



Speech by

Hon. Andrew Fraser

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (5.53 pm): I second the Premier's amendment to the motion. It is really important that in this debate we start at the first principle with the members of the opposition and that is that there is an issue in local government that needs reform. Even local government says that. The only people left trying to prosecute an argument that reform does not need to happen reside in the economic neverland sitting on the other side of the House. Let us be really clear.

Mr HOBBS: I find that offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn. The minister is referring to us. It is not true. We are happy to go along with reform.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I will again remind the member for Warrego in regard to interjections that are used as points of order. I warned him in that regard this morning. I ask you to desist from that. There was no personal imputation about a particular member.

Mr FRASER: Let us remember that PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association, not me.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cunningham!

Mr FRASER: Let us remember that PricewaterhouseCoopers drew upon the Access Economics work, not mine. Let us remember that the PricewaterhouseCoopers report was used by the Australian Local Government Association to undertake its budget bid to the federal government. It was happy to rely on that information to put its bid to the federal government. But when it comes to suggesting that the information that is contained in that report makes a case, in fact, for the need for extra funding and reform in local government, all of a sudden the opposition walks out the door on a great fancy of unbelievable nonsense and illogicality in its argument. Those opposite are the only people left arguing that reform does not need to happen. To suggest that the set of boundaries that are in place and have been in the place for the better part of 100 years in Queensland are here to serve Queensland well into the future is an argument that defies gravity.

What do we know about the voluntary process? It was going to lead to nought, and in those circumstances you get two choices. When you know about a problem—when everyone knows about the problem and when you have the Auditor-General backing it up and Queensland Treasury—in politics you get two choices in life. You can put it in the bottom drawer and hope that it does not go pop on your watch. You can be the person who does not front up to your responsibilities and hope that the issue emerges down the track when you are in another job or it is the other side of politics that is undertaking the task at the time. Or the other choice you can make is this: you can take your role seriously. You can be the person in the government who steps up to the mark to provide the leadership to achieve the change that is needed.

I am happy to answer the questions about why the government is going down this path. I am happy to answer the questions every day of the week about why this absolutely is the right thing to do and the only course of action open to responsible government. I do not want to answer the questions in three or four years time about why we knew all of this and we did not do anything. I do not want to do the interview on ABC on an afternoon when they ask, 'Minister, you knew about this and why did you not act?' I say that I am happy to act—

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: I warn the member for Cunningham.

Mr FRASER: I want to make the point particularly that the Leader of the Opposition tried to suggest that the federal government should be involved in the reform process. The federal government has a view. It has legislated to provide and assist with amalgamations, both voluntary and involuntary. When it comes to amalgamations, the federal National and Liberal parties have a view. Not only do they support it; they are happy to help fund it, because they know that reform needs to happen. They know that reform is vital for the future of Queensland. They are prepared to be the people who know that question.

The most instructive thing about the speaking list tonight is the absence of the opposition Treasury spokesman—the absence of members who have a sound economic knowledge, such as the member for Surfers Paradise and other members on the opposition side who know, and I know, disagree with this position. They are the members on that side of politics who know a little bit more about economics than a voodoo calculator that suggests, 'When it comes to this issue, we're not going to be the people to touch it.'

This government prides itself on its economic management. It prides itself on providing for the future prosperity of Queensland. That means absolutely that, in these circumstances, the future of Queensland is secured only by—

Mr Johnson: Thanks to federal government policy!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Gregory.

Mr FRASER:—stepping in and making sure that we achieve the reform. The final word is that an independent commission is going to draw the boundaries for local government. I contest that it draws the boundaries for the federal election. I say to everybody and to every community around Queensland: a key tenet of democracy is that an independent commission draws the boundaries. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.