



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (6.05 pm): As the former minister for local government and planning during the last term of the Beattie government, I would like to make a couple of points. Over the past three years local government was very well consulted. During my term in that office, there was no bigger topic or one more often talked about than the future of local government. Local governments themselves recognised that change was upon them. They knew that it had occurred in other states of Australia. Indeed, they were fond of talking about how it had been unceremoniously imposed upon local governments in many other states of Australia, and that they wanted to find the way forward themselves. That was the climate in which—and my compliments to the LGAQ—the Triple S program was developed. It was wisely called Size, Shape and Sustainability. I give the LGAQ credit; those are the exactly the right words.

Tonight the opposition makes a mischief as though this is just about finances and the financial management of councils. Yes, it is about that, but it is also about very important issues that come under the heading of Size, Shape and Sustainability. It is about the 1,200 councillors, many of whom are part-timers and who have other jobs. Those people have to travel huge distances in western Queensland, but they have no time and little ability to find the time to study regional planning, strategic planning and integrated planning acts. That is why some western councils in particular have had trouble even getting people to stand for local government. This is about areas where a city has grown, the community of interest has changed and the rate base is in a surrounding country shire. Therefore, the city shire is going steadily broke trying to provide major facilities.

Those and many other issues two years ago led local government itself to take the lead—and a fine lead it was—sit down at the table and talk about Size, Shape, and Sustainability.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I have already warned you. You may wish to go to the State of Origin tonight, but if you continue with that behaviour, you will be out of the House shortly.

Ms BOYLE: What happened has been a disappointment to very many fine and courageous mayors, as it certainly has been to me. Our worst fears were realised, which were that the naysayers would win out. Initially, there was tremendous enthusiasm for the Triple S program. Groups of councils in regional areas sat down together to talk turkey. Some of the mayors were brave and forward looking. They were prepared to talk seriously about a change for the future, about doing things in a new way and about regionalisation. The naysayers hid their heads in the sand and took a no-change position. In the end, they slowed down the process to a snail's pace.

That is why it became necessary for the present minister for local government to step in and say, 'Enough!' Local governments were not succeeding at the process. They asked for a chance to find their own way forward. They were given that chance, financial resources and advice, but due to the naysayers they were unable to find a way forward. Therefore, it is right and appropriate that the government has established a very wise panel. That wise panel will show us the way forward.

At the moment the naysayers are grabbing the publicity. I can tell the House that I know of some 20 to 30 mayors of non-Indigenous councils of Queensland who have the gumption to say publicly that change is necessary and that change is right. They are on the train that is leaving the station. That is the situation: in terms of local government reform, the train is leaving the station. Some are standing on the platform with opposition members, waving placards and going nowhere.

I am very proud of the stance that the new Minister for Local Government and Planning has taken. I support him absolutely in this direction.