



Speech by

Hon. Kerry Shine

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard Thursday, 9 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Hon. KG SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (10.28 pm): Before I say the comments that I have prepared, might I just pose a question to the honourable member for Lockyer. He raised the question of Kilcoy and Esk and said that Kilcoy is weak and joining it with Esk will make the new entity weaker as well. I am just wondering what his solution would have been for Kilcoy. He would have let it what—die by itself?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Excuse me, Leader of the Opposition and shadow minister for local government. I think there is some rapport here. You have got faith in the member for Lockyer.

Mr SHINE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very pleased that the Premier made the announcement earlier tonight in terms of what I think was a shameful application and a misuse of the courts in order to prevent debate on this very important topic being carried out in this parliament tonight. That injunction proceeding was dismissed with costs against the applicant, and that is a very appropriate result and a result important for the democratic process that we regard very highly.

I am proud to be a member of a government that takes the role of local government so seriously. The government is determined to ensure that local governments are sustainable and viable. Unsustainable and unviable councils threaten jobs and the communities they are supposed to serve. I strongly supported the government's decision to appoint an independent expert commission comprising people from all parties. I welcomed the appointment of former local government ministers Terry Mackenroth and Di McCauley and former Liberal Party leader Bob Quinn. Di McCauley was of course a National Party minister. She was also a very well-respected member for Callide.

Many of the western shires will remain unchanged, as we know. A number of others will amalgamate as per the commission's recommendations. Strong, sustainable and viable councils will best guarantee job security, future growth and prosperity. These communities are of course the lifeblood of rural Queensland. The best way to support these communities is to ensure that they have strong, sustainable and viable councils. As the member for Toowoomba North, I supported the proposal for the Crows Nest and Rosalie shires to merge. Crows Nest and Rosalie shires took the Triple S program seriously—one of only four out of all of the councils to do so in the entire state. I took the trouble to write a submission to the commission supporting a merging of the Crows Nest and Rosalie shires. I do not know whether too many members opposite took the time to write any submissions to the commission, let alone to support—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SHINE: So those opposite failed to write any? Such was their interest in the process! While I am disappointed that the commission did not support the proposal, I am pleased it was considered. I can understand the rationale of the Toowoomba Regional Council that was recommended by the commission. The job now is for all councils and the community to work together to ensure that the Toowoomba Regional Council works and it works in the best interests of the region.

I want to refer to the comments by Crows Nest Mayor Geoff Patch in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* last week where he said on behalf of his council—

Our attitude is to look for the positives and get on with the job of working with the seven other local authorities. Our ability to focus on the big picture and work together cooperatively will be the key to ensuring a successful transition.

Members opposite should take notice of Mayor Patch. He also said—

We believe we owe it to our residents to embrace change by building a strong regional government that will be poised to take advantage of the considerable growth and economic opportunities. It is also important that the new regional council continues to deliver locally based services.

I also note the comment of Jondaryan Shire Council and prominent National Party member Peter Taylor on the front page of the *Toowoomba Chronicle* today where he says—

Politics are being played on all sides. We don't want to be squeezed by the state and federal governments.

The Toowoomba Regional Council is an amalgamation of Toowoomba city, Cambooya, Clifton, Jondaryan, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Crows Nest and Rosalie shires. Last week the local government minister and I met with local mayors and councils to discuss the Toowoomba Regional Council, as we did with representatives of the workers. Two key issues that arose out of that meeting were divided versus undivided and the name of the regional council. It is important to note that, where two or more councils have been amalgamated and these councils share concerns regarding the adopted name, a different name will be accepted if supported by unanimous submission from the councils.

The Local Government Association of Queensland issued a media statement yesterday which claimed that—

By amalgamating particular local councils, the state government has found a way to skew the new redistribution to bring about a more favourable outcome, despite massive population growth since the last redistribution in 1999.

This statement is nonsense. It is egregiously stupid and it is monumentally defamatory. The LGAQ ignores the independence of the Queensland Electoral Commission and it misrepresents the requirements for regular redistributions of state boundaries under Queensland's electoral laws. In May Executive Council approved the appointment of the three-member committee to oversee the redistribution review of Queensland's electoral boundaries. Former Supreme Court judge and Queensland's first Integrity Commissioner the Hon. Alan Demack AO is the chairman of the committee. The other committee members are Electoral Commissioner David Kerslake and director-general Rachel Hunter. I urge the LGAQ to correct its false public statement. I urge the LGAQ to withdraw its attack on the independence of the Queensland Electoral Commission, a senior public servant and a former Supreme Court judge.