



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

---

Hansard 11 November 1998

## CITIZENS' INITIATED REFERENDUM (CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT) BILL

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (10.07 p.m.): In relation to the Citizens' Initiated Referendum (Constitution Amendment) Bill, I want to draw a number of matters to the attention of the House. The member for Nicklin has made a positive contribution to the constitutional debate by bringing this Bill forward, and I congratulate him on that. I recall that, when he and I had discussions in relation to a number of matters after the June State election—in fact, as honourable members would recall, he had discussions with Mr Borbidge, the Leader of the Opposition and then Premier, as well as discussions with me—one of the things that the member for Nicklin was very strong and positive about was restoring the community's confidence in the Parliament and in the Government. During our discussions, he made it clear that he felt that there were a number of matters that needed to be implemented to restore public faith in modern politics. At that stage he indicated strongly to me his support for citizens' initiated referenda.

I did indicate to the member for Nicklin that it was no longer party policy, and those honourable members who have read the letter that I wrote to the member for Nicklin would know that I referred specifically to that matter, that is, the matter of citizens' initiated referenda, because it was a matter of such strong passion and commitment by the member for Nicklin. As a result of the points made to me by the member for Nicklin, we developed a process of Community Cabinet. I set on record in this Parliament tonight that the Community Cabinet process, which has been so successful in this State, arose out of a discussion that the member for Nicklin and I had which started on citizens' initiated referenda. While we did not agree about that issue, we did agree that the people were entitled to have a greater access to Government and they were entitled to be listened to more by their elected representatives.

So the member for Nicklin can quite rightly take credit for the Community Cabinet process. In my view—and this is certainly the view expressed to me by the member for Nicklin—in recent times all major political parties and Governments of both persuasions have simply got out of touch with people. That is why the Community Cabinet process was instituted. The member for Nicklin held strong views about a range of other matters, and they are covered in my letter that I wrote to the member for Nicklin, including lifting the standards of this Parliament and making certain that parliamentarians actually got out and served the community rather than playing silly political games.

I want to deal a little bit with the Community Cabinet process that came out of the discussions that the member for Nicklin and I had after the 13 June election. That Community Cabinet process, which started in Edmonton, has seen Community Cabinet meetings held now in six different locations, and they have been as widespread or as far apart as Edmonton in north Queensland; Mount Isa in western Queensland; Springwood, which we visited only on the weekend; Ipswich; Bundaberg; and the list goes on. We have had an incredible response to these Community Cabinet meetings. We find that there is a hunger in the community—a hunger to really be consulted about how the Government should be run.

I gave a commitment to the member for Nicklin that, if we formed Government, we would hold 15 Community Cabinet meetings each year throughout the State so that we could open up government to all Queenslanders. The beauty of these Community Cabinet meetings is that not only do the Ministers sit down but so too do their directors-general. So the two major decision makers—one

at a political level and the other at an administrative level—have to sit there, quite rightly, and listen to what the community wants. That focuses the minds of the Minister and the department on the issues in a particular area.

One of those Community Cabinet meetings was held in Nicklin, which I did not mention before. I know that the member himself would indicate that it was a success, because the whole community in that electorate—it was held in Nambour—came forward not only to make representations but also to attend a number of functions that were held in conjunction with that Community Cabinet meeting.

We write widely and advertise, inviting people to come along. Formal and some informal delegations are received. Normally, the Community Cabinet meetings start at 1 o'clock on a Sunday. Prior to that, many Ministers will have visited the area—often on the Friday or the Saturday. At 1 o'clock on the Sunday there is an informal cup of tea and a biscuit or whatever and the community comes along and mixes informally with the Ministry. At 1.30 I make a few introductory remarks—as honourable members know, I am always very brief—and then I, as Premier, take questions from the community on any matter that any member of the community wants to raise. Then, at some time after 2 o'clock, depending on how the questions go—it may be 2.10 or 2.15—until 3.30, anyone who turns up can talk to any Minister. There are tables in the venue, and the Ministers are there with their directors-general and any support staff—we keep that to a minimum—and the community comes along and makes direct representations to the Ministers. Then from 3.30 onwards there are formal delegations, which have been arranged prior to the day. That is where people have responded saying, "I want to see the Minister for Public Works and Housing"—or the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs or the Minister for Mines and Energy or other Ministers on any particular issue. They then go through the formal delegations.

During the Estimates committee process there was some criticism from the Opposition that there is a cost involved in this. There is a cost involved in this, but it is money well spent. This is the most decentralised mainland State in Australia. As I have been saying in relation to the negotiations involving Queensland and the Commonwealth, 73% of all Victorians live in Melbourne and 62% of New South Welshmen live in Sydney, yet only 46% of Queenslanders live in Brisbane. We are a decentralised State and where we sit tonight in Brisbane is closer to Melbourne than it is to Cairns. We have to remember that. When we go to Mount Isa, of course there is a cost. When we go to Edmonton, of course there is a cost.

**Mr McGrady:** It is well worth it, isn't it?

**Mr BEATTIE:** Yes, it is. When we go to Nicklin there is a cost. When we go to Bundaberg there is a cost. When we go to Mackay, which is the next place in which a Community Cabinet meeting will be held—it will be the last one before Christmas—of course there will be a cost involved.

Invitations to these meetings are extended to the local member of Parliament, whatever their political persuasion—whether they are ours or not. I do not mention this by way of any mischief, but Charlie Rappolt came along to the Community Cabinet meeting held in Edmonton. He participated in the meeting and raised questions.

**Mr Sullivan:** Very actively.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Yes.

**Mr McGrady:** And Mr Hegarty?

**Mr BEATTIE:** Yes. Mr Hegarty was there on Sunday at the Springwood Community Cabinet meeting. We invite the local member. This is a non-political occasion. The member for Nicklin attended the Community Cabinet meeting held in Nicklin. Members of the House can see that we are not just going to electorates held by Government members. I gave a commitment that we would be a Government for all Queenslanders, regardless of where they live.

At the Estimates committee hearing the Leader of the Opposition raised with me the issue of cost. I say again what I said to him and what I said earlier. If we are going to be a Government for all Queenslanders, we need to get out and travel around the State. That is why, when it comes to travel, I have said to the Ministers that, while there are strict guidelines, I expect them to get out and travel. When the travel reports of Ministers are tabled in this Parliament, I expect intrastate travel to be high. I expect my travel within Queensland to be high.

I do not expect any member of this Parliament to be critical of my Ministers or of me for the fact that our travel within this State is high. I do expect some criticism at home, which I get on a regular basis. Even the dog tried to bite me the other night. I can see the member for Caboolture saying, "Maybe it is an intelligent dog." The only criticism I get is from my loving family—my dear wife and kids. But I expect my Ministers to get out and to listen.

The member for Warwick knows that we were out at Inglewood only recently. We will get around the whole community and talk to people. We have found that between 400 and 600 people have attended these Community Cabinet meetings over the two main days. I have only talked about the Sunday. On the Monday morning there is more time for delegations. They go through until around

about 9.30, when there is normally a morning tea with the local council. Local government is important, so we involve the local council in the process. We then go through with the Cabinet meeting itself from 10 until 1 o'clock. Then there is a Cabinet lunch, which is a very informal, stand-up affair and at which Ministers have an opportunity to get around and talk to the community. After that Cabinet lunch is over, there is then an opportunity for some more delegations, and some Ministers will get involved in those delegations as well.

These Community Cabinet meetings have certainly been a success. As I said, we have held six so far—in Edmonton, Nambour, Ipswich, Bundaberg, Mount Isa and Springwood. Nearly 700 delegations have held formal meetings with Ministers. This is the way to give Queenslanders a voice, and it is an important voice. It is darned hard work. After the two days, a lot of the Ministers feel like I do. We are tired because it is hard work. But at the end of the day, Queenslanders pay the bill. They are the employers. They pay the bill and they are entitled to that sort of service.

We will find it tough to meet the commitment we made to have those 15 Community Cabinet meetings a year, but we are determined to do it. Community Cabinet meetings have been so popular that we are getting requests from all over Queensland for them to be held in particular communities. Unfortunately we cannot satisfy all of those requests, but we will be doing our best. Over the next 15 years we will get to every one of them! Over the years we will get to as many of those communities as we possibly can. As I stressed before, it will certainly be on a non-political basis.

Community Cabinet meetings have been a great success. During the dinner break tonight, when I was going through my mail for the day, there were a string of letters from people in Springwood and other places thanking us for the openness in the Community Cabinet process. Community Cabinet meetings came out of the discussion that the member for Nicklin and I had about the citizens' initiated referenda Bill. As I indicated to the member for Nicklin, while we could not support citizens' initiated referenda, we were prepared to come up with a community consultation process which reflected his concerns. I believe that we have done that, and we have done that in good faith.

All I can say in addition is this: the member for Nicklin, by bringing on this private member's Bill, has shown his determination and commitment to this process. I respect what he has done. I respect the Bill that he has brought forward. While we cannot support it, what we have done is introduce a level of community consultation which I believe is in the interests of Queensland. And when the history of this Government is written—as it is of all Governments, including the Borbidge Government—there will be an acknowledgment that the Community Cabinet process was brought about by the member for Nicklin.

---