



Speech by

**Ian Rickuss**

**MEMBER FOR LOCKYER**

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL**

**Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—NPA) (10.13 pm): I rise to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. I am very disappointed with this bill. I do not know whether the minister or government members actually read the report because if they did they would have seen that its aim was supposedly to make councils stronger. The report says that the Beaudesert Scenic Rim council would be financially weaker. Three hundred workers will not be required. Logan City does not require those extra workers; it has said that in the paper. Beaudesert will not require the workers because of the loss of ratepayers from its shire. The way this process has been conducted is just crazy. I am disappointed that the minister did not actually read that report in relation to Beaudesert and understand that. If the aim was to make councils stronger, how is making the councils weaker going to achieve that aim? Beaudesert has lost 30,000 people and increased its area by 50 per cent. It is just crazy. I cannot understand this.

The democratic process has been rushed. The minister was actually sending letters out to councils in my area saying they could start the amalgamation process at the same time as he was preparing this bill. I cannot understand why there was such a big rush. As everyone has said, these councils have been in place for over 100 years and they have worked very well. If amalgamation is so successful, why is Beenleigh being deamalgamated again out of the Gold Coast City Council? Beenleigh was in its own shire until the fifties. It then went into the Albert shire and then the Gold Coast City Council. It is now going into the Logan City Council. What have we succeeded in doing? We have only to look at history to see that it does not actually work.

What cost-benefit studies have been done to show that there will be benefits from this process? Have there been any cost-benefit studies? Can honourable members imagine major companies conducting amalgamations of this size without undertaking any cost-benefit studies? People talk about these shires being strong enough to deal with the mining companies. Four of these still relatively small councils taking on BHP Billiton? We can imagine how much stronger they are going to be! BHP Billiton would buy and sell most of the shires out in central Queensland. It is fairytale stuff. It is not going to give councils any extra clout or benefit.

Most of the councils are working very well together. I represent two full shires and three other part-shires in Laidley, Gatton, Ipswich, Esk and Beaudesert. Laidley and Gatton shires are a fairly good fit. They will fit together fairly well. It is a bit like some of the doughnut shires that fit together in some areas; they do make sense. They were just about to start talking about the amalgamation process. Gatton is a bit larger in area and a little bit larger in population.

**Mr Shine:** How much of Esk have you got?

**Mr RICKUSS:** Not much. I have a bit. I have Coominya. The Esk shire is a small area of my electorate.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** That is right; the family of the member opposite will have to vote for me soon. The Esk shire has a small area. There was talk of amalgamating Esk into part of the Laidley shire, but it never came to fruition. Esk and Kilcoy have actually amalgamated. That shire will now be weaker because,

unfortunately, Kilcoy was in a weak financial position and Esk was just starting to improve its financial position. Now those two shires have been made weaker because of the amalgamation. It will not help them at all.

I represent part of the Beaudesert shire down in the Flagstone-Greenbank area. That is now going to go into the Logan shire. Unfortunately, even some of the politicians who represent those areas do not live in those areas. It is just a shame that that sort of thing is going to occur. Now they are going to be disfranchised by the move with the councils as well. No cost-benefit analysis has been done into this process. It has been rushed. It would have been better if the process had been allowed to go through at a reasonable pace.

I am also concerned about the lack of divisions. Some of my councils had meetings about divisions, although they could not get consensus on it. As a member of parliament, I have received a lot more complaints from councils that are undivided, particularly where the councillors are only part-time. They are supposed to look after the whole area. Every councillor is to look after all of the area but at times the reality is that no councillor looks after any area. That becomes a problem in the undivided shires. Even after Gatton and Laidley are amalgamated, each councillor—and there will be six—will still represent fewer than 3,000 voters. So I would imagine they would still be part-time positions. I cannot see how that is going to really benefit that area.

I am extremely disappointed that 300 council workers from the Beaudesert shire will actually lose their jobs. The minister stated on page 2 of his second reading speech that Beaudesert and Boonah will become more sustainable. How will they become more sustainable? He stated on page 5 that council workers will not lose their jobs; only elected officials and CEOs will be affected by the reforms contained in the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill.

What will happen to the 300 workers in Beaudesert? I keep harping on it. Unfortunately this government does not really care about the workers. It is plain to see that it is not interested. It is all PR and spin on that side of the House. Those opposite do not really care about the workers. It is all PR and spin from over there. This would not have happened if they cared. It is all PR and spin.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** The member should go and talk to the council workers in Beaudesert. I invite the member to talk to the council workers in Beaudesert any time.

**Mr Reeves:** They will keep their jobs.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Some 300 are going to go.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Mansfield is being repetitive.

**Mrs Smith** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** I take the interjection from the member for Woodridge. Logan City Council has said they do not want the extra workers.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Member for Lockyer, do you mind speaking through the chair. I have already said to the member for Mansfield that he is being repetitive with his interjections. Can you keep on going.

**Mr RICKUSS:** I will take the interjection from the member for Woodridge. Logan City Council has said they do not want the extra workers. Some 300 people will be surplus to requirements. Can members imagine council workers who live in Rathdowney going to Logan. It is a two-hour drive to Logan. Why would they want to do that? That is the sort of thing that the member for Aspley was talking about before.

**Mr Seeney:** They don't understand.

**Mr RICKUSS:** They have not got a clue.

**Mr Seeney:** Just not interested.

**Mr RICKUSS:** No. Unfortunately we have a weak shire in Kilcoy and an improving shire in Esk so they have decided to amalgamate them. Now we will have two weak shires joined. This is a real problem. There is no real sense to this whole process.

As I mentioned before, the Laidley and Gatton councillors will only have 3,000 voters each. The shire will still be too small to have full-time councillors. So this will be an undivided shire that covers an area that is bigger than the area covered by most members on the other side of the chamber. The councillors will struggle to drive the hundreds of kilometres from one end of the shire to the other. It will be a battle for part-time councillors.

I turn now to the transitional local committees, the TLCs. I cannot fathom the benefit of the transitional local committees. In March we are going to have a bigger elected council. What is the committee supposed to do? Surely the two elected councils are the ones that should be organising the transition. What is the benefit of having a local committee. It is creating another level of bureaucracy. The new council elected in March will be able to overturn all of its decisions. What is the point of the transitional

committee? It is just something else so that the government can say that it is not its fault that it did not work; it is the TLCs fault. It can say that the transitional committee did not do a good enough job.

**Mr Johnson:** Is the TLC the Trades and Labour Council?

**Mr RICKUSS:** That is what it is going to be—the Trades and Labour Council committee. The Trades and Labour Council has never been able to run anything. They sent petrol stations broke in Australia. It is the only group in Australia that could ever send a petrol company broke. How good is that? Now the TLC is going to run the councils.

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** That is right. It could not even run a petrol station. It is a shame it never got into pubs because it would have sent them broke as well.

**Ms Nolan:** It means tender loving care over here.

**Mr RICKUSS:** I think TLC stands for a total lack of care. That is what it will be. I feel that there are going to be problems with councils that are not divided. Part-time councillors struggle at times to cover large areas of country.

I am really concerned about the fact that there was no cost-benefit analysis done of the whole process. The member for Toowoomba South mentioned the NLIS tags. How many other situations like that will occur across the state? There are little things that are reliant on the shires that are there—

**Mr Reeves:** They'll be fixed.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Yes, but how much is it going to cost? That is what I want to know.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** But this is supposed to save us. I have a word of warning for the councils that are being amalgamated. I think that they will have to tread very carefully with their bureaucrats. Unfortunately, some of the bureaucrats will feel disfranchised and disadvantaged. They will have to manage that situation very well. It is a bit of a shame that the democratic right of the councils has been suppressed so much so that there cannot be a real transition. The process could have been a lot smoother than the rush job that has been put in place by this government.

As the member for Toowoomba South said, we have a minute's silence for the Singapore drug lords but we cannot exercise the democratic right to vote on council amalgamations. I cannot believe the hypocrisy of those on the other side of the chamber. They will not let people vote on whether they want to be in another council.

I honestly hope that there are a number of mayors around the state who take the government on. I would like to see the government send in the administrators. How many administrators are those opposite going to be able to find on 1 December if all these councils decide to do this on 1 December? Over the Christmas holidays how are they going to run all these councils? It is going to be ridiculous. What will happen to all the administration staff in the councils?

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** I do not think that there will be enough union officials to be in the TLCs. They will be total loss committees if union officials are involved.

**An opposition member:** They will truck them in.

**Mr RICKUSS:** The real problem in a lot of areas is that they will not have two or three union representatives to make up the committee.

**Mr Johnson:** Dean Michael might come over and be the coordinator.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Dean Michael might come up and be the coordinator. I take that interjection from the member for Gregory.

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Apparently he is not very useful down in Tasmania anymore.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lockyer, you are wandering a bit.

**Mr RICKUSS:** It is the interjections.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I know you are taking on the interjections very well. If you want to go back to the topic that would be good.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Unfortunately this government has trampled the democratic rights of a lot of Queenslanders in this process. It has been unfair. The time frames have been unrealistic. The divisions are unrealistic. The costs will have blown out of all proportions. There will be very little benefit to the state government. It is a shame that this bill will be rammed through tonight.