



Speech by

KEN TURNER

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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COMMUNITY-BASED REFERENDUM BILL

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (9.29 p.m.): I commend the Community-Based Referendum Bill to the House as a means of strengthening participation in the democracy of Queensland and the freedom that is so closely associated with people power. Community referendums are the core of democracy and are quite common to the great democracies. In America, 10,000 local government referendums have been held since the turn of the century. In four separate ballots in four separate States of the United States voters approved a stronger approach to law and order and a stronger approach to violent crime.

In Switzerland the story is the same. One local government area has had 600 referendums in just 30 years. A value added tax was rejected by a Swiss community initiative. The Swiss voters also rejected an initiative to stop the construction of a nuclear reactor, a shorter working week and a move to join the United Nations. Spanish voters rejected an initiative that the nation leave NATO. A community referendum in 1974 to repeal Italy's first divorce laws was rejected.

In most cases, the electors voted to overturn the Government's politically motivated actions. Yet in Australia, all that Australians can do is speak strongly and hold firm when the Federal Government demands the passage of a centralist referendum. Community-based referendums will go a long way to redressing the imbalance of centralist and federally imposed referendums by imposing people-initiated referendums at the State level of Government.

There are many good reasons for supporting community-based referendums in Queensland. Our political system has been unable to accurately reflect the will of Queensland's citizens on all issues. We need to maximise the voice of the Queensland voters when it comes to critical issues. When issues are dealt with separately in a referendum, the attitude of the people can be measured exactly and the result is in no doubt. At present, voters are faced with only two options: Labor or coalition party platforms. Voters may not want either, but they are forced to accept unwanted options in a package of policies in order to obtain one policy that they just might want.

Community referendums can be a check on the Executive arm of Government which, because of the party system, can be the will of just one man forced upon the Cabinet which in turn is forced upon the caucus and which in turn is forced upon the Parliament. The people usually end up with a policy that nobody wants except for a few high ranking politicians pushing a too often tattered and torn agenda. The present system of presenting petitions to this Legislature is a waste of time when the time involved in collecting the petition is considered. The community referendum is an instrument with teeth and purpose and an obvious and effective replacement for the present petition system.

The theory of a mandate has also been seriously abused in our Westminster system. This theory has been exploited shamelessly to give Governments an unjustifiable warrant to legislate in ways which the voters have not consented to. Community-based referendums give electors an incentive to participate in public issues, making themselves heard in Government.

This is an issue whose time has come, and I strongly support the Bill. I was listening to the honourable Mr Fenlon saying that we have a democracy here. However, I have looked around the House during my short time in Parliament and I know full well that people on both sides of this House are voting for things that they do not believe in, whether for or against. That happens. In my opinion, everything that is voted on in this House would be entirely different if everybody could vote for what they believed in, and that does not happen. I do not think that is democracy; that is dictatorship.