



Speech by

Jack Dempsey

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Thursday, 9 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (1.26 am): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. To have a true amalgamation, we need openness, transparency, consultation, respect, decency, the courage to listen to the people of Queensland and a process of unity. The people of Queensland do not need forced amalgamations that go directly against the true spirit of this parliament. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Many councils have done nothing wrong, are financially stable and have worked hard to give their young citizens a bright future and a special cultural identity to the place in which they were born and raised.

This government states it is a government assisting our future citizens, but they forget the first lessons we teach our children are trust and truth, and how can we trust this government if it does not involve the people and their opinions?

These councils are now being forced to give up all that they have worked for through a process forced onto them. I have even heard one government member here today justify forced amalgamation due to climate change and that this person thinks that there will be no job losses.

No investigation, no study—just a feeling, and this is the type of thought process that has been involved in this forced and unnecessary fearful decision. Fines of over \$1100 and legislation to repress the voice of the people is not the Australian way and is not what local people have given in blood, sweat and tears and copious volunteer hours to see thrown away.

The signs and symbols of these small communities and the identities and social fabric of these communities will now disappear with the flick of a pen. These social fabrics are entwined into the spirit of the people that blanket this vast land of Queensland in a unique way to make Queenslanders what they are today.

True blue Queenslanders that love their identity will not be pushed aside by a dictatorial Labor government that has forgotten about the working-class person and the rights of all Queenslanders, not a chosen few.

The Size, Shape and Sustainability process which the Bundaberg City Council and many other councils had embraced was taken away without consultation. The SSS process had been supported by the Bundaberg City Council and both sides of state parliament.

The Bundaberg community was already involved in their own amalgamation debate and was moving forward in a very positive manner. Bundaberg is a very proud and democratic community and do not appreciate being taken for granted through a forced and rushed process with representation taken out of their hands.

The Bundaberg community is very resourceful and was well on the way to amalgamation because they are hardworking, community-minded citizens who see the benefits, but now know there is no other option but to accept this outcome without true participation in the process.

We have also seen other councils embrace amalgamation in the past and we would have seen them in the future as these local representatives have the interest of their community members at heart and believe in partnerships and cooperation. Competition is not a negative aspect of true growth and prosperity, but conformity and annihilation is.

The fact that there are three union representatives on each transition committee does not represent a balanced view of the community. I believe unions should not be abused to act as a fear of not conforming to this state Labor government. People do not like to be told what to do or be pushed to the side and their thoughts not taken into account.

If we follow this state government's lead we may as well conform to Aldous Huxley's novel "A Brave New World" and live without individualism and be controlled by the state.

In our modern society, community members do not need extra stress and fear added to their lives. They need consultation and confidence in governments being there to help and listen to their constituents.

Fears to a person's job security by this state Labor government are unnecessary and reflect the uncaring nature where we see this government respond quicker to press statements and financial controls ahead of people's rights.

If we keep taking the local out of community we will eventually put more responsibilities onto government bureaucratic departments. Government departments already have enough interference in people's lives and, by reducing local government representation, citizens will hand over their freedoms to Labor bureaucrats—bureaucrats that cannot even manage their own state government departments.

We have had unprecedented protests in petitions and demonstrations against this decision, and the train of democracy is coming from the yards, and it is the voice of the people of Queensland who want to be heard. Governments should never restrict the voice of the people they represent.

To justify one's actions by fraudulent and misleading means is to defraud and be disrespectful, and this cash grab by this government through its self-righteous ideology is a sad reflection that this state is heading into bad debt at a time when this nation is experiencing its greatest prosperity.

This state government states that these new supercouncil governments will now be taken seriously and be able to bargain with this government and large mining companies. This comment identifies the contempt this Labor state government has for local councils.

If we apply this same argument to state governments then when will we see states amalgamating to get a bigger, better deal. The sad fact is that people's democratic rights are being taken away to pay for these so-called better deals.

Family values and community values are not represented by dollar values but they are observed when we see people pulling together when the times are tough because they have a common community interest.

This government is saying to the people of Queensland that they want super regional councils and to do this they are willing to give up on democracy and take away Queenslanders' right to free speech.

The democratic rights and convictions of the people of Queensland to have a say in their future are symbolised by the women and children of rural Queensland that travelled on a bus for 24 hours to speak to this government and it is represented in the words of Theodore Roosevelt when he said:

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat."

Let Queenslanders have their say.