



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (6.19 pm): With this proposal of forced amalgamations in Queensland the Labor government has engaged in the most profound and unbelievable attack on democracy and local representation in Queensland and, as a consequence, decentralisation. We hear this government constantly talking about the need to decentralise Queensland and to treat all of our regions equally. It is not only a good idea; it is an essential idea to ensure that this state is able to develop and address properly the growth problems, particularly in south-east Queensland today.

The consequence of this proposal by this Labor government, using the so-called independent boundaries reform commission as a stalking horse, is that we will see the destruction of regional Queensland. This will be the greatest destruction of decentralisation ever in the state of Queensland.

We just heard the member for Mount Isa stand up and wax lyrical about how good it will be for her electorate when the Cloncurry council is absorbed into Mount Isa.

Mrs Kiernan: Who said that?

Mr SPRINGBORG: It is going to happen and the member knows that it is going to happen. They are the things that are going to happen. If they are not going to happen, what is the point in actually doing this to start with?

We know tonight from the Premier's comments, from the minister's comments and from other government members' comments that this whole process is about deflection and deception. It is about deflecting the heat off themselves, or trying to, by blaming a so-called independent local government commission which is given a very tight framework in which to work. It has very tight and constrained marching orders by way of its terms of reference.

The government is trying to hide what is Labor's hell-bent, long-term policy of forced amalgamations behind that particular commission. The government knows as well as we do that the commission has very limited room to move. If the member for Mount Isa thinks this is a great idea, she should look at what happened in the northern part of her electorate some years ago when a shire based on Camooweal agreed to merge and was given all sorts of assurances. What exists there now? Very little of what existed there before. This is an indication of what will happen in the future. The jobs promises are worth absolutely nothing. They are not worth the paper they are written on.

Consider this for a moment, and I use the member for Mount Isa as an example. Let us say that those workers in Cloncurry are given the option to move to Mount Isa. They are given a two-year stay of execution to start. They have to sell their house—which is going to be at depreciated values following the government's economic demoralisation and destruction of Cloncurry—at what will be the going rate and then move to Mount Isa and buy a house at whatever the local valuation is there. That will be the situation right around the state of Queensland in places like Inglewood, in places like Millmerran, in places like Tara. That is what we have from this government.

Earlier today I asked the Premier a question: does the Premier apply the same standards of accounting to his own government in the area of valuing and depreciating fixed non-current assets? He

could not answer that question. But this is something that this government has applied to councils across Queensland and it is diminishing their budget bottom line. Imagine if this government was forced to value historic assets in this state—whether they be the Princess Alexandra Hospital, the RBH, the Gateway Bridge, the south-east Queensland freeway or a plethora of buildings which this government has as infrastructure—at modern-day valuations and then depreciate them and take them off its budget bottom line. At modern-day valuations, this would amount to hundreds of billions, if not trillions, of dollars which, in depreciation, would take billions of dollars off the government's budget bottom line and put it well and truly in the red.

That is what the government is doing with its dodgy accounting figures, and it has no shame. If the government is so confident that this is the right way to use the accrual accounting mechanism, then the government should apply it to itself and see where it will get. It will get itself into a state of paper insolvency overnight. It is unfair to judge this situation, which is apples and oranges, as apples and apples. If this Premier is so sure about the overwhelming support of the people of Queensland, as he dishonestly contended the other day, then he should put it to a referendum. That is the only way it can be proved. He will not put it to a referendum because he is telling pork pies again, as he always does.