



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 23 November 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2)

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (3.45 p.m.): There are three things that I want to raise in relation to the Local Government and Other legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2). The first issue, which was mentioned by the member for Warrego, is the four-year term. I canvassed seven local authorities in the Western Downs electorate just prior to the issue being raised at the local government conference and I received a mixed reaction. Some are very much in favour of it and some are against it. After reading the second-reading speech of the Minister this morning and listening to the way that the member for Warrego has used the data that has come forward from the survey, it is interesting to note that people use the same sorts of facts in different ways. The fact remains that there is a mixed bag in terms of acceptance of the proposal. I support the recommendation of the member for Warrego for a referendum on the matter down the track.

Personally, after my experience in State Government, especially as a Minister, I am inclined to support four-year terms. I am thankful that, to date, local government has not gone down the same track as the State Government of having compulsory public consultation, corporatisation of services and so on, which slow up the processes of a department and the work of a Minister. They might be wise enough to put that off the agenda.

Mr Mackenroth: There are some that support it and some that don't. The ones that support it, you'll send them this speech, and the ones that don't, you'll send them the vote.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: That would be right. They will all hear my opinion, which I am entitled to, and I think that they respect it. I make the point that local government would be wise to step away from some of those things that we have done since the Fitzgerald days, because we have slowed up the process of government. By trying to have more accountability, we have made it more difficult for a Government to turn its policies into realities. Therefore, it seems to me that a four-year term is more realistic. I am frustrated that some of the things that, as Minister, I had almost completed when the election came along are now withering. That is the first point.

My second point is not covered in the Bill, but it is a problem that I have been raising since the days of Russ Hinze and it concerns the election of mayors. I appreciate that there is great divergence across Queensland. In the bigger cities there are declared political parties standing on various platforms, but the rural councils are not aligned on political lines.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: That is not always so, but it is pretty right, because normally they are all conservative voters. In rural areas, there is a small pool of people from which to call for nominations. For the first time in about 15 years, there will be an election for the Mayor of Chinchilla. Two candidates have indicated that they will stand. I regard both councillors as being very competent. Under the present situation, the Chinchilla Shire Council will lose one competent councillor because whoever loses the election will be out of the council altogether. I worry sometimes that the legislation we pass in this House has to fit all situations, but sometimes it just does not fit. We have to be a little more flexible, especially when dealing with councils that service small rural populations.

I will put two propositions to the Minister. In respect of the council elections in a rural area, a person can nominate for two positions: a mayoralty job or a councillor position. If he misses out on the

mayoralty, he can be elected as a councillor. The argument against that would be that, if he loses, he would be aligned against the mayor and that would bring disharmony to the council. I do not think that is the case. Most people are community minded and they would stick with it. Alternatively, following the election of the council the councillors could then choose a mayor. That would be a bit like what happened at the recent referendum. The people in the shire would like to think that they have a say as to who will be their mayor, rather than leaving it, as in this case, to local government politicians. I am concerned about this, because there is a small pool of people who are willing to take on a role in local government in rural Queensland, and we could lose some impressive people. If they want to become a mayor, they run the risk of dropping out for at least three years or, in this case, four years. I ask the Minister to give that a bit more thought. I raised the same argument in my party room and I did not win the case there, either. However, I will not give up trying.

I turn now to the amendments to the Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995, which was brought in under the Goss Government. In 1996, when I became the Minister, it was my responsibility to try to bring that to fruition. We put in place regional advisory councils across Queensland. We went through a process of consultation and there was a fair bit of angst from time to time. The landowners, especially the sugarcane farmers—who seemed to be diametrically opposed to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—Landcare, the conservation groups and the local authorities were all players. I am not up to date with the latest state of play, but we should be at a stage at which all of the advisory committees are reporting back to the Minister with plans. I endorse fully the recommendation that we should amend that Act so that it fits in with local authorities and statutory instruments, where they are made.

I noted the comments of the member for Warrego, who spoke about what the committee recommended. I can see the need for it, because those plans need to have teeth so that, when councils make planning decisions, they can fall back legally on the plan made under the Coastal Protection and Management Act. I fully support that process. It takes some time to go through the consultation process for each regional area; there are many conflicting interests. However, that is a necessary part of the good governance of Queensland, be it at a State or local government level.
