



Speech by

Barbara Stone

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

Hansard Thursday, 9 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (8.07 pm): When looking at the issue of reform in local governance some questions that need to be asked are: does the present structure fit today's society and can it adjust to the challenges of the future; do the boundaries reflect communities of interest; and are those councils viable and sustainable units? The report by the Local Government Reform Commission, an independent commission, did cover and examine these questions and more.

I would say that the majority of local authorities have responded positively in the past to the changes in their communities. However, we are now starting to see some significant changes that will mean some local authorities will lack the resources to be able to respond positively to those challenges.

The challenges are not going to go away, nor are they going to diminish, and therefore local government needs a strategy that will reform it to ensure that they are viable, reflective communities of interest and that they have the economies of scale that will provide the resources expected by communities. Many have attested that most councils have performed these functions in the past with great success—a claim I will support. However, the increasing expectations of residents, ratepayers, businesses and workers will be unmet by those councils that are already operating at their fullest capacities under the current local government boundaries.

This problem needs to be addressed now and not when it becomes too late. That is exactly what the state government is doing. A concern that has been expressed is the possibility that the plan to create a Sunshine Coast council will result in decisions that go against the best interests of the preservation of Noosa's most significant areas. If the jewels of Noosa are to be maintained for the benefit of all Queenslanders, all Australians and, most importantly, for future generations then adequate protection must be provided. This will be done through state government legislation.

Speaking of Noosa, I want to correct the statement made by the member for Noosa. Firstly, as a ratepayer and resident of Logan City, to say that this bill does not affect me is incorrect. Secondly, council divisions within the electorate of Springwood will be changed due to the expansion of Logan City, and so once again I must correct the member for Noosa.

I now want to refer specifically to the changes for Logan City. The report of the Local Government Reform Commission confirms that while Queensland is the engine room for economic growth of the nation Logan City is the engine room for urban development in south-east Queensland. The report rightly identified that an expanded Logan City Council area will allow for a new council to plan appropriately for the population growth that is forecast for the Pacific Motorway, Mount Lindesay and Logan Motorway corridors. The feedback I received from residents was that they wanted very little change to the current boundaries, and I am pleased that the commission took notice of the council submission which basically reflected this message. The changes that have been made are manageable and sensible. The recommendation from the commission also demonstrates that in Logan City's short life it has developed into a strong and sustainable city and recognises that it is ready to take on the economic and population growth challenges of the future.

I believe the new areas of Beenleigh and Northern Beaudesert are unique identities and have a strong sense of history that adds another flavour to Logan City's natural resources. I also believe that this uniqueness and strong history does not need to be lost in the expansion. Instead, it should be embraced and enhanced when formulating future planning. Currently, there is a debate in the local media on a change of name for the city. While I do not have any suggestions for a new name—and I personally do not even have a desire for a name change—what I do want is for more Logan people to get out there and shout about the fact that Logan City has an enormous amount of positive work being performed. It has an extremely high community spirit and participation rate. Logan City is a great place to live, work and play. It will not matter what name you give a city if all you do is promote negativity. Changing the name does not change the image being portrayed. We need to embrace those councillors who are proud of their community and proud to positively promote their city. As I said before, Beenleigh has always had a very strong identity, no matter what city or shire it belonged to. I have no doubt that this will never change—not because of any name change or boundary change but because the people of Beenleigh know how important it is to promote their area in a positive and proud manner, something which they have always done.

I now want to refer to an article from the *Albert and Logan News* titled 'Logan—where to now?' It says—

Logan City Council has expanded. But what does all this mean and how will it take place?

It continues—

Logan City Council is committed to ensuring that transition to a larger city next year occurs as smoothly as possible.

The article says that CEO Chris Rose—

... stressed it would be 'business as usual' in the three affected councils up to the March 15, 2008 local government election, when the newly elected council would formally come into existence.

'Between now and then, council will undertake a great deal of work to determine how the existing Logan City and the relevant northern suburbs of Gold Coast and Beaudesert Shire will be brought together as a new community' ...

He then went on to answer some key questions that have been put to him by residents, and certainly the community does have a lot of questions which need to be answered. These are the questions contained in the article. It asked—

Will my rates change?

Once the new council is elected on March 15, 2008, it will begin a budget process. This process will ultimately determine rates for the expanded city. These rates will be introduced for the 2008/2009 financial year. Existing rating arrangements will remain in place until the new budget is handed down.

It continues—

Will projects planned for my area still go ahead?

The Queensland Government has given a directive that all projects committed in existing council budgets are to be delivered.

It continues—

Will I still have a local councillor?

The Queensland Government has agreed to Logan's submission for divisional representation for the 12 councillors who will be elected on March 15, 2008. Proposed internal boundaries will be advertised by the Queensland Electoral Commission. Public submissions will be invited and considered.

It continues—

What will happen to council staff?

The Queensland Government has guaranteed staff job security for three years from the local government election on March 15, 2008. Some staff from Gold Coast City Council and Beaudesert Shire Council will be transferred to the new Logan Council as part of the transition process. The number and selection process for these staff have not yet been determined.

How can I stay informed on the progress of preparing for the 'new' council that will come into effect on March 15, 2008?

You can monitor the reform on the Logan City Council's website ...

I seek leave to table that article.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Copy of article from the *Albert and Logan News* dated 10 August 2007 titled 'Logan—where to now?'

Ms STONE: I believe that the changes that were recommended certainly are good outcomes for Logan City and for its future. I just want to support what the member for Redlands said with regard to the Redland Shire Council submission. It wanted to take Logan East into its boundaries. I believe the commission got that right and we do not have any connectivity with that area. So I believe, as I said, it got it right with the recommendations it has made.

We must also take into consideration when debating this bill that the commission sought public consultation and received tens of thousands of submissions from Queenslanders from all over the state. From its investigations and public submissions, the commission did not change 36 western Queensland

councils and was sensible and practical in its recommendations for amalgamation. Consider this: the structure of local government has changed very little over the past 100 years. Our nation and society have changed significantly. It is easy to see why the government is implementing local government reforms. If we are serious about planning for the future, then we must have a strong local government structure. The changes reflected in this bill are positive steps towards securing the relevance and viability of the third tier of government in Queensland. That is why I support this bill and commend it to the House.