



Speech by

**Hon. Kevin Lingard**

**MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT**

Hansard Thursday, 15 November 2007

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION (INDIGENOUS REGIONAL COUNCILS) AMENDMENT BILL; LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. KR LINGARD** (Beaudesert—NPA) (3.32 pm): Personally, I hope very, very sincerely that what the government is doing in the Torres Strait islands and the northern peninsula works out for the people of those areas. I now realise that it is more than 30 years ago that I went and lived in the Torres Strait islands as an administrator. I enjoyed the company and the life of those magnificent areas. When I went there in 1975 what was happening on the northern peninsula is exactly what the government is now promoting. Adikuiam Adidi was the leader. Whilst everyone thought that it would work, unfortunately, it did not work. Similarly with the Torres Strait islands, having a central council is not a new idea; it is an old idea. As the member for Cook would know, unfortunately, that also failed.

I have heard the member for Cook speak passionately here today and I have also heard the two members I travelled with to the Torres Strait islands speak passionately. I know they are passionate about their ideas. One thing that always happened in these particular communities is that, whilst you might have a very definite idea as a person who goes to the islands or the northern peninsula about what is necessary, if the people of those areas are not supportive then the idea has absolutely no hope of being a success. Whilst I appreciate the member for Cook's very many definite ideas—and whilst I appreciate that he has worked with Steve Bredhauer in the northern areas and that he has been there for a long time as well—I would have to say to the member for Cook that the people of the Torres Strait islands themselves are not supportive of what is happening. Until they are supportive it is going to be very, very difficult for these ideas to grab and to be successful.

I heard the member for Cook's attitude about whether it was the leaders. Yes, certainly the leaders are opposed, but the old elders are also opposed. Sometimes we do not understand their culture completely. One thing we do have to understand about their culture is that if their leaders and their elders are not supporting it then the whole community will not support it. Somehow or other if this government is going to make this work, it has to go back to the islands and convince the islanders and their leaders that this is going to be a success. I have heard the member for Cook say that the NPA is supportive of it. For those other people who do not understand what the NPA—

**Mr O'Brien:** Seisia.

**Mr LINGARD:** No, I was not even going to mention Seisia. What we have to realise is that those five communities, which were set up by Pat Colloran in the early sixties and seventies, were a modern attempt to bring Aboriginal and Islander communities together. It was also a place to bring the people of Seisia when their island flooded and they would be successful there. It was an idea to build an agricultural community. When I was there, every child from the Torres Strait islands came to Bamaga for education. It was the centre of education. But all of that has failed. There is no agricultural section there now at Bamaga and in the NPA. The high school is not considered to be the only school that they can go to because they go to all other parts of Queensland. Those ideas have failed. Whilst I was amazed at the success of

Bamaga as it stands now, I was concerned that still they do not accept that their five communities must be brought back in as one.

**Mr O'Brien:** Yes, they do. That's not true.

**Mr LINGARD:** They are happy to say, 'Yes, we will support it because we believe this is what the government is doing. We have to go this way and we are going to get something out of it.'

**Mr O'Brien:** They had a community meeting and supported it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Cook, you have already spoken.

**Mr LINGARD:** They are happy to say, 'If this is what the government is going to push and if you as a coalition are saying that you will take it back, we have to accept that this is obviously the government that will be in power for a long time because of the fact of its numbers, so we will go with the present government.' That is their attitude but it is a negative attitude; it is not a positive attitude. So the government has a lot of work to do if it is going to have the NPA and the Torres Strait island communities on side.

People here have to appreciate the difference between the islands—you have to live there for a long time, as the member for Cook said. We still think that, because Murray Island and Darnley Island are next to each other and the eastern islands and Yorke and Stephen are fairly close to each other, their culture should be the same and the people should be the same. They are not the same. They are entirely different. Similarly with the NPA, one would think that with an Aboriginal community and an island community living together they would have assimilated and intermarried, but they have not. There are people at New Mapoon who want to move back to old Mapoon and all of that sort of movement. Certainly within the Torres Strait islands the government has to appreciate, as members on this side have been saying here today, that the people are not accepting this. Their cultures are so different that they do not want to give up control to a central body.

I appreciate the member for Cook's concerns. I know exactly what he is talking about in relation to Daunan Island and the people who owe money. There are people on Yam Island who also owed money back in the old days simply because the culture is that when a very important person dies a lot of people come to the funeral and that is paid for by someone—they do not pay for it themselves. Generally they take the money out of community funds and they use it.

There are other reasons why they do it. They accept that they have made mistakes and that the money must be controlled from a central body. We accept that and that is why we have said that the joint local government central financial management and accountability system will be brought back. They accepted that. We did not find one person who did not accept that and I was quite amazed that they accepted the financial management. It is simply because in a control of councils there are many columns. Unfortunately I think sometimes the island people go to the bottom line and see how much money is there and say, 'Yes, there is enough money to run a magnificent funeral', and they forget that there are specific columns. Then when they need money for roads that money has been taken for something else. It needs to be centrally controlled and we accept that.

The unfortunate thing is that the CDEP programs have been successful. I say again to the member for Cook that I was amazed at how beautiful and fantastic the islands of Sue, Coconut and York are. The people who went with me were amazed as well. I tell people down here that they would be amazed at how clean and beautiful these communities are. I had sometimes to step into a bucket of water on the bottom step, wipe my feet on the next step where a towel was and then step up into the dwelling. We saw people on Coconut Island raking their private allotments making sure there were no leaves there. That is how beautiful and tidy some of their houses are. People down here could not appreciate it. What we are seeing is some of the other communities in Queensland which are nowhere near what these Torres Strait islands are. They have to be admired for the way they look after their islands. We also have to admire the way that some of the elders have run the CDEP programs. It is their own personal idea, but they say that if a person does not do this today they will not get any money. They run it very strictly within their islands. If we take their power away from them, as I believe we are—I heard the member for Cook say it will be returned—we are taking away a massive power that these councils have.

**Mr O'Brien** interjected.

**Mr LINGARD:** Give me a chance. Similarly, when it comes to control of the houses, if we do not allow the elders to control who gets the next house then an amazing power has been taken away from those people. I heard the member for Cook speaking positively about DOGITs. I was on Bob Katter's committee in 1983-84 where we had a definite idea that we should give the land of the islands back to the people. People have to realise that in giving land back to, we will say, York Islanders, there are a lot of people who have left York Island because they have been upwardly mobile and have come to live in our own community. If we start giving land away from York Islanders then these people who have moved away would say, 'Hey, that is our family land. We are entitled to that land.' So we could not just give it back to

those people living on it at present, we have to give it back to the councils and say, 'You distribute that land, because you know—because of where such-and-such tree is and where such-and-such stone is—who owns that land.' That is why we failed. We gave it all back until we hit the Murray Island land case and the argument in the Mabo case which was, 'You can't give away that land because it belonged to my ancestors.' Mabo was successful. It was not an argument against the Queensland government; it was an argument about the fact that we had given to it the councils and the councils were giving it away to someone who Mabo said should not be given it because he wanted it. As people who have been to the magnificent Murray Island know, it is a long, long way round to Mabo's block. It is not a significant block.

We believe that the control of DOGIT and land tenure should come back to the people themselves. What we have said here today is that we believe the cultures of the Torres Strait islands are so strong on the individual islands that to take any of that away from them will be the wrong thing to do. I would hope that in 20 years time I might be able to come back and say that the government has done it well. I would say to the government that at this stage—the member for Cook might argue—it does not have the support of the island councils or the island elders and in the NPA there is a negative attitude which basically says, 'We may as well accept it and try it because the opposition will not be in power for a while. We will go along with the government.' Therefore, we would oppose what is being done with these 17 island councils.