



Speech by

**ANDREW McNAMARA**

**MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY**

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Hansard 21 August 2002

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr McNAMARA** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.49 a.m.): I rise to support the Local Government Amendment Bill 2002. This bill amends the Local Government Act to put in place a method for reviewing internal local government electoral boundaries as well as making changes to improve the conduct of local government elections. I congratulate the minister and her department on the ongoing review of the Local Government Act to ensure that we have a dynamic, modern and democratic system of local government.

The amendment proposed by this bill to introduce a new procedure for initiating the review of local government electoral boundaries has very sensibly been modelled on the approach set out in the Electoral Act 1992 which, of course, governs redistributions in state electoral boundaries. In particular, I welcome the explicit reaffirmation of the importance of the principle of one vote, one value at all levels in our democratic system. Politicians are elected to represent people, not dirt or buildings, and the two-part, eight-year cycle for redistribution reviews is realistic and practical.

At the four-year point in the electoral cycle, which in our case will be 2004, if one-third or more divisions in a local government area are outside the margin of tolerance, a redistribution is triggered. If that does not occur, then at the eight-year point in the cycle or after two local government terms, if one division is outside the tolerance, a redistribution is triggered. This consistent system for local government electoral boundary reviews will ensure that councillors in high growth parts of local governments have their representative workload adjusted regularly and that all voters have access to elected representatives with similar constituent workloads. I note that it was broadly welcomed by local governments in Queensland, with 80 per cent of local government submissions in favour of this change.

Briefly, I endorse the other significant changes to the Electoral Act proposed by this bill. The change to the method of determining the winner of a tied vote is welcome. The current procedure of having a returning officer exercise a so-called casting vote is problematic, and the provision for drawing lots takes that burden from the returning officer. For a returning officer to have to decide who will represent a district or division would forever unfairly politicise that particular returning officer. Drawing lots removes that perception. Accordingly, this is a very sensible change. If returning officers lose the casting vote responsibility, there is no reason why such returning officers should be denied their right to cast a ballot in their own residential areas. This bill does that, and it is entirely appropriate.

Finally, the provision in the bill to allow eligible voters to apply for and make a declaration vote at any place the returning officer decides is certainly overdue. I welcome this initiative, which extends their ability to exercise their democratic rights. In our modern, mobile society, it is common for people not to be at home on polling day for a variety of reasons and they should be able to vote, if possible. I understand that this provision in the bill will lead to more work for returning officers and local government officers in general. On that note, I particularly welcome the support shown for this bill by the Local Government Association. I congratulate the minister and her staff on these very sensible reforms and I commend the bill to the House.