



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 2) 2007: DISALLOWANCE MOTION

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (8.31 pm): The process that this government used to make local government changes was wrong. The process was wrong. Despite what the member for Cook said, people were disfranchised. They were left with a sense of utter hopelessness. They had never encountered legislation like this before, through which this government has removed the rights of the community to have an effective say. Yes, they could have a say but it was not effective. They did not have a chance to make a difference to what the government had proposed. They felt disfranchised and they still do.

However, I do not understand this disallowance motion either. I do not understand the logic behind it. The process of using a regulation to change legislation is very poor process indeed. It is not supported by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. For years the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has been trying to minimise this type of process in the legislative bills that are put to this House. During my time on that committee, the committee always criticised this process as being the poorest way of changing legislation and protecting the rights and liberties of the community.

Having said that, I cannot support a disallowance motion that effectively says that I support the threats that this government made towards local government in relation to their right to hold polls. With all due respect to the National Party and the Liberal Party and whilst I can understand that they find the use of regulation to change legislation abhorrent, which it is, I am certainly not going to go on the record in support of a disallowance motion that effectively smacks local government in the mouth again, because the government has already done it enough.

Local governments in Queensland have operated well for many years. They are not without fault, and neither is the state government nor the federal government. But they were duly elected by the community. They answered to the community and at the next local authority election, if they did the job poorly and enough people in the community were upset with them, they will be gone. It is the same with state elections. I am sorry to say this to the minister and others in the government, but I hope that this does bite the government at the next election because unless the community is effectively able to say to a government of any persuasion, 'When you disfranchise us, it will have an effect', the government will become even more arrogant than it is now.

There are those in my communities at Calliope and Gladstone including the mayor of Gladstone who are in favour of the amalgamations, but many in the community are opposed to the process. The community is angry about the fact that we sat in this chamber while government members said, 'Of course they will have a say; the commission's recommendations will come back here', yet they had no say about who was on the commission. Our local councils were working on Size, Shape and Sustainability in good faith. Until the morning of the statements by the Premier and the local government minister, they had no idea that what they were doing was wrong.

The government can slam local councils all it likes, but they were doing a good job. They were acting in good faith. They are not perfect. It is not that they did not make mistakes, but they tried flaming

hard. They do not pay themselves a huge amount of money, but the government will have to after this because it has already acknowledged that councillors will have to be paid as full-time employees with an income similar to that of a backbencher or a minister. This is not about saving any money.

The process of threatening and intimidating councils with section 159ZY of the act was wrong. It always was wrong and it always will be wrong, according to me and according to my community. However, I will not support a disallowance motion that effectively means that I have to support the dribble that was in this local government act.