



Speech by  
**Mr DENVER  
BEANLAND**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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Hansard 23 November 1999

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

**Mr BEANLAND** (Indooroopilly—LP) (4.37 p.m.): I rise to speak about the proposal for four-year terms put forward in this amendment to local government legislation. It is well known, and remembered by many I am sure, that I was one of those who campaigned for four-year terms for this Parliament, a question which was put to a referendum in the early 1990s. I still support the concept of four-year terms for the Parliament. Having said that, the people of Queensland spoke. They said very clearly that they did not want four-year terms. They are the facts of life. The majority of people in this State said that they did not want four-year terms. There is no getting away from that. That was only a few years ago—in the early 1990s.

What has been put forward today is a proposal by Labor to look at introducing four-year terms for local government, but we have had no referendum. It is all very well for the member for Townsville to stand in this House and say that other States have four-year terms. The fact is that four-year terms were achieved in those States via referendums. The member for Townsville conveniently forgot about that.

From listening to the debate today, particularly the contributions made by those on the other side of the Chamber, I think one of the casualties of this debate has been the truth. Those on the other side have forgotten just how these things occurred. The people of those other States spoke out and said that they wanted four-year terms. We tried to introduce four-year terms and we failed. That is all very well, because the people said on that occasion that they wanted to stick to three-year terms.

It is all very well for Labor members to get up in this place and say that they have consulted local government. I am sure that they have consulted a number of local government people. How many people of this State have they spoken to? Have they consulted the people? Even if those opposite say they have surveyed them, how many were surveyed? There has been no referendum. We well know that in this State and across this nation people change their minds when it comes to voting in referendums. A referendum should have been held in this instance.

It is all very well for us to say that we know best. But how often do people in local government complain about the fact that the State Government is making changes which are not in tune with what the people involved in local government want? In this case, it is not simply the local governments who are the players, it is the public.

The closest form of government to the people is local government. Some people in local government might want four-year terms, but others might want three-year terms. And at the end of the day, those people should have their say on exactly what they want. They should not have imposed upon them a piece of legislation without any real consultation—and without a referendum there is no real consultation—saying simply that there will be four-year terms. But that is what is going to occur.

These are very significant changes indeed. As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier—and I was going to say it in a slightly different way—this legislation shows that the Government has not been listening to the people out there. There is a certain arrogance on the part of Government members that they know best when it comes to an issue like this. Or this might be part of some other Labor ploy; I will

wait and see about that. Nevertheless, the fact is that the people are not getting their say on this particular matter.

Some members of the public regard members of this House as elite, media proprietors as elite, journalists as elite and so on. I have had that said to me on many occasions. And what will be said in relation to this matter is that the ordinary people—the mums and dads, the ordinary folk—have not had a say on this very, very important matter.

It has been said that there has been consultation with local government. In relation to consultation on four-year terms, the brief says that community consultation was undertaken by Queensland councils and members of Parliament. The Local Government Association of Queensland sponsored a survey that was also conducted on community attitudes to four-year terms for councillors. The survey showed that 57% of respondents supported four-year terms for councillors. The majority of councils that considered the issue were supportive of the change. I am not going to argue about whether or not the majority of councils were supportive, because I am quite sure that I could come up with a majority of councils that were supportive of the change. However, I am far from convinced that that is what the people want. It does not matter what I want or what the Minister wants or what the Labor Party wants; I am far from convinced that the people of Queensland want four-year local government terms. I want to hear from the Minister how many people were actually surveyed. It does not matter whether it was 1,000, 12,000 or a few hundred; there has been no referendum. And as members of Parliament, that is what we are going to cop a lacing about: that no referendum was held on this important issue.

We know how people change their minds on these matters. The recent referendum result of 57% was not an overall figure. Many people said that the republic was sure to get up; but it was never a certainty, and it went down in a screaming heap. Many people said to me that four-year terms were a lay-down misere, but that was not the case. That applies to a whole host of other things, but I will not go through them. There have been Federal referendums on many issues. People have said, "This is bound to get up", but that has not happened. Many Governments—no matter from which side of politics—have been brought down by the people. No matter how good a Government might be, it is the people's perception of it that is the deciding factor. The fact is that the people want their say on this particular matter, but they have not had that opportunity.

In his second-reading speech, the Minister reiterated many comments made by LGAQ delegates at its annual conference at Toowoomba and conferences elsewhere supportive of this issue. But it does not get away from the fact that the public have not had a say on exactly what they want.

There are two sides to this argument. I might be able to run a good four-year term argument. Madam Deputy Speaker, you might be able to do likewise. But at the end of the day, other people equally could run a good three-year term argument. I can think of just as many good points in support of that argument, which could well win.

We have all seen the push for citizen-initiated referendums. One of the arguments that has always been used is the fact that we have three-year parliamentary terms, we go to the people regularly, and local government goes to the people regularly; so, therefore, there is no particular need for such referendums, because people have a far greater opportunity to vote for government than they do in other countries. People love to refer to the United States of America when discussing the republic issue. In the US, the Congress—the House of Representatives—has two-year terms, as do many of the States in that country.

It may be, of course, that the public do not want three-year or four-year terms. They might want elections to be held every two years. This legislation is not suggesting that, and I am not promoting that for a moment. Nevertheless, people might want more voting opportunities, particularly at the local government level.

What is being proposed here is a fundamental change to the democratic processes that relate to local government—something that is very close to people's hearts. People are far more sensitive about local government than they are about the role of State Governments. Yet this Labor Government is treating local government as another arm of this State Government, because it is not giving the people a say on what they want for their local governments. It is all very well for members to make comments, but I believe that, at the end of the day, the public will regard that as arrogance on the part of this Government in not listening to them. Many people would argue strongly that they ought to have had that opportunity to be listened to and that this legislation changes what they regard as a very important aspect of their fundamental democratic rights to have their say on their local governments, whose councillors they place on a far higher level than they do members of State Parliament. I well remember how sensitive people became when changes were made to local government ward boundaries. But when it comes to State or Federal boundary changes, most people are either not very perturbed or not very interested. Local government is not a plaything of Labor. And if the Labor Government believed in the significant role of local governments and the people who vote for local

governments, a referendum would have been put to the people so that they could choose exactly what length of terms they want their local governments to serve.

In his contribution, the member for Townsville did not worry too much about the truth. He did himself no credit by saying that I ignored a convention of this Parliament. That was not the case at all, and I do not intend to address that issue now. Clearly, the member was trying to promote an argument without any substance or facts. The member for Townsville made many assertions that had no basis in fact.

I put on record my concerns about the fact that this legislation is being thrust upon the people of Queensland without their having a say on what they regard as a very important level of government—far more important to their day-to-day activities than State or Federal Parliaments—yet this Labor Government has not been listening to the cynical comments of people out there. It is showing arrogance by thrusting this legislation upon the people of Queensland without letting them have a say on exactly what terms they believe their local governments should serve. I believe that this issue will come back to haunt this Government. It cannot say that it has been listening to the people when it comes to local government matters, because this particular amendment clearly shows that this Government has not done that.

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