



Speech by

# Fiona Simpson

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.59 pm): I rise to support the motion of the Leader of the Opposition, which is a positive motion about the future for local government in Queensland. Despite the lies of this state Labor government, the National-Liberal coalition has a plan for the future of local government.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Maroochydore to desist from using unparliamentary language. I ask her to withdraw.

**Miss SIMPSON:** It was not a personal reflection.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I am asking you to withdraw the word 'lies', which is an unparliamentary term.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw. This Labor government has deliberately contorted and misconstrued the truth. It has acted in a way that is deceitful. It has abused the trust of the people.

The way forward for local government is very much the blueprint that the state opposition has put on the table. It is that councils go to the next local government election in March 2008 on their present boundaries; that the Size, Shape and Sustainability process be reinstated, including a new regional representative commission to oversee its completion during the next council term; and that referendums of affected local government areas be held to allow the people to accept or reject the recommendations of the commission.

What the state National-Liberal coalition has put on the table is a cooperative model. It is a democratic model. It is a way to get a sustainable outcome that respects the differences between communities, that understands that one size does not fit all and that definitely does not believe that a forced amalgamation process, which is supposed to be completed within three months, is the right way to go.

If we look at what has occurred in other states, the research is quite telling. This morning I referred to some aspects of that, but I would like to quote examples from other states. Forced council amalgamations have not delivered the magic bullet. They have not delivered the outcomes that this government continues to lie about. In this state we need to see a supportive and interactive process that respects the rights of these communities.

It really upsets me when I get calls from around the state, as do my colleagues, from people who are distressed about the potential job losses from their communities. This Labor government will not give a commitment that jobs will not be lost from communities. We need to understand that if jobs are lost from communities, there are flow-on impacts on health services, schools and many other services.

I received a call from a distressed woman in the Hughenden area who said, 'If we lose these services, I hate to think about the potential for suicides in our community.'

**Government members:** Oh!

**A government member:** You're sick.

**Miss SIMPSON:** The backbenchers of the Labor Party do not understand the distress of the people who are calling us. Those people understand that if local jobs are lost, there is that potential. Those are not my words, but those people do not have a voice in this place because this government has ripped away their chance to have a say about their boundaries through a democratic process. They deserve to have that voice.

Let us look at why this issue has been rushed. There is no evidence to support the need for it to be rushed. The necessity for this to be rushed is based on a complete lie from the government. There is no evidence, other than the political agenda. They do not want this issue to get mixed up with the looming federal government election. There is no rush. You do not get a good outcome when (1) you force it; (2) you lie to the people about why you are doing it; and (3) you rush the process.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Maroochydore to desist from using the word 'lie'. I ask you to withdraw it.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw. This government has deliberately and deceitfully misled the people.

A review published in 2005 by the Financial Sustainability Review Board of South Australia into the financial viability of local government in that state concluded—

... fewer, larger councils are not the instant or easy fix that many would like to believe, especially in non-metropolitan areas dominated by the tyranny of distance and other impediments.

... amalgamation brings with it significant costs and often exaggerated benefits and there are many intermediate forms of cooperation/integration among councils, with amalgamation being the most extreme (and confronting) form of integration.

In a paper titled 'Governance in rural communities: The case of Victoria', Kevin O'Toole and Neil Burdess stated—

Amalgamation to larger rural municipalities resulted in the loss of local government offices from many small rural Victorian towns, and now they are administered from the largest or most accessible population centre within the new rural municipalities.

And they went on.

We are talking about areas becoming depopulated because of the loss of services as a result of forced council amalgamations. Why does this government not trust the people to have a say? Why is it rushing the issue? Because it has a political agenda, not one about financial sustainability!

Time expired.