



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): The Beattie Labor government has a policy that I strongly support that we will not—and I repeat 'not'—force any local governments into amalgamation. Forced amalgamations are not part of my or this government's agenda. I wish to comment on an article in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on Saturday, 4 May, which I seek leave to table.

Leave granted.

Mr CUMMINS: I commend the editor and also the chief political reporter for their supportive editorial and accurate reporting. The community of the Sunshine Coast is, I believe, very supportive of the massive cost savings of ratepayer funds when councils operate in an efficient manner. I am constantly advised by residents and business owners of the need for the Maroochy Shire Council and Caloundra City Council to consider combining or amalgamating. I believe that both councils' first job is to put aside the 'can't do, too hard' mentality and replace it with a 'can do, let's find a better way' mentality. Councillors should begin investigations.

Presently, there are dozens of senior officers, including the chief executive officers, senior managers and third-level managers, across these councils. I am not criticising the ability or standard of their work; I am outlining the sheer numbers of these council positions. I wish to again publicly encourage the local councillors to begin investigations into combining councils, thus ensuring that millions of dollars of Sunshine Coast residents' hard-earned funds are saved or better spent through their local government authorities. The concerns of many regarding Maroochy Shire council's debt compared with Caloundra City Council's and other local governments' debt is easily addressed. When an amalgamation goes ahead—and I, for one, believe it is inevitable, as the community opinion is very strong on this issue—once an amalgamation is investigated, economies of scale will quickly be identified, thus ensuring savings that can offset debt levels.

Maroochy shire and Caloundra city have a wealth of assets, and some obviously should be closely scrutinised. Are they all core businesses of local government? Caloundra city residents are concerned at Maroochy's debt and political goings-on. It was only a few terms of council ago that Caloundra City Council was the political joke of the Sunshine Coast, with then mayor Barry Grey going AWOL and the deputy mayor being sacked or replaced as his ability was obviously not commensurate with his ambition. Bad councils will occasionally come, and hopefully go. An amalgamated Sunshine Coast council will sing with one voice, and at present this is not happening.

I want to mention the feedback from the *Sunshine Coast Daily* resident poll on the ill-conceived suggestion of transferring the responsibility for police, education and health to local councils. On Monday, 6 May, one man said that he would have concerns about the uniformity between the different council areas. Another lady said that cutting out the jobs at state government level would not necessarily be a good thing. Another man questioned doing the same with the police force, saying, 'That part's ridiculous. Can you imagine councils running a police force?' I fully agree with that comment. Another lady said '... not the police. I'd certainly like to see nursing homes run by local authorities'. Finally, another lady said '... you'd have to question consistency across the different areas'. When asked their opinion on the federal government's proposal to transfer certain tasks to local councils, five out of five people were not in favour.

I want to comment on the recent proposal by the federal local government minister, Wilson Tuckey, that local governments take control of state issues or services from the states. I have no idea

what the federal minister for local government was thinking when he came up with this ill-conceived suggestion. I encourage Liberals and conservatives, both in this parliament and the federal parliament, to take these issues on board. No-one in the community believes that councils should be running police forces.

Mr Tuckey suggested adopting a United States-style system, with councils taking over essential services, including police, education and health. As we know, in America there are many tiers to the police service. There are county police, city, state and federal police, and in some areas also the local sheriff. Given the sheer number of local authorities across Queensland, creating any kind of consistency with policing, education and health, if those services were controlled by local government, would be incredibly difficult. In Queensland, this government—

Time expired.
