



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

---

Hansard 23 November 1999

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

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—IND) (5.23 p.m.): It has been said here today that local government is the closest government to the people. By virtue of that fact, Federal Government is the most detached from the people. I would like to put it on the record here again today that the sooner we get rid of the Federal Government in this country, the better it will be for all of us.

I personally believe that we should be again looking at minimum and maximum terms. I personally believe that we should be looking at a five-year term, if anything. A lot of things in today's society—a lot of business plans and so on—work on a five-year plan. If there is no more compelling argument than to get things done—especially to get things done considering the slow rate of bureaucracy we have in this State and in our country at the moment when going up against a bureaucratic machine, as most of us have to do day in day and day out, in that it might take three or four months just to get a letter back from a Minister or local authority—then we certainly need to be looking at the time it is going to take Governments, people in Government or councils to get their issues up.

There are four local government areas in my electorate: Atherton, Mareeba, Herberton and Eacham. I certainly went out and talked to not only representatives from council but also representatives from the communities. They did not seem to have any problem at all with the concept of four-year terms.

**Mr Paff** interjected.

**Mr NELSON:** The member for Ipswich West may not care at all about the issue, but I certainly do and I will certainly continue to represent my area, even if he does not feel like doing so.

The point remains—and I have heard it said here today—that we must talk about local government and whether or not it has support. Of course, people who are in the know—people who are in local government, people who are educated about the issue—are going to say, "Yes, we support it", or, "No, we do not." They are going to have a firm opinion on it. When I went to people in the community who are not involved in local government—people who are not councillors or people who do not have anything to do with the process of local government—they either did not have an opinion or they were of the opinion that councillors should not serve a four-year term.

Even though I fully support the concept of lengthening the term—and I personally believe in having a minimum and a maximum so that people can say, "This is the time frame that our local government will be serving"—I certainly believe that the idea of having a referendum on the issue and ultimately giving that choice back to the people who are, of course, going to be affected by the subject change is a very sound one. In that way, we will get a broad spread: the rural communities will be having their say and eventually everybody in the State will be having their say on the subject. That would also increase the education level. No-one is going to be able to say, "I was not consulted on this issue"; one small regional area will not be able to say, "This is a decision that has come from Brisbane." It is going to be an issue that they are going to be able to raise right across the community.

I certainly would have no problem at all giving my support to this Bill if it included the amendment foreshadowed by the Opposition because I believe that we do need to be looking at four-year terms. Ultimately the disillusionment in the community comes from the fact that people do not feel

that they are being consulted with at every level and they do not feel that they are being included in decisions made by Government. One sure-fire way for the Government to get itself "Jeffed" is to take the attitude that it does not need to go back to the community from time to time and ask them what they feel. If there was ever a Government that was in danger of being "Jeffed" in the future, it would have to be this Government. The members opposite need to look at that and say to themselves, "We have a very real opportunity here at a very limited cost to the taxpayer and at a very unique point in time"—which, of course, is the local government election—"to raise the issue of a referendum with the people and give them a choice."

A lot of people have asked, "What if you get a bad local government?" I say, "What if you get a good local government?" We also need to recognise that in local government there are opportunities, as the member for Townsville said before, for local governments as mayors or teams or groups to serve for a very long, continuous period and have quite a happy community, or there can be the situation such as we have in Mareeba where the local government is \$17m in debt and the people are howling for blood. I would err on the side that it is the former that is more imperative in society—where people are quite happy with their local government. They might have little problems with one or two councillors, but they are happy with the direction it takes.

As has been said, with local government being as close as it is to the people, it certainly takes the will of the people forward. A few people have raised the point, "What if you get a bad local government?" My point would be the opposite. Nine times out of 10 the people are going to get a good local government—or at least the local government they want—and they should be given the opportunity to push that stability level into the community a lot more.

Without going on for too long, I would just like to say that I have no trouble assenting to this Bill as long as it includes the opportunity for the people to have their say through a referendum. As I said, I believe that it is a sure-fire method to stem that tide of discontent that is still very much alive and well in the community. It will give everyone a voice; it will give everyone the opportunity to voice their opinion; and it would be at a very limited cost. As has been said here today, it can be drafted so that it takes effect as of the day of the referendum so that we can say, "From this term onwards we will have four-year terms." I stand to be corrected on that. I believe that that would be a way to stem that tide of discontent. When I asked "What if we had a referendum on the subject? What would you think of that?", all the people I spoke to said that that would give them a chance to have their say and that they felt that that would be a reasonable level of interaction between the Government and them and a reasonable level of opinion gathering in the community. If the Opposition's amendment gets up, I have no problem supporting the amended Bill.

---