



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 23 November 1999

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

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (4.50 p.m.): I, too, want to place my thoughts on the record. The people of the electorate of Crows Nest will not be given an opportunity to have a say with regard to four-year terms for local government councillors. However, as their representative I will do it for them. I know they would rather speak for themselves.

In speaking to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2), I want to place my thoughts on the record so that I can let my electorate know exactly what I think of the way in which this matter has been handled. It is not a question of whether the term for councillors should be four years or three years. I would certainly not die in a ditch for either. Whatever the people decide is good enough for me. Unfortunately, the people have not been given a say.

I believe that the people would normally be given a say on such fundamental changes. It is not a matter for sitting and elected councillors to decide whether they have a three-year term or a four-year term. The long-suffering people who elect the councillors should be given an opportunity to speak on this matter. I guess that is the guts of what those of us on this side of the House are trying to say.

The member for Warrego is handling this Bill on this side of the Parliament. I second his remarks with regard to the need for a referendum. The people will not forget the Government's arrogance when change and reform is thrust upon them. The people have long memories. They know very well that at some stage they will have a vote which will enable them to express their point of view. Whether the people agree with four-year terms or three-year terms is not the point; the point is the process which has been undertaken in this case.

The way this Government is acting is a tragedy. We went through this sort of thing in the Goss years. We saw rural and regional Queensland virtually destroyed through the sheer arrogance of the Government of the day. We do not want to see that happening again. Too many people suffered as a result of the Goss Government's actions.

Along with other honourable members, I have had experience in local government. Local government is a good learning ground for people who want to move on to State politics or whatever. I had 12 years' experience with the Bendemere Shire which is based on Yuleba. Local government is the closest government to the people. It is probably the best of our three forms of government. Local government supplies the small services which people desire.

My electorate covers the shires of Crows Nest, Esk, Rosalie and Jondaryan. These four shires, together with the other 121 shires in Queensland, make an enormous contribution to this State. More and more development is taking place, more and more things are happening and more and more responsibility is thrust onto local government. They have to rise to the occasion. A little later I will discuss some of the issues with which local government is dealing.

I want to refer to the referendum that was held in this State back in the early 1990s. At that time, I was Leader of the Opposition, Mr Beanland was Leader of the Liberal Party and Mr Goss was Premier. The three of us met in the Premier's office to discuss the issue of four-year terms. Lo and behold, the three of us agreed to four-year terms. However, we in the National Party said that we agreed with four years but that parliamentarians must serve three years. The other two members at the meeting wanted four years, and four years only. The referendum went down. It was one of the most

stupid things I have ever seen. If we had been as one, perhaps the referendum may have succeeded. We should have persevered with it.

People are concerned about Governments—and I am not referring to Queensland because Queensland has a good record of Governments serving their time—going to election early. People prefer Governments to serve their full time; they do not elect Governments to play around with the system. Sometimes a Government can be in office for 18 months and, because of some quirk or some whim, the Government goes to the people. People are annoyed at this sort of behaviour.

The member for Townsville referred to the long period when Labor controlled the Townsville City Council. The Bjelke-Petersen Government served seven three-year terms—21 years—as the Government of this State. One serves one's three years and goes back to the people. One is re-elected if people believe one is doing the right thing. I do not know why people want a four-year term. People can become complacent and lazy. I believe the three-year term keeps parliamentarians on their toes. They know very well that other people are breathing down their necks if they are not doing the job. If the people decide on four-year terms, fair enough. However, I believe a three-year term is adequate.

As the member for Indooroopilly has said, the United States Congress and most of the individual States in the United States serve two-year terms. I believe that a two-year term might be a bit too short, but such a system has certainly suited a democracy such as the United States for a long period of time.

I think the President of France serves a period of seven years in office. In such an instance, one could easily forget who was the President's predecessor.

Mr Purcell: I think that is the idea.

Mr COOPER: It could be, too. I do not think it is very good for democracy. If democracy hangs in the balance, I would say yes, go for seven years. However, I would like to keep politicians more honest. I believe that a four-year term is too long and I would prefer a three-year term.

It is the people who should decide these matters. Obviously, elected members and councillors would feel happy with a four-year term. I am sure that if someone offered those opposite a four-year term they would take it.

Queensland's local authorities will face the electors in March 2000. I wish the candidates in the shires in my electorate well. I believe most councillors will go to the people with a clear conscience, knowing that they have served the people well.

The Jondaryan Shire Council, the Crows Nest Shire Council and the Toowoomba City Council are involved with the second range crossing. This is something of major importance to the Darling Downs. This road involves travel from Brisbane to the Darling Downs and is badly needed. It was tipped that the road would be constructed by the year 2015, which is far too late. The local authorities, the State Government and the Federal Government have undertaken a lot of work with regard to the second range crossing. We hope that a fast rail crossing will follow the road crossing over the range.

We have a rail interchange and an industrial area coming to the Jondaryan area. We would also like to see the water pipeline from Luggage Point to the Darling Downs come to fruition. This pipeline involves some 160,000 megalitres of recycled water being supplied to properties on the Darling Downs. While there are some problems presently associated with the pipeline, it must be remembered that this water is currently being wasted by being allowed to run out into Moreton Bay. This water is important for the Lockyer Valley and the Darling Downs. We are all aware of the shortage of water in this area of the State. It is vital that the shires involved, together with the Toowoomba City Council, are given every assistance in bringing this project to fruition within a reasonable period of time.

The Crows Nest Shire Council has raised with the Minister and the former Minister the question of unsurveyed roads. Questions of liability arise when there are problems with such roads. Mayor Geoff Patch has taken part in deputations and has written letters on this matter because he is extremely concerned. It is vital that we find a solution to this major problem.

The floods in the Esk Shire earlier this year wiped out quite a number of bridges over the Brisbane River and various creeks. It has taken a long time to repair these damaged bridges. The Mayor of Esk Shire, Mrs Jean Bray, is known to a lot of honourable members. She has made a tremendous contribution to the Brisbane Valley/Lockyer Valley area of this State. I have had a long and close working relationship with Peter Taylor, the Mayor of Jondaryan Shire, and Noel Strohfled, the Mayor of Rosalie Shire. It is vital that we all combine to provide services to the people. That is what we are here for; that is what it is all about.

I reiterate my concerns about not having a referendum. People will respond to that when they get their chance at the next State election. People are tending to do that these days. They do not forget. Sometimes we might not hear their complaints because they bottle them up and quite often people feel that politicians are not listening to them. If they are ignored and then have change and reform thrust upon them, they will say, "Okay, we have one thing left to us and maybe one thing only,

that is, our vote. We will use it." Incumbency is a risk. Incumbent Governments will get a shake-up every time they go to an election, because the people will be angry at the way that they have been treated. I think that we will see that at the next State election, because people are sick and tired of being treated with disdain and being ignored. They are sick and tired of having things thrust upon them.
