



Speech by

**JOHN ENGLISH**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Hansard 17 May 2001

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr ENGLISH** (Redlands—ALP) (5.32 p.m.): I commend this bill, because it will ensure that local councillors must resign from local government office before they run for either state or federal office. The bill will ensure that communities get local elected representatives who will provide them with consistent representation rather than using their local offices as a springboard to get them into a higher office. Councillors will need to attend to their primary local responsibilities during their term. Their interests should remain focused on ratepayers rather than taxpayers. Local elected representatives will need to resign from their office should they choose to run for a state or federal seat.

In the past, many councillors, including the Honourable Minister for Local Government and Planning, have moved successfully from the local government arena into either the state or federal government arena. In fact, Honourable Ministers McGrady and Reynolds have also served previously on local councils. There is no argument that local government representation has provided useful professional development for many elected representatives at the state and federal levels.

The claim by the honourable member for Warrego that this bill seeks to limit the number of candidates in state elections is false. Local councillors are still eligible to nominate as candidates in all state elections. This legislation does not change that. The government asks only that councillors earn their money. Why should ratepayers pay the salary of councillors who are not focused on working for them? Unlike the opposition, we expect all elected members to earn their pay. This bill will help ensure that councillors, at any given time, choose between local government and another jurisdiction and dedicate their energy and attention accordingly.

The bill also provides for the inclusion of a head of power in the Local Government Act to require all operators on the Kuranda rail line to pay a levy of \$1 per passenger to assist the Mareeba Shire Council to provide the necessary tourist infrastructure in the town of Kuranda. The provision has been introduced to fulfil this government's obligation under an agreement made in 1994 between the Queensland government and the Mareeba Shire Council. Under that agreement, this government is obliged to provide funds to the council equivalent to \$1 for every passenger travelling on the rail line between Cairns and Kuranda. The government's obligation to provide such funding must be met irrespective of whether or not the rail operator actually collects its money from the passengers. Similar contributions are made by visitors to Kuranda who arrive other than by rail and also by local businesses that benefit from tourism in the local area.

Until now, Queensland Rail has operated the only trains on that line, and it has voluntarily included the \$1 levy in the price of passenger tickets. Significant infrastructure, including rail lines, can be subject to claims for third-party access by other prospective operators. Another rail operator has applied for access to the line between Cairns and Kuranda and is expected to commence operating in the near future. That operator has indicated that the levy will not be collected on a voluntary basis and that legal action will be taken to avoid paying it if attempts are made to make it a condition under the access agreement.

Currently, the Queensland government has no power to require the operators to collect the levy. If Queensland Rail continues to voluntarily collect the levy from its passengers, it would not be able to compete on a level playing field with another operator that is not required to collect that levy. This

amendment will address that issue by providing the legislative power to enforce the collection of the levy from any rail operator carrying passengers on the Cairns to Kuranda line.

The amendment is necessary to ensure fair play and fair competition. The amendment allows the state government to avoid any adverse financial impact resulting from the agreement that obliges it to provide funds to the Mareeba Shire Council without a reciprocal obligation on rail operators to collect the levy. The levy has a limited life. It will be collected until the end of the agreement between the state government and the Mareeba Shire Council in 2014. I commend the bill to the House.

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