



Speech by

**Evan Moorhead**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MOORHEAD** (Waterford—ALP) (5.53 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. This bill is not just important but essential reform to the local government regime in Queensland. Local government is an extremely important part of our system of government and our state's economy. Local government is charged with some of the most important functions of government, none less important than town planning and development approval. They are responsible for the planning and management of our local communities. As well, local government provides the day-to-day services which keep our communities running such as local roads maintenance and local rubbish collection. This bill will ensure greater accountability and transparency in Queensland local government. Local government is an important custodian of public funds and public trust. It is important that our community has faith in our institutions of government—all levels of government.

A key part of this reform is to ensure that local government adopt many of the standards and electoral processes applying to state government elections. This bill will ensure that voters will be aware of candidates who are actually part of a group and are not misled by candidates branding themselves as Independents. This bill will ensure that candidates will not be able to hide donations for campaigning. What is important in elections is that everyone accepts that the process is fair and above board. If people accept the process is fair, the legitimacy of the elected member of council is assured, even if it is not the person they may have voted for.

While I do not want to go into the reasons behind the CMC inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election, whether we agree or disagree with its report, the report did raise serious questions about the electoral process for local government and led to many electors losing confidence in some members of the Gold Coast City Council. Whether the election is fair or not is only half the issue. The important issue is whether the election is perceived to be fair. This bill will for the first time introduce a caretaker period to local government. This will ensure that incumbent candidates will not be able to use their positions to make undemocratic and unaccountable decisions binding future governments.

Before I turn to the amendments moved by the minister, I would like to raise some important matters that are not included in this bill but that I hope will be considered as part of the review of the Local Government Act that has been foreshadowed. The first issue I would like to raise is the undemocratic and unaccountable divisional funds process. Local councillors are allocated money to spend as they wish in their own wards. I am concerned that it is difficult to reconcile this practice with the obligation under the Local Government Act for councillors to act on behalf of the whole city. While many of these projects may be important, they should be a decision of the council and prioritised across the city. We should be very careful to ensure that these ward funds are not spent on politically motivated projects rather than on those projects which are in the interests of the greater council community. These funds also provide incumbent candidates with an unfair advantage in council campaigns.

The second issue is the relationship between councillors and the officers of the council. The current system provides limited powers for councillors to require information and briefings and little accountability for council officers. I think there needs to be a review of the accountability and control relationship between

council and its officers. It is important that those who are elected are in control of and accountable for the actions of council.

I would like to move on to clause 4 of the bill and the amendment moved by the minister. This amendment will see the establishment of the Local Government Reform Commission. Its purpose is to take over the structural reform of local government from the voluntary Size, Shape and Sustainability program. I had great hopes for the Size, Shape and Sustainability program.

My electorate encompasses parts of the Logan and the Gold Coast city councils and borders the Beaudesert Shire Council. I thought this was a great opportunity for these councils to look at shared service arrangements that would remove the requirement for border changes. They could look at changes to ensure that borders are rational and logical and that they support communities of interest and support the delivery of important services. But, unfortunately, this process is not one that all councils were prepared to follow through with. Some councils were enthusiastic, usually to take over areas from other councils. However, no council was prepared to make the hard decision to change their borders, particularly if it were to excise areas to another local government. But these councils were also not prepared to discuss the important issue of resource sharing.

In my area one of the big issues facing local councils is that of waste storage facilities. Redland Shire Council is currently running out of waste facilities. Logan City Council will run out of waste facilities in the next five years. Beaudesert Shire Council has a significant amount of waste storage capacity. These councils could not agree on a way to share those resources amongst themselves.

Because councils were not willing to participate in this voluntary process and make the hard decisions, the state government was forced to make the hard decision to establish the LGRC. Councils were given ample opportunity to participate in the Triple S process. Councils that were not prepared to make the decisions for themselves will have to accept the outcome of the LGRC process.

I am proud to represent the northern tip of the Gold Coast and the southern end of Logan. One of the central elements of my electorate is the Logan River, the border between Logan City Council and the Gold Coast City Council. The area of the Gold Coast that I represent—Beenleigh, Holmview, Edens Landing, Bethania and Waterford—was up until 1995 part of the Albert Shire Council that was merged into the now Gold Coast City Council. I will be strongly encouraging local residents to participate in the Local Government Reform Commission process and to have their views heard and I will also be making a submission on the issue of the Logan and Gold Coast border. My view is that the Logan River is a clear and appropriate border for the two local government areas. It is a hard border between two very distinctive communities. Beenleigh is an independent community that up until 1995 was the head of the Albert Shire Council. As well, communities to the south of Beenleigh identify as part of the Beenleigh district and any move of the border southwards would only create divided communities.

I was very interested to hear the tarot-reading prophecies of the member for Robina and former Albert shire mayor, Ray Stevens, suggesting a new city based on Beenleigh. I do not know where he gets this from. I am sure it is not from the previous member for Robina and one of the eminent representatives on the LGRC. Regardless of where it comes from, I am sure the people of Beenleigh would be happy, but whether it is logical is another matter. What the opposition has misunderstood in this whole debate is that the purpose of this process is ensuring that there is no preconceived outcome. This process will ensure that reasonable and logical considerations inform boundaries rather than historical anachronisms. As I have said, I think the LGRC is a visionary reform process that will ensure local government boundaries are rational and efficient and will ensure that ratepayers get value for money well into the future. However, it is also important that local residents take this opportunity to have their say and contribute to this valuable process. I congratulate the minister on this difficult decision. In my view it is the right decision. I commend the bill to the House.