



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard 6 August 1998

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (4.37 p.m.): Firstly, I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the Speakership. I offer also my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker on his election. I wish you well in your new position. Before going too far into my speech, there are a few people whom I wish to thank in relation to my re-election. Firstly, and most importantly, I thank the voters of Sandgate.

Mr Robertson: Very wise people they are.

Mr NUTTALL: I think so. I thank the member for Sunnybank for those kind words.

I am pleased to say that I have been returned with an increased majority. That is very rewarding for me and very satisfying for the members of the Labor Party within my electorate who spent a great deal of time assisting me with my campaign. I pay a tribute to all of the members of the Labor Party in the Sandgate electorate who assisted me. In addition, I acknowledge those people who are not members of the Labor Party but who came forward and offered their support and assistance. I offer them a heartfelt thankyou. Throughout the 49th Parliament I hope that I will be able to serve my constituency well and that I will be able to deliver to them the services that they require and so richly deserve.

I wish to take the opportunity to speak about redistributions and the general voting system within the State of Queensland. That is perhaps timely. As we would all be aware, the recent election was the last that will be held based on the existing 89 State seats in Queensland. We have now had three elections based on those boundaries and the trigger has now been set for a redistribution. One would think that, unless legislation is enacted and passed within the Parliament, there will not be an increase in the number of seats; there will be the same 89 seats and that in turn will bring about a real increase in quotas, that is voters, for each and every one of us here in this Parliament.

Mr Lucas: Don't tell me you are staking a claim already.

Mr NUTTALL: One thing about having a seat by the seaside is that not too much damage can be done.

Mr Lucas: You and me both, brother.

Mr NUTTALL: That is where the member for Lytton and I have a lot in common.

In relation to that, obviously we will have an increase in quotas. As we are all well aware, this State has five weighted seats in the Legislative Assembly. I personally have a view about that, as does my party. Nevertheless, those five weighted seats came about as a result of an EARC recommendation which was endorsed by both parties within the Parliament. At this point, I say that it would be timely and healthy for the community in Queensland to have a debate not only on the issue of redistributions, but also on the voting system in general—and I will come to that a little later in my speech. I am referring to whether we should have preferential voting, optional preferential voting or first past the post voting.

In relation to the redistribution, at the moment I think the quota is somewhere around the 23,000 mark. In the last Government Gazette that I saw, over 30 seats were outside the quota, that is plus or minus 10%. That in itself is a trigger for a redistribution. The other trigger, of course, is the fact that there must be a review after seven years, and the last review was conducted in 1991. No doubt that review will take place, although I am unsure of the time frame. As we all know, most members of Parliament are fairly jittery about the prospect of a redistribution and boundaries being changed.

That brings me to the issue of the voting system itself. If we look at the voting systems that we have had in the State of Queensland, we see that we have had the lot. We have had first past the post voting, optional preferential voting and preferential voting. At the moment we have optional preferential voting. It is my contention that optional preferential voting really is a de facto first past the post voting system. I have to say that I am strongly in favour of a first past the post voting system. As I have said before, I believe that it would be timely—and it would be healthy for the democratic system within this State, given the wide ranging debate that was brought about by particular parties' decisions regarding their preferences in the last State election—for us as a community to have an open debate on the type of voting system we would like to see operating in Queensland. As I said, I believe that we should have the first past the post voting system.

I will just give honourable members an example of how that can work. Looking at the 1992 election results, the Labor Party would have done extremely well. We would have won something in the order of 66 seats, with the coalition winning the remainder of the seats. Just to show honourable members how that system can work, if we had had the first past the post system in 1995, the Labor Party would have lost 21 of the seats it won under that system in 1992. So the system can work. That is what I am wanting to point out. We would have gone from holding some 66 seats down to 45 seats, and that shows that the first past the post voting system can work.

Looking at the 1998 election, again if we had a first past the post voting system, while the Labor Party would have won, the Liberal Party still would have won the same nine seats that it won in the recent State election. It is my contention that, based on those examples, the first past the post voting system, whereby candidates who obtain the most formal votes are elected, is not only simple but also fair. As I said, it has previously been the voting system in this State—in fact, from 1903 to 1918. I would encourage a public debate in relation to that issue.

That brings me to the other issue, that is, the issue of fixed term Parliaments. It is true that we have three-year terms in Queensland, but they are not fixed in any way, shape or form. If one looks at the trends in Queensland, one sees that most Parliaments tend to last about two and a half years and then they go into campaign mode. A new Parliament is then elected and, by the time it is brought together, the three years are up. In my view, that is not healthy for business or for Government. I cannot see any way in which that benefits the citizens of the State of Queensland.

A number of years ago a referendum was held about the introduction of a term of Government for a minimum of three years and a maximum of four years. Without bipartisan support, that referendum was defeated. I think that there is a mood out there in the community for fixed terms. I say that for this reason: both in the 48th Parliament and in this Parliament we have had de facto fixed terms. In the 48th Parliament a motion was moved that no election be held prior to May 1998. Indeed, last week in this Parliament—the 49th Parliament—part of the confidence motion moved was that no election would be held prior to May 2001. Basically, we have had two sets of de facto fixed terms of Parliament. I personally believe that there is a mood out there for fixed terms.

We should have a fixed four-year term and there should be a set date for each election. All councils in Queensland have a fixed three-year term and the system works well. There do not seem to be any dramas or problems with that. I actually would encourage them to change to a fixed four-year term as well. I honestly believe, as I have said, that there is a feeling in the community that that would be a good thing for the State of Queensland. If bipartisan support could be achieved for that change, I believe that a referendum should be held at the next council elections so that, when we go to the people of Queensland in the year 2001, they would know that the 50th Parliament that they elect would be elected for a fixed four-year term. It is certainly something that I will be advocating within my political party. As I have said, I believe that there is a mood out there for that change. We can look at the other States. I do not want to go through each individual State but most of them have minimum or maximum terms. I do not necessarily agree with minimum or maximum terms; I believe it should be a fixed maximum term. That is the type of voting system that we have.

Given that we are about to have a major redistribution, I think it would be very healthy if we had a public debate in relation to those issues. I have set out my views fairly firmly. I believe that we should have a first past the post voting system. I also believe that we should have fixed four-year terms. Indeed, the fixed four-year term issue would be a matter for the people of Queensland by way of a referendum. The referendum should be held at the next council elections, which I understand are to be conducted in the year 2000. That gives us plenty of time for an open debate.

Another issue that is somewhat dear to my heart is the issue of delivery of services to the people of Queensland. Successive Governments of either political persuasion have always struggled with the issues of health, education and police. I believe it is no longer any good to stand here and defend the work that we are doing because the message simply does not get out. I believe that we need a radical overhaul of the way Governments in general are run, particularly in those three areas in terms of delivery of service.

I hope I do not make myself unpopular with my ministerial colleagues on this side of the House, but I believe that in the portfolios of Education, Health and Police the area of capital works should be taken away. Those capital works should be transferred to the portfolio of Public Works. That would enable Ministers to concentrate solely on delivery of services. Service is not gauged by a new police station or a new hospital wing or a new classroom. Service is gauged by delivery. Service is gauged by the end result. Service is gauged by what comes out at the other end. If we build ourselves a new school and we cannot provide enough speech therapists for that school, we are failing. I believe that the Ministers in those portfolios should be allowed to concentrate on the delivery of services. They are three very large portfolios and I believe that if there was some lateral thinking our citizens would be far better served.

If we take the example of maintenance work, we find duplication across all portfolios. The old days when the Department of Public Works used to carry out all the maintenance have gone. We now have the Education Department looking after theirs, the Health Department looking after theirs, and so on. That is a crazy system. It leads to duplication. It does not spend the taxpayers' dollars well. It does not lead to the job being done well.

I am not talking about stepping backwards. I am talking about having a structured portfolio of public works whereby we have proper monitoring of Government buildings to ensure that the upkeep on the buildings is maintained. We simply cannot say to a school or a department, "Look, here is some money. You can outsource that contract work." The school rings up a contractor and the contractor comes in and he does not understand what is wrong with the building. In the event, the contractor spends ages fixing up the building. In a structured system the people who built it, namely the Public Works Department, would undertake the maintenance work and be able to understand what they were doing. That would be a better system.

As a Government we are committed to security of employment. This system would allow us to give people security of employment. We would have a real public works system that is delivering on its job. I welcome a debate on this matter. For far too long we have gone down the same old path and we have struggled. We have struggled to get the message across that we are delivering on services. The only way we can get the message across is if Ministers are able to concentrate solely on the delivery of services.

The other matter I wish to raise concerns the recent State election. I find it interesting that on the north side of Brisbane all but one electorate had a One Nation candidate, and that was the electorate of Clayfield. We have to ask ourselves why. Why was it that the seat of Clayfield did not have a One Nation candidate? The reason why Clayfield did not have a One Nation candidate was——

Mr Hayward: A deal was done.

Mr NUTTALL: I did not say that, but honourable members have heard the interjection. Maybe there was a deal done. Whatever it was, something untoward occurred. All the other seats on the northern side of Brisbane had a One Nation candidate but in the seat of Clayfield there was no One Nation candidate. The sitting member for Clayfield is the same member who was involved in the deals regarding preferences. Suddenly we find his electorate has no One Nation candidate.

I simply ask the question: was a deal done for the distribution of preferences in the seat of Clayfield? This question needs to be answered. I know that the honourable member for Clayfield will probably come back in here this evening during the Grievance debate and jump up and down and——

Time expired.
