



Speech by

MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (4.23 p.m.): I have a great deal of pleasure in speaking in favour of the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I was interested to hear the comments from the member for Callide relating to the lack of depth of local government experience on this side of the Chamber and the few paltry years he served in local government and the fact that he brought that experience into the Chamber with him today. I come into the debate with a 16-year background in local government, four and a half years as the Deputy Mayor of the City of Townsville and about nine years as Mayor. I feel that I bring some experience—

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I feel obliged to ask the member to withdraw those statements. They are untrue and offensive. That is not what I said. He is misrepresenting what I said.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): No. That is not a point of order. The member is very delicate.

Mr REYNOLDS: As I was saying, the member for Callide made some outrageous comments with regard to this Bill. It really showed the level of ignorance he has about local government and, furthermore, his level of ignorance with regard to employment opportunities.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No. There is no point of order in relation to anything the member for Townsville has just said in reference to the honourable member. He referred to the member correctly and he only referred to experience.

Mr SEENEY: My point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, is this: I find the reference that the member for Townsville made to me as being ignorant offensive, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did not hear that.

Mr REYNOLDS: Mr Deputy Speaker, if the member for Callide takes offence at the comments I made about his level of ignorance, I will withdraw those.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The honourable member will withdraw them. If that was the case, I did miss it. I thought the honourable member was talking about knowledge. The honourable member will withdraw it unequivocally.

Mr REYNOLDS: I withdraw the comments if the member does find them offensive. I will make no further comments about the level of ignorance of the member for Callide.

The Bill before us today is a quite sensible and appropriate Bill relating to modern-day local government in Queensland. Sometimes we forget that in the State of Queensland we lead the way with regard to local governance. No other State of Australia has the same depth of local government powers, responsibilities and functions as Queensland's local governments. If we compare the six States and two Territories of Australia, it is well known that in Queensland the 1936 Local Government Act set down a number of very wide and expansive powers that local government could exercise in the State of Queensland.

Amendments made in 1993 by the Goss Labor Government were very progressive amendments for local government in this State. They did take cognisance of the fact that Governments

across Australia in terms of local, State and Federal governance were moving in a direction that were very much embodied in the Local Government Act 1993. It was a Labor Government that recognised the need for those amendments. What we have before us today with the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is other progressive amendments being made with regard to management and governance at that local government level.

I first of all speak today about the amendments that have been the subject of most comment this afternoon—that is, the amendments to the Local Government Act 1993 and the City of Brisbane Act 1924 to introduce four-year terms of office for councillors. That will occur, as has been correctly stated today, as from the March 2000 local government elections.

I turn first of all to some of the comments that were made by the Leader of the Opposition, who preceded me in this debate in the House today. We heard from the Leader of the Opposition that these are cheeky, arrogant and insensitive amendments. Is that not amazing coming from the Leader of the Opposition who, when Premier of this State for two and half years, not only dealt with the people of Queensland in a cheeky, arrogant and insensitive way, but ignored many of the requests made of him, particularly with regard to the then Attorney-General of the State. The then Premier absolutely ignored the conventions of this Parliament and showed no regard whatsoever for the people or for the conventions of this Parliament built up over many decades.

What we have before us today are quite sensible and appropriate amendments providing for four-year terms for local government. In my time in local government, I do not know how many times I heard it said that, when a new council was elected, the first year was really the year when they got on top of the agenda. The next year was when they set their first budget. It was the budget that was going to be very much there for the next year. The third year was when they readied themselves for the next election.

I think four-year terms for local government makes eminent sense. The concept has been supported by local government. There has been major consultation by the Minister for Local Government, the Urban Local Government Association and the Local Government Association of Queensland. Indeed, in May of this year the Minister asked for the initiation of public debate on that matter, and there has been public debate. Unlike members on the other side, in my capacity as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier I was one of the members of Parliament who put out a press release asking for public comment across north Queensland. By and large, the clear majority of the comments that came in to my office—from rural and provincial areas—indicated very strong support for four-year terms for local government.

The Local Government Association of Queensland sponsored a survey to gauge community attitudes to four-year terms for councillors. There was 57% support for four-year terms for councillors. There has been a great deal of strong support for four-year terms in local government in a bipartisan way, across political parties. There has been support from independent councillors as well for a very long period of time.

There are two councils in the area that is covered by the electorate of Townsville. The Townsville City Council, a Labor city council in its 24th year of local government—

Dr Prenzler interjected.

Mr REYNOLDS: I take the interjection of the member from Lockyer. I am very proud of that 24 years. Indeed, the people are as well. Over 24 years the people have voted in a Labor city council. I predict that in March next year the people of Townsville will again vote in a Labor city council, not for three years but for four years. Indeed, I believe that Townsville will set a record for the longest period of time a Labor city council has governed anywhere in Queensland. The record is held by Brisbane—from 1961 to 1985, after Clem Jones was elected as the Lord Mayor of Brisbane. As a north Queenslander—as a Townsvillian—I would like to see Townsville take that record off Brisbane, and I believe that next year it will. I am very proud of the work that the Townsville City Council has done for 24 years.

Dr Prenzler: Shame!

Mr REYNOLDS: Again I take the interjection from the member for Lockyer. He would not have a clue about the progress that has been made in Townsville. He knows that the city is one that has made phenomenal progress. The people have voted with their feet. They have voted for a Labor council over that long period of time.

The other council in my area is the Palm Island community council. This proposal for four-year terms also applies to the DOGIT community councils right across Queensland. From my discussions with DOGIT councillors, I know that they also look forward to the four-year terms that are being offered them.

This proposal also applies to the Gladstone Area Water Board and the Townsville Thuringowa Water Supply Board. It makes eminent sense to see those two water boards so strongly associated

with the local governments in the areas of Gladstone, Townsville and Thuringowa and for them to be in sync with local government. Indeed, local government representation on those boards is the key to those water boards. There is an independent chair on the Townsville Thuringowa Water Supply Board, but there is equal representation of the Townsville City Council and the Thuringowa City Council. It makes eminent, good sense to ensure that those terms are indeed the same.

I will conclude with some comments on equal employment opportunity. The comments made in this Chamber today by the member for Callide show his lack of awareness of the real benefits of an EEO policy, not only at local government level but also at the State and Federal levels. In the last two decades in Australia major changes have been made in regard to public sector management standards. The Goss Labor Government led the way with the Public Sector Management Commission, and EEO management plans introduced at State and local government level have been very much part of reaching those high standards. The member for Callide said that this was all about women being in employment. I say to him that in my 16 years in local government I think I knew two CEOs out of about 136 who were women.

Mr Mackenroth: There are presently two out of 125.

Mr REYNOLDS: So it has not changed much. We have decreased the number of local authorities, but we still have only two women CEOs. I think we have a long way to go in terms of equal employment opportunity for men and women in local government.

EEO goes further than that. EEO is not restricted to the number of men or women in the work force. It talks about councils striving to ensure employment opportunity for people with a disability and for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Also, there is not to be a bias in regard to whether people are from rural or provincial areas.

Equal employment opportunity is very much part of modern and progressive public sector management standards. I believe that the amendments contained in this Bill firmly appreciate the need for equal employment opportunity in a local authority area. We see some changes in regard to the process and the reporting standards, but EEO will continue to be a very important part of the management framework and the policy decision framework of a local authority. I believe that the amendments being made in regard to equal employment opportunity are progressive and fair. Indeed, they will be welcomed by local government across the State.

I think the changes with regard to four-year terms are sensible ones. Today we heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about the arrogance and the insensitivity of it. In my work—I have a close contact with local government in this State—I have not seen the mayors or the councillors marching on Parliament House. The way the Leader of the Opposition was talking, it was almost as if the world was going to end if we as a Parliament had the temerity to pass four-year terms for local government in this State. Of course, four-year terms are everywhere across Australia in other State jurisdictions and the world has not ended. What we heard from the Leader of the Opposition today is a half-truth and very much an example of the political opportunism of the Leader of the Opposition. I commend the Bill to the House.
