the government has stepped in and legislated for what it actually wanted, so we have put those councils through the whole process of wasting their time, wasting their effort, wasting their money and wasting everything else to try to insulate this government from actually making a decision. We have again seen the normal procedure where it sets up an independent commission with bipartisan people on it to try to insulate it from criticism so that it is not the government making the decision; it is actually an independent body making it—like we have seen with water and like we have seen with a whole range of things so it is not the government that is seen to be making the decision that adversely affects the people of Queensland.

An opposition member: Terry Mackenroth!

Mr COPELAND: Yet we see Terry Mackenroth, who has been on this agenda since the early nineties.

An opposition member: Very independent!

Mr COPELAND: Absolutely. It is a very independent commission! We have seen the government make a decision to adopt some recommendations but not all of them. So it is now no longer the independent commission's review; it is the government's position, and I want all Queenslanders to know that that is the case. To say that this is a waste of time is something that my constituents will be absolutely horrified at but something that I have known the whole time that that is where this government's views lie.

Mr SEENEY: I, like the member for Cunningham, was somewhat stunned by the minister's response to this amendment. For him to suggest that this amendment somehow repeats the second reading debate shows a gross lack of understanding of the amendment. I do not think he has even bothered to try to understand it. This amendment puts forward an alternative process from here. It suggests that the type of amalgamation that the so-called reform commission has recommended can be achieved in a much more acceptable way if it is done in a way that takes the communities with it, if it is done in a process that takes the communities forward and if it is done to a time frame that allows the people involved in local government to put in place the mechanics of the amalgamations over a period that is considerably more appropriate and much more reasonable. Minister, the government is proposing in the legislation that all of that happen before March.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Order! Can you direct your comments through the chair.

Mr SEENEY: For the minister's benefit, the government is proposing that all of the amalgamations—

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Darling Downs, if you are going to interject, return to your seat, but stop it altogether.

Mr SEENEY: The bill proposes that all of those amalgamations should be completed before March next year and that they should be completed without any reference to or consultation with the communities that are involved. By this amendment, we are proposing that those amalgamations should proceed over a much more appropriate period—that the councils involved should be allowed to go to their next round of elections on the current boundaries to consult their communities, to seek from their communities an acceptance of the amalgamation process that has been proposed and then to put in place that amalgamation process over a four-year period rather than over a seven-month period. That is the proposal that the minister quite clearly has not even bothered to understand, let alone respond to.

In terms of making the debate in this place worth something, I think the minister has a responsibility to explain not just to us but to the people of Queensland why this process has to be completed before March next year. The minister has some responsibility to explain to the councils and the communities why this process cannot be completed over a four-year period. There has been no evidence put forward. In fact, the argument has not even been rebutted that there is not an imminent financial collapse threatening a significant number of Queensland councils. That argument has not been rebutted, because it cannot be rebutted. The evidence has not been put forward, because no evidence exists. There is no rush for this amalgamation process.

At this point in the debate we have to accept that there is going to be an amalgamation process of some sort. The question that is being considered in the consideration of this amendment is whether that amalgamation process should proceed before next March and proceed without any community consultation or any community support or any community reference or whether it should, much more

sensibly, be allowed to proceed over a four-year period after due consideration by the communities and after an appropriate level of support has been expressed by those communities. That is the simple choice that the minister and the government face in accepting or rejecting our amendment.

But whatever the government chooses to do, it owes this House and the people of Queensland an explanation of its actions. It owes us something more than the arrogant dismissal of the proposition that we saw from the minister in his initial response in which he said that it was a waste of time. He said that it was an absurd reversion to the second reading debate. It is clearly neither of those things. It is a sensible proposition put forward by people who understand the impact of these amalgamations on the communities that will have to deal with them. Minister, if you are going to suggest—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Order! Can you direct your comments through the chair.

Mr SEENEY: If the minister is not going to give that to those communities, then he owes us an explanation as to why.

Time expired.

Ms NOLAN: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the amendment which seeks to slow down the process—consult for another four years, have a referendum, carry on and then do this. I seek to respond to the amendment and I seek to respond specifically to the comments of the member for Cunningham about the amalgamations that happened in 1994 and 1995 around Warwick Shire Council which brought in a number of communities that surrounded Warwick into the Warwick Shire Council.

As the member for Cunningham knows, this is a topic about which I have a degree of knowledge. I represent the fifth generation of my family to be in politics. That is because my great-great-grandfather and his son and my great-uncle, Des Cooper, were National Party members and sat on the Rosenthal Shire Council. My family came from a little place called Bony Mountain, which is in the electorate of Cunningham. My family were stalwarts of that small community along with families such as—

An honourable member: You still are.

Ms NOLAN: That is right—and still are—along with the families like the Dwans, the Seibels and the Ryans. They lived out in this little place and they were very proud of the service that they offered to the community through the Rosenthal Shire Council. Since that amalgamation my cousin Gary Cooper has continued to represent the area as part of the Warwick Shire Council.

There is no longer a Rosenthal Shire Council but there is still a place called Bony Mountain and I go there from time to time. The change that happened was a huge change in that community. If you go there, the older people will still tell you that it is a shame. I think that would be my grandmother's view. When I go out there with my grandmother she shows me the stumps where the school used to be and where some of the farmhouses used to be. She talks about what it used to be like when Bony Mountain was a thriving rural community.

But, of course, what has happened out there is that my grandmother was one of five children. My uncle Des was one, and I mentioned him, and there were four others. Of those five children who grew up on the farm at Bony Mountain, three moved to town. Between them they had 19 children, of whom a dozen moved to town. That is my mother's generation. Then there is my generation of whom, of course, the vast majority live in towns and cities. Of course, I have ended up representing Ipswich in this place. That is where my family ended up.

So it is lovely for grandma and other people who are trying to hold on to a changed community to talk about what it was like and to hope that it might be like that again. But it is not, because the people—us, those people, your children—moved away. It is not amalgamation that changed Bony Mountain; it is the drift of population absolutely, decidedly, deliberately and decisively by people like me and people like your children away from the rural communities. This was not a change in policy that fundamentally made tiny little local governments not viable. It was the deliberate shift away from the country areas to the city. That was not a government decision; it was many, many private individual decisions over time.

Now I represent Ipswich. It is not right that the people of Ipswich, who made the hard decisions—who amalgamated, who now run a good and efficient local government—should continue to cross-subsidise tiny little inefficient councils that largely exist to prop up someone's nostalgia, because it changed and it changed because your children left—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Order! Member for Ipswich, direct your comments through the chair.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members on my left.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Toowoomba South!

Ms NOLAN: It changed through natural processes. The government has to respond to those processes. That is what we are doing. That is the right and proper thing to do. It is not right to talk about it for years; it is right to do it now.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I have been tempted to respond to that. Whilst the honourable member is principally talking about some of the areas in the honourable member for Cunningham's electorate, I can assure the House that what we are talking about here is not necessarily due to the effluxion of migration brought about because people do not have horses and carts anymore and they have to refrigerate a truck. We are talking about something which has been accelerated by the process of government, not a government that is about efficiency but a government that is about retribution.

Bony Mountain might have been like that because as you drive out there was a dairy factory here and a dairy factory there. There was one every 15 or 20 kilometres. There was one at Greymare. We know all those things. But we know what happened with refrigeration and transport. People got cars and certain things happened. No-one is arguing against that, but what the honourable member displays is an ignorance about the things that government has actually accelerated. It has broken down the service centres and the capacity for those communities to be able to sustain themselves in a viable structure.

There was talk about Allora. It had its own viable council and it had been highly efficient. It was not being propped up by anyone. It employed people in that community, it gave the community a sense of heart and a sense of soul. That had nothing to do with horses, carts, buggies, refrigeration and telephones away from party lines. This was a government decision that impacted upon that community. It was not some of those other extraneous matters that happened with the advancement of technology, transport or whatever the case may be. When the government took that away it had a significant and profound impact upon the culture of that community and upon the psychology of that community.

Recently I was at the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Rotary club. It still burns hard for those people. When I raised this issue in April in this parliament even the mayor, who was responsible for running that council and who does a good job, agreed with my assessment. There are winners and losers out of this process. As soon as this is assessed and understood, they will have a greater understanding of what they are seeking to do. No-one on this side is arguing against the concept of amalgamations and boundary change per se. We have not done that. We will never do that, because unlike what the minister has said—and it has been borne out by what the honourable member for Cunningham has said—any time over the last 100-odd years since local government was established in Queensland there has been a constant evolution of boundaries, internal and external, from amalgamations. No-one argues against that. There will be things that even we cannot stop. But the government through misunderstanding of local community identity and alignments—the nature of localism itself—comes in, tears it apart and destroys it, because it wants to play a political God in this process. It wants to put apples with oranges or oranges with apples. It just does not understand what it is doing. The pieces do not line up. The jigsaw puzzle pieces do not fit and that is the problem. What we then have is a community devoid of heart and soul, but it still has to exist as a service centre for a whole range of people.

It still needs a hospital in many cases, because we have gone to a stage over the last 60 to 100 years with the advancement of transport technology, refrigeration and communication where we have probably pulled our service centres back as far as we can. There is an issue as to how far you can have between a hospital, between a school and all those sorts of things. So you take one part of something out of a community that sustains that community and you are saying, 'Will you sustain yourself on a much lesser basis?' That is a government decision. That is nothing to do with economics.

That is what this government does not seem to understand. It is interesting that we have the honourable member saying, 'We're not going to cross-subsidise something which is unviable.' I do not have a problem with us putting a bit of money into Suncorp Stadium. It will not fly on its own. I do not have a problem with us cross-subsidising an unviable city bus network in Brisbane, because if we did not do it it would not work. It is the same with the Citytrain network, and they continue to say, 'We are not going to do it out there but we can do it down here.'

I have a belief that any good government looks after the service centres and the networks and has strong, vibrant communities based on what the need is to sustain a decentralised state, not because we do not like something and we want to change it because we do not understand it. We have a greater understanding of the broad network and the church of this state than what those opposite do.

Time expired.

Mr FRASER: The member for Cunningham and then the Leader of the Opposition asked about my assessment that the proposition in their amendment was to remove the whole reform process, and I likened it to the essential debate that we have been having through this bill. I do accept the error of my ways. That is actually the debate we had in April when we put in the legislation to conduct the reform process.

Just to shine a little bit of light into the economic shadowlands that members of the National Party reside in, they know full well that if we were not undertaking this course of action, if there were not a mechanism to achieve the sensible and timely reform of local government, then the people on the other

side of the House would be holding up and waving at me Queensland Treasury Corporation assessments, the Auditor-General's report, the PricewaterhouseCoopers folder and saying to me, 'The evidence is incontrovertible,' as they did rather disingenuously with the Auditor-General's report over the last couple of days when it suits their own needs.

They know full well that they would be waving all those reports saying, 'Nothing is coming of this voluntary process. Why do you continue to invest great store, hope, time, money and effort into the process?' Then a couple of years down the track when nothing happened, when inevitably we found the crunch point which would arrive from doing nothing, one afternoon on ABC Radio they would ask me to go on and the journalist would be saying, 'You had all these reports; they were piling up on your desk. Why didn't you do anything? Why didn't you act?' The answer is that we acted.

Division: Question put—That the member for Warrego's amendment be agreed to.

AYES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seenev, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

NOES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

Resolved in the **negative**.

Non-government amendment (Mr Hobbs) **negatived**.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr FRASER (3.43 am): I move amendments Nos 1 to 5—

1 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 29, after line 16—

insert—

'(3) The appointment may be made by way of seconding an employee of a local government required to be represented on the committee to the role of interim chief executive officer.'

2 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 29, line 17, '(3)—

omit, insert—

'(4)'

3 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 29, lines 23 to 25—

omit.

4 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 30, lines 11 and 12—

omit, insert—

'(a) a representative of each union whose members include employees of a local government required to be on the local transition committee; and'

5 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 30, after line 18—

insert—

'(4) In this section—

union means an employee association registered as an organisation under the *Industrial Relations Act 1999*.'

The amendments are largely self-explanatory and are set out in the explanatory notes provided with the amendments when I tabled them. However, in speaking to the amendments, I would note that the two hours provided for debate in the committee stage that we have witnessed tonight have largely been comprised of the following: in the first instance, a debate about the title of the bill, which represents a stunt on the part of the National Party; in the second and third instance, the two amendments related to the removal of the term 'regional' from the provisions of the bill; and in the fourth instance, to take us through to nearly two hours of committee debate time, the National Party then engaged in a debate about the debate that we actually had in April about whether we should do this in the first place. I am sure we will hear tomorrow a story from the National Party members about how they used the two hours in this time.

I think the record will show when people review the two hours of this debate the enjoining of many members of the National Party as they sought for their own purposes during this debate to filibuster out their meaningless amendments so they could conclude at the end of this that the two hours were in some way inadequate for them to address the issues of substance. The fact of the matter is that when people review the transcript of those two hours of debate they will see the puffery that was engaged in by the National Party. I commend the five amendments in my name to the House.

Mr HOBBS: I have to say that the minister's arrogance knows no bounds. He thinks he is king of the road, and I think John Miller has him summed up pretty well. We should read John Miller's reviews again.

An opposition member: Is it a G or a K?

Mr HOBBS: What is it, a G or a K? These amendments that the minister is bringing in just go to show the absolute arrogance of this government. The government is trying to take away absolutely the rights of the people to have a say. If there are some major changes going on with a community, wouldn't it be reasonable to assume—

Mr FRASER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The amendments that I have moved are amendments Nos 1 to 5 which clarify a number of definitions. I suspect the member for Warrego, in great anticipation, is already on amendments Nos 6 to 9.

Mr HOBBS: The minister once again is being his fairly normal self. The reality is that these amendments the minister is putting in are basically trying to take away the rights of the community to have a say.

Mr Seeney: We are not moving any more amendments to clause 5. You were supposed to move your amendments to clause 5.

Mr FRASER: Thank you for the advice.

Mr Seeney: Any time you want some assistance.

Mr FRASER: The opposition actually tabled 24 amendments and then proceeded to waste two hours on the rather insubstantial first four amendments. Now opposition members apparently have decided not to move any more of their amendments.

Mr SEENEY: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr FRASER: That is what you just said!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister, resume your seat.

Mr SEENEY: I said we were not moving any more.

Mr Fraser: I know it's late.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, as you know, we gave the minister the opportunity to move his amendments to clause 5.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr FRASER: For the benefit of the House, I will move amendments Nos 1 to 13 standing in my name.

Mr SEENEY: No, 1 to 10. They are the amendments to clause 5. You have to do them one clause at a time.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr FRASER (3.48 am): I move amendments Nos 6 to 9—

6 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 45, lines 5 and 6, 'under chapter 6, part 2'—
omit.

7 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 45, line 18, ', despite chapter 6, part 2,'—
omit.

8 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 45, after line 25—
insert—

'(2A) If the poll mentioned in subsection (2) is to be conducted under chapter 6, part 2, the subsection applies despite that part.'

9 Clause 5 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1B)—

At page 46, after line 4—
insert—

'**conduct a poll**, means—

(a) conduct a poll under chapter 6, part 2; or

(b) take any action to request, arrange, assist, facilitate or cause a poll to be conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission or any other entity.

Example of action to arrange a poll to be conducted—

advertise that the poll is to be conducted

poll, other than for a poll conducted under chapter 6, part 2, includes referendum and plebiscite, and any process similar to a poll, referendum or plebiscite.'

I gather we have already adequately debated the first five amendments, so I will move to amendments Nos 6, 7, 8 and 9. Those amendments provide in the provisions of the bill for us to ensure that the waste of ratepayers' money that was proposed by individual councils is not somehow transferred to be a waste of the federal taxpayers' money. Despite the contribution of the member for Nanango during the substantive part of the debate earlier when she sought to claim that it was okay to waste the federal government's money, I would provide the opinion and the insight to the member for Nanango, to other members of the community and to all members of the House that ratepayers are taxpayers. There is in fact no magical distinction about the provision of public money and where it comes from.

In that regard, our view, as I set out in my summing-up, is clearly this: there are no referendums at a state level, there are no referendums at a federal level. Those boundaries are determined independent of a referendum provision. The referendum provision was in fact only inserted by the National Party into this legislation in 1996 in a way that it has, by omission, dishonestly referred to ever since as being absolute or long-grained and not, in fact, resident with a reserve power by the minister of the day to be able to return any such referendum out of those 10 years. The provision of these amendments ensures that ratepayers' money and, indeed, taxpayers' money, being one and the same, the provision of public money, is in no—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Minister, please resume your seat. Under the provisions of the resolution agreed to by the House and the time limit for the consideration in detail of the bill having expired, the question is that clauses 5 to 22 as amended by the minister's amendments and the schedule as read be agreed to.

Division: Question put—That clauses 5 to 22 as amended by the minister's amendments and the schedule as read be agreed to.

AYES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczyk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Third Reading

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Honourable members, under the provisions of the resolution agreed to by the House and the time for the third reading of the bill having expired, the question is that the bill as amended be now read a third time.

Division: Question put—That the bill, as amended, be now read a third time.

AYES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczyk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Long Title

Mr SPEAKER: Under the provisions of the resolution agreed to by the House and the timing of the long title of the bill being agreed to having expired, the question is that the long title be agreed to.

Division: Question put—That the long title of the bill be agreed to.

AYES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczyk, Pearce, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Nolan

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Elmes, Rickuss

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Parliamentary Staff

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, before anyone leaves the chamber, I would like to make a comment before I call the Leader of the House. I take this opportunity to thank the staff of the parliament. I want to particularly thank our Hansard reporters, who have had a very rugged three days. They have been here with us til this particular time and they are here for the adjournment debate as well. There are seven Hansard reporters, two supervisory reporters and of course our chief reporter. Yesterday was an incredibly busy day with the appropriation bills. A hurried five-minute speech is actually very hard for our reporters—more so than a 20-minute full speech because of the rapidity of members speaking at that particular time. Can we thank our Hansard reporters and all other staff.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (4.09 am): I move—

That this House, at its rising, do adjourn until 9.30 am on Tuesday, 21 August 2007.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (4.10 am): I move—

That this House do now adjourn.

Abuse of the Elderly

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (4.10 am): Recent newspaper articles have revealed a growing criminal trend whereby the elderly are losing approximately \$2.5 million every month to rip-off merchants. An amount of \$116 million was lost in the period from 2002 to last September. Sadly, it is often the elderly's own children perpetrating this 'legal' crime and the trend is set to worsen as Australia's population ages. It appears that some children are unable to wait for their inheritance. It also appears that sibling rivalry exacerbates the issues as one sibling will try getting the money from their parents while they are alive to beat their other siblings to it. This is a most difficult situation. The elderly are easily intimidated and can be threatened into giving their money away.

I recently had such an experience in my electorate and had to come to the aid of a senior couple. The elderly, because they are frail, have to believe that people will act in their best interests and, of course, they will trust their children. The answer might be for the elderly to form the likes of a tribunal with their solicitor and one other trusted citizen, who may be a JP, and form an account where large sums of money can only be withdrawn from it on the signatures of all three people. Perhaps they could come to some arrangement with their bank whereby they work out how much money they need each week and have some sort of block in place that will only allow them to take out that much.

If they are residents of a nursing home, the home may be able to assist in some way. But really, when it comes down to it, how does one fight against the emotional blackmail that would undoubtedly take place from the children saying, 'If you don't give us the money, we won't visit you'? The elderly are lonely enough without having their children use such tactics to force them to surrender their money. The elderly are terribly vulnerable. I would hope that by the time I reach that point I will be able to have some arrangement in place whereby I cannot take out more money than I need each week without involving two very trusted people who would support me against the wheedling of any of my children. I am not saying that they would do that. We know how human nature is.

I hesitate to add that I do not expect my kids to behave this way, but money has a nasty way of changing people and I am well aware of that. I think we should all be very careful who we appoint as our enduring power of attorney. One may select a relative but after hearing stories regarding children having power of attorney, I think a good friend or a professional person such as an accountant or someone else whom one trusts might be a far better choice. It will also help prevent fighting between siblings as to what should or should not be done when one cannot make those decisions themselves.

Too many times we hear of families torn apart. I know of one family fighting over who was going to have the chooks. The gentleman who was 103 was not even dead. It is a very sad situation that families face. I can only trust that there will be some solution to protect the elderly in the future.

International Nurses Day

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (4.13 am): It is quite interesting that at 10 past four in the morning I would be congratulating nurses on International Nurses Day this year. As members would expect, I have seen 10 past four in the morning quite a few times in my working life. I would like to dedicate my speech to all those nurses who are currently getting ready to do their morning rounds.

I had the pleasure on International Nurses Day of joining with the director of nursing at Prince Charles Hospital, Cheryl Burns, in a celebration in what is her ninth year as the district director of nursing and to reflect upon the achievements of Prince Charles Hospital over the last 12 months in particular.

Prince Charles has grown up and become a general hospital. That opening occurred in July. The Minister for Health and the Premier came to the hospital for that very special event. It has also seen the introduction of general medicine and surgical units. The hospital leads the way with the introduction of a national dementia centre led by Professor Jenny Abbey. It has introduced highly specialised services in cardiology, respiratory medicine and cardiothoracic surgery.

The orthopaedics team are leading the way in cold joint surgery. Communities have become an important focus in the health care provided by the hospital in the development of the continuum of care. There are strong working partnerships being undertaken within the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and other private healthcare organisations.

There are great challenges in terms of recruitment. With the new hospital they needed to recruit over 150 nurses and they did so. It is not easy but I congratulate them on that. Jacana has been developing a rehab model of care. Ashworth House and Eventide continue to achieve accreditation and have introduced a pathway from acute to subacute care. The hospital in the nursing home is well underway. Nurse practitioner developments are well and truly occurring across the district. There are creative and innovative methods of delivering perioperative education. Partnerships with the Mater and Royal Children's Hospital are going to be further developed when we create and build the Queensland Children's Hospital.

There has been best practice in piloting a new model of nursing care called transforming care at the bedside. Mental health has led the way in clinical supervision. There has been an increase in school cadetships and the introduction of paid third-year nursing students working in clinical settings. They are winners of many prizes. They present papers at many conferences. They have best practice in pressure ulcer care and their infection standards are world class. The list goes on and on.

What is the common denominator? As Cheryl Burns quite rightly said, the hospital is led by nurses who strive for excellence in care and practice. At this early hour of the morning I congratulate not just the nurses at Prince Charles Hospital but Queensland nurses for the incredible work that they do.

James Nash High School

Mr GIBSON (Gympie—NPA) (4.16 am): Even though it is 4.16 in the morning I rise to address a very important issue within my electorate. A son of war pensioners in my electorate attends James Nash High School as a year 10 extension plus student. In March this year he was playing rugby union with the school team against Nambour in an away match. Unfortunately, he was seriously injured and taken to Nambour Hospital by ambulance. The school staff attended to his needs in a responsible manner and there are no complaints with the assistance provided by those staff.

Since this happened, however, Riley has had serious problems with his knee and has been on and off crutches for the past four months. He has seen doctors at both Nambour and Gympie hospitals, attended physio weekly and seen a local GP. Finally, with a referral to the head of orthopedics at Nambour General it was determined urgent surgery on the knee was necessary. This is distressing knowing that four months had passed already. There can be grave consequences for a 15-year-old to be informed that the chances of success in repairing the damage are now as low as 20 to 30 per cent. However, his parents believe any chance is better than none, so surgery was performed two days ago on 7 August. Should this operation not be successful, he will have another operation in the near future.

They were told that for the Queensland public health system to cover the cost of this operation Riley would be on a waiting list for an additional six to 12 months before the operation could occur. This is appalling when a child is in urgent need of surgery. The parents were also told that if they paid approximately \$850 he could be seen urgently as an intermediate patient. They considered this was their only option. The parents also approached James Nash High School believing that any school would have some kind of medical cover for students who represent the school in school sports. They were told this is not the case unless they could prove that the staff had been negligent in Riley's care. This was clearly not so.

This is appalling. Riley will most certainly never be playing sport at school as his parents are now aware that no medical cover is provided. I do not believe any parent would be willing to have their child in this situation with that knowledge. As war veteran pensioners, his parents had to come up with \$850 for this operation, and quite possibly again the same in the near future. This is not an easy task for anyone on a limited budget, let alone those just drawing a pension.

I have been asked by Riley's parents to place on the record of the House that they believe the Queensland health system has failed them both in terms of a lack of a correct diagnosis in the beginning and by not providing free public hospital service when urgent surgery was needed. The Queensland education system has failed them also by not having medical cover, even just to cover the hospital fees, for our children who are expected to attend state schools and participate in sports when serious injury is possible.

Scrutiny of Legislation Committee Conference, Wellington

Mrs SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (4.19 am): Members of the Queensland Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and research staff were invited to attend and participate in the Australia-New Zealand Scrutiny of Legislation Conference in Wellington last week entitled 'Democracy in legislation: The role of scrutiny committees'. The sessions were held in the Legislative Council chamber in Parliament House and we were grateful that it was warmer than outside. We were welcomed with a formal traditional Maori Powhiri and by the Speaker of the House, the Hon. Margaret Wilson. The official opening was performed by the Rt Hon. Sir Geoffrey Palmer, President of the Law Commission. His was one of many inspirational speeches, but his history is the most interesting.

Sir Geoffrey was the 18th Prime Minister of New Zealand. He headed the Labor Party government and spent about 11 years as an elected politician, although he has not held a seat since 1990. While he was justice minister and Attorney-General he appointed a royal commission to examine New Zealand's electoral system which recommended the mixed member proportional system—MMP. He was responsible for considerable reforms of the country's legal and constitutional framework such as the creation of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act. He is a constitutional lawyer and still practises law.

As the chair of the state government's Scrutiny of Legislation Committee I was able to present a paper to the conference. My paper entitled 'Sunset provisions in Queensland legislation' focused on the inclusion of sunset clauses and like provisions to encourage the systematic review of delegated legislation which has become a common feature of Australian subordinate legislation. I want to place on record my thanks to the research staff—Chris Garvey who did the initial work, Julie Copley and Ali Jarro. A sunset provision automatically ends the life of legislation after it has been in force for a specified period of time. In the Australian federal and state jurisdictions where provision is made for the sunset of delegated or subordinate legislation, periodic review of the regulatory suitability of a rule complements the functions of review of legislation carried out by committees of the legislature.

The jurisdiction of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee of the Queensland parliament includes consideration of, one, the application of fundamental legislative principles to particular bills and subordinate legislation and, two, the lawfulness of particular subordinate legislation by examining all bills and subordinate legislation. Some members of this parliament will remember that the introduction of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee was a Goss Labor government initiative and my husband, who was a member of the Queensland parliament from 1989 to 1998, was its very first chair. I am pleased to say that, although the New Zealand parliament does not have sunset schemes, the Rt Hon. Sir Geoffrey Palmer supports them and is continuing his lobbying efforts to get them introduced. Subject to confirmation from the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee of the Queensland parliament and notification of suitable dates, the 2009 biennial conference will be hosted by the committee of the Queensland Legislative Assembly here in the Sunshine State in Brisbane.

Wide Bay Australia International Air Show

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (4.22 am): Bert Hinkler was a pioneer Australian aviator, putting Bundaberg on the world flying map when he became the first person to fly solo from England to Australia in 1928. So it is fitting that the aviation spotlight shines brightly on Bundaberg for three days every two years, and the whole district is still abuzz after the 2007 Wide Bay Australia International Air Show at the city's Hinkler Airport last weekend with over 25,000 people attending. The first day of this three-day event was devoted to trade and careers with aviation, defence and lifestyle displays. This event is the largest air show in Queensland and incorporates aerial demonstrations, joy flights and static displays of some of the finest aircraft of all ages to take the skies.

On the ground there were fashion parades, live music, kids' rides and food and drink for the whole family. Highlights of the weekend included a Vietnam re-enactment with aerial and ground action, with Vietnam veteran Keith Payne VC a special guest of the air show. While there was also a visit from F111s, the weekend also saw the largest Red Star fly-in in Australia and the appearance of the Jabiru Formation Flying Team, which was of special significance as the Jabirus are manufactured in Bundaberg. The presence of 25 of Australia's general aviation exhibitors highlighted the growing importance of the air show nationwide. Children with special needs were given a wonderful experience in a 30-minute flyover of the Bundaberg area in QantasLink's new aircraft accompanied by McDonald's Hamburglar.

The outstanding success of this event was due much to the tireless efforts of the air show board headed by chairperson Peter Tuffield, air show general manager Lyn Leadbetter, media manager Trish Mears, Bundaberg Mayor Kay McDuff, Councillor Dave Porter, Cliff Fleming, Darryl Corpe, Neil McPhillips and air operations coordinator Ray Vullermin. An army of volunteers also helped in areas such as marshalling, set-up and take-down, hospitality, security, grand operations, administration and meet and greet. It was just a great community event. Proceeds will go to very worthwhile community charities, with the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia being the main beneficiary.

I also applaud all 14 air show ambassador challenge entrants who worked hard for months to raise over \$36,000 for the Leukaemia Foundation and especially congratulate charity winner Jade Wilkinson who chalked up over \$17,000. Congratulations, too, to open and junior challenge winners Brittany Duncan and Kaitlin Christensen respectively and all other entrants. Well done also to challenge coordinator Pat Hooper, who has been a great worker for the community for many years. Planning for the next Wide Bay Australia International Air Show for 2009 is already underway, but engines of a different kind will roar again in Bundaberg on the first weekend of November at the annual Wide Bay Australia Bundy Thunder Powerboat Spectacular. I welcome anyone who loves the thrill of this kind of racing to come to our region for this event.

Logan Disability Awards

Mrs SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (4.25 am): I want to report on one of the most joyous occasions of the calendar year in Logan City. It is our annual Disability Awards which I understand is unique in our state. We celebrated the 20th anniversary of these awards on Monday, 16 July and Maureen Collins, Margaret Harvey and their committee members are to be congratulated for an outstanding record of support and encouragement to our people. The uniqueness of these awards is the celebration of the abilities of those in our community who may have obstacles to overcome in their daily lives which clearly make them heroes. To add to the excitement of the evening, we were privileged to have in attendance our Minister for Disability Services, the Hon. Warren Pitt, and his wife, Linda, along with the minister's caucus liaison officer, Leif Bremerman, who is a fine product of our Woodridge schools and our community.

The entertainment for the evening was superb, with four delightful female singers as well as wonderful young 12-year-old singer Ashleigh Denning, who simply wowed her audience. Ashleigh has a wonderful future ahead of her. The actual announcements of those nominated for each award were accompanied by great applause and calls of support from family and friends. The minister was often engulfed by a large number of nominees all excitedly awaiting the final announcement. All went home with a certificate of recognition and of course some were selected as our outstanding winners for 2007.

The winners were for the Art Award for 16 years and under, Samantha Springall; Highly Commended, Tamara Livermore; Art Award, Fiona Bell; Achieved Employment/Returned to Work, Melissa Lane; Highly Commended, Michael Allan; Has Contributed to Community Activities, Aaron Richardson; Has Achieved a More Independent and Satisfying Way of Life, Jacob Bruinsma; Highly Commended, Mediatrice Livuzimana; General Life Skills for 16 years and under, Scott Schwartz; Sporting Award, Liam O'Sullivan; Sport at International Level, Chris Scott; Special Abilities Award, Lathom Devery; Highly Commended, Tory Rudd; Overall Achievement Award, Tony McClutchic; Encouragement Award, Catherine Coe. Everyone who was a nominee went home proud to have received their accolades, but every single person who attended went home on a high simply to have shared in their joy and the infectious excitement evident throughout the entire evening.

Aviation High

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (4.27 am): I want to touch briefly on two issues of importance. The first one is the opening today of Aviation High, former Hendra Secondary College, at Hendra in my electorate—in fact, a short distance away from where I live. I was pleased that the Premier and the minister for education could join me today for the opening of Aviation High as part of the process of joining my plans to update education in the Clayfield electorate and to provide pathways for students who are interested in the aerospace and aviation industries. I particularly want to pay tribute tonight to Ms Roslyn Parkes, the former principal of Hendra Secondary College who guided its formation from an adolescent and adult education facility into Aviation High. When she was first appointed there three years ago she asked me as a then councillor to come and have a chat with her and discuss future prospects for Aviation High, because it was struggling and it was suffering at the time from declining enrolments and a perception in the community that it was not achieving as it should have been.

So I had a discussion with her and we discussed the school's proximity to the airport and perhaps potential links. She took that and went to the department and spoke to them about forging links with the aerospace industries and the airport. Subsequently, through two and a half years of hard work, that has resulted in the formation of Aviation High, the adoption of new uniforms with the help of the school and ultimately today the launch of Aviation High in the presence of leaders of the aviation industry and leaders of education. So I particularly want to pay tribute to Ms Parkes. She is now the principal at Coorparoo State High School. I wish her all the very best in terms of her placement there.

I also want to particularly acknowledge the work of two students there, Josh Taylor and Josh Zande—two boys who finished at the end of last year and who are now in their first year of aeronautical training at Aviation Australia. I wish all students, staff and future graduates of Aviation High all the best for the future. I look forward to working with that school in the future.

I also want to address briefly the miserable performance of the Beattie Labor government with respect to the performance of its train service.

Government members interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: I hear some crowing behind me. I am fairly sure the member for Southport would not know a train if it ran over him. Certainly, he would not have much chance of being run over by a train the way this government runs them, because for the last four weeks the services from Doomben have been cancelled for spurious reasons, with no excuse given to the passengers who have been left behind. The service from Doomben is an appalling indictment of the way in which this government plans for future growth. Indeed, as I have said on many occasions, the Fat Controller from *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* can do a better job of running the train service than the current minister does. He does not care and he does not know. The service is appalling.

Ashgrove Electorate, School Projects; Odgers, Ms R; Member for Clayfield

Ms JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (4.31 am): On Tuesday morning I had the pleasure of attending the launch of the Ashgrove State School's edible garden project.

A government member interjected.

Ms JONES: I know. It is very exciting. This innovative project was funded through a \$15,000 grant from the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport

A government member interjected.

Ms JONES: I know. He is so busy, but he can still provide money for my local school. He is a great man.

Mrs Reilly: A great minister.

Ms JONES: A great minister. I take that interjection. That \$15,000 in funding from the minister was allocated through the Eat Well, Be Active grant program. The funding will be used to build the garden, as well as providing tools to maintain the garden. It is intended that the gardens be constructed and maintained by years 6 and 7 students in conjunction with teachers, consultants and volunteer parents and grandparents.

It is also the school's intention to encourage local residents to be involved in the gardens and to help share skills, knowledge and contact between the school and the wider community. The funding will also be used to undertake a kitchen fit-out so that students can use the food they grow to cook healthy food options.

A government member: Hear, hear!

Ms JONES: I know. It is very exciting. To celebrate the launch the school held a free dress day with students dressed up as farmers. There were even a few strawberries and there was even a little chicken and a little lambie. It was very cute.

I believe that this project really builds on the state government's commitment to improve the health and wellbeing—

A government member: Was it waterwise?

Ms JONES: Yes, it is waterwise. It improves the health and wellbeing of young Queenslanders through the healthy choices changes that we have made already in our schools.

This week I also attended the launch of the Healthy Bones Week at The Gap State School.

A government member: Fair dinkum!

Ms JONES: I am a very busy local member. Through this program the children learn how to build bone strength through their calcium intake as well as through food, weight-bearing exercises and a small amount of sunlight. The coordinator and Gap State School mother, Mrs Kellie Stockton, was very impressed by how much the students learned. The children had a really great time and they particularly enjoyed the free milk that they were given by Parmalat, with the team of Fortitude at the school winning.

I have only one minute left in which to speak, so I want to acknowledge two things. One is that Rosie Odgers from the *Courier-Mail* is taking leave. She has been a long-serving journalist at the *Courier-Mail*. She is taking six months long service leave. I want to thank Rosie. I have had a really great working relationship with Rosie over the past seven years.

I also want to wish the member for Clayfield the best of luck next week. I know it is going to be a very tough week for him and the member for Moggill. I hope he does not get RSI through all the stabbing he will do in the back. I know that it is going to be a tough week—gloves on, gloves off.

Quite frankly, I really hope that Flegg keeps the numbers, but I know that it is going to be a tough week. My thought will be with Timmy.

Mr Nicholls: I will always look after the western suburbs, don't worry.

Ms JONES: That is right. I was very surprised to hear the member talk about state schools. Being a member of the Liberal Party, I did not think that he cared about them. So it was very heartening to hear a Liberal Party member actually talk about state schools, because they do not seem to give a stuff about them in Canberra.

Teenage Adventure Camps Queensland; Palm Beach-Currumbin Lions Club

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (4.34 am): After that disgusting display of unparliamentary language, I would like to talk about Teenage Adventure Camps Queensland, which held its annual camp at the Rocks Resort in Currumbin between 25 June and 2 July, with 25 kids aged from 13 to 19 attending. In its 12th year, TACQ, which is completely funded by donations and run by a dedicated committee and busy team of volunteers, organised a smorgasbord of activities for these young people with life-threatening illnesses. Children with illnesses such as cerebral palsy, quadriplegia, spina bifida and the rare Morquio's disease participated in the daily events with great gusto. These were events like a night out at Dracula's, where they dressed up in gothic outfits, visits to Harbour Town and Carrara markets, rides on Harley Davidsons, joyflights at Southport Flying Club and even a mini Olympics.

Eighteen-year-old Elanora teen Kris Field, who is in year 12, said—

It's a great camp but it's too short and not held often enough.

Kris, one of only 12 people in Australia with rare Morquio's disease, was diagnosed when he was just two years old. At around 90 centimetres tall, Chris has normal body organs in a body that fails to maintain its growth rate. He is able to walk, but often uses an electric wheelchair.

Another eager participant was Todd Winther from the Sunshine Coast, who has cerebral palsy. Todd said—

I am fully aware that I am one of the lucky campers on the TACQ. Unlike most I have a long term life expectancy, and despite being confined to an electric wheelchair I am fairly independent. I would hazard a guess to say that most people upon first meeting me would feel sorry for my circumstances. However, I would not be the person that I am without my disability.

...

All of those involved with TACQ—the carers, the campers and the committee—are deserving of the praise that they receive for they all have added a different perspective to my life.

The Sunday evening farewell dinner was a most humbling encounter for this able-bodied local representative. There was not a dry eye in the room as these remarkably physically challenged teenagers recounted the past week's experiences and the enormous impact they had on them, the friends they had made, and teary farewells. You could hear a pin drop as some struggled with their speech to say how much they appreciated the efforts of the TACQ team.

It is no small feat dressing and transporting this number of kids with considerable challenges, yet the carers, many of whom took a week off work to help, said that they would not swap the experience for quids. Spontaneous laughter, irreverent humour, respectful compassion and genuine friendship filled the room with the most wonderful celebration of life. These are scenes I took away that evening and ones I will cherish.

Another joyous occasion in my electorate was the 50th anniversary celebration by the Palm Beach-Currumbin Lions Club, who were chartered in 1957 by the Coolangatta Lions Club. During a gala dinner held at the Palm Beach-Currumbin RSL, who are also a great benefactor within our local community, presentations were made for exemplary service, including that of charter member Bill Freeman. Many outstanding achievements over the years on a number of projects that still stand today provide immeasurable enjoyment for our growing community, including the construction of the Salk Oval sports field, the Girl Guides Hall, the Tugun Progress Hall, Miami Great Hall and the Currumbin Swimming Pool.

Mount Archer State School

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (4.37 am): To stand in this House at this time in the morning and to run a hand over one's chin really gives a new meaning to the term 'five o'clock shadow'. It should be the '5 am shadow'. I would like to bring to the notice of this House that I have had to rewrite my speech because time has caught up with parts of it. Originally, it was this weekend, but now it is tomorrow that Mount Archer State School, one of the biggest schools in my electorate, celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Mount Archer State School was opened in 1982 and at that stage it was right on the outskirts of the then developing areas of North Rockhampton. It is now the second largest school in the electorate, with about 700 children. The school has been very well looked after. In actual fact, funding from both the

state and federal governments has been put to very good use. The school has an excellent and very advanced waterwise project. It has a massive number of rainwater tanks, because I have to say that we still get some rain in central Queensland. The actual school buildings have been well looked after. The school has great staff. The children really enjoy their education. It really is a credit to the support of Education Queensland.

To the principal, Greg Wilkes, and to his deputy, Debbie Ilott, and to the wonderful group of parents who have put together the P&C committee, I congratulate them on the coming weekend. They are having an open day tomorrow and they are having a get-together tomorrow evening. Then on Sunday, they are having an open barbecue for anyone who has returned as a former pupil of the school.

We do hear a lot about public schools. The way in which this school operates and the benefit that it gives to our children is really a credit to its hard work over 25 years. Hopefully, it will go on for many more years to come.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 4.39 am (Friday).

ATTENDANCE

Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Copeland, Cripps, Croft, Cunningham, Darling, Dempsey, Dickson, Elmes, English, Fenlon, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, Horan, Jarratt, Johnson, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee Long, Lee, Lingard, Lucas, McArdle, McNamara, Male, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nicholls, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Pratt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Reynolds, Rickuss, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Seeney, Shine, Simpson, Smith, Spence, Springborg, Stevens, Stone, Struthers, Stuckey, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson