



Speech by

PETER LAWLOR

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (6.01 p.m.): The proposed amendments to the Local Government Act have strong community support as well as support from many sitting councillors. This is indicated by the poll that the member for Nanango referred to, which was taken in her area, which indicated overwhelming support for the proposition that councillors are to resign before standing for election to state parliament and, similarly, by the sentiments that have just been expressed by the member for Darling Downs. I would certainly prefer their figures to the rubbery figures of the members for Warrego and Callide.

Mr Hobbs: No, I used your figures.

Mr LAWLOR: You quoted 51 councils. The member for Darling Downs just pointed out that they have a vested interest.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! The member will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr LAWLOR: Councillors will now need to carefully consider their options when seeking higher office, just as honourable members in this House must if they seek a federal seat. The community can be assured that local elected representatives will dedicate their energies and attention to matters of local government rather than electioneering.

I know that the member for Surfers Paradise opposes this particular provision. That is probably because he is judging everyone by his own high standards and great capacity to work. I know that he was most scrupulous in his care not to neglect his council duties whilst campaigning for that seat. Further, he avoided the use of ratepayer funded services and facilities to assist his campaign by leasing separate premises, purchasing new phones and so on. But not everyone adheres to those high standards. Unfortunately, people such as the member for Surfers Paradise, who was a councillor prior to his election to this place, may be disadvantaged. But those types of people must pay the price for the councillors from the various local authorities who have abused their position and have effectively conducted ratepayer funded campaigns for election to higher office.

The minister herself is an excellent example. Despite the fact that she was not required to do so, she resigned her position as Mayor of Bundaberg—a position that she held for seven years—in order to stand for the state seat.

Mr Livingstone: She's someone of principle.

Mr LAWLOR: Absolutely! When the minister speaks in favour of this proposition, she genuinely believes in it and is not just paying lip-service to it. She gave practical effect to that provision without being compelled to do so.

While the three tiers of government in this country share responsibilities across various jurisdictions, it is reasonable for taxpayers and ratepayers to assume that their elected representatives will attend primarily to their respective and designated duties, be they local, state or federal representatives. The proposed amendments will ensure that elected local representatives carefully consider their commitments before they undertake a four-year term at local government level.

I would also like to speak on the amendments that will commercialise the Thuringowa-Townsville Water Supply Board by its conversion to a joint local government entity under the Local Government Act 1993. The proposed amendments would come into effect on 30 June 2001. Through commercialisation of the board, now trading as North Queensland Water, the amendments will generate improvements in the efficiency and delivery of bulk water services to Townsville and Thuringowa. The board is one of four state-owned entities that Queensland committed to commercialise in 1994 under the Council of Australian Governments' water reform agenda. In the period 1999-2000 the Beattie government carried out the commercialisation of three of these boards: South East Queensland Water Board, Gladstone Area Water Board and the Mount Isa Water Board. For the Brisbane region, the government created the corporatised South East Queensland Water Corporation, sharing ownership of the region's bulk water supply with the 12 local governments it supplies.

In Townsville and Thuringowa, the two councils expressed a strong desire for the state-owned water board in their region to be given over to local government to be controlled as a joint local government entity with an independent chairperson. The proposed amendments carry out this commitment and would effectively shift responsibility from the state to local government within the overall water management framework established by the Water Act 2000. The proposed amendments are supported by both the Townsville and Thuringowa City Councils.

The commencement of the proposed amendments on 30 June 2001 will satisfy the state's commitments under the COAG water reform agenda and entitle the state to national competition payments from the Commonwealth.

One issue of concern to the Townsville City Council related to the position of its residential consumers under the proposals to convert the Thuringowa-Townsville Water Supply Board to a joint local government entity. The council was concerned that any changes to its jurisdiction that would permit the board more scope to supply bulk water to key industrial customers currently supplied from the reticulated water supply of Townsville City Council would require it to increase prices for reticulated water to its residential consumers.

Under the Water Act 2000 local governments have the option of setting up a monopoly to supply retail water in a declared area. This means that local governments can continue to exercise their role in protecting public health through supplying safe and clean water to people's homes and businesses. However, the Water Act 2000 does not permit a local government to declare a monopoly over the provision of bulk water services, for example, to industrial customers. Provisions in the bill dealing with the board's jurisdiction reflect this approach. The board will have jurisdiction to supply bulk water to the Townsville and Thuringowa City Councils and to any other bulk water consumers in its operational area.

In addition to economic benefits, new arrangements for the board will also generate environmental benefits through sustainable use of scarce water resources. I commend the bill to the House.
