



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

Hansard Thursday, 9 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women) (1.18 am): I rise to support the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill before the House. In doing so I recognise that building stronger communities across Queensland by reforming local government boundaries and structures is difficult and challenging work. It is not easy for the Beattie government and it is certainly particularly hard for the many communities across Queensland that are affected by change. But when faced with tough decisions in responding to the challenges of our state's growing population, whether it be planning for water infrastructure, health services or climate change, the government has a strong track record of never shirking from its responsibilities.

In the electorate of Albert, which I have the privilege of representing in this House, the recommendation by the independent Local Government Reform Commission means that the area north of the Albert River will be amalgamated with Logan City Council. For many residents living in Beenleigh and its western suburbs, this news has been received with a range of reactions, including surprise, disappointment and anger. I thank the many people who have contacted me at my electorate office to express their concerns at the boundary changes. In fact over the past six years, no other issue has so raised the passion of my constituents. I seek leave to have the rest of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

In listening to my constituents, two issues of particular concern quickly became evident.

Firstly, residents told me the Commission's recommendation on undivided divisions for Logan City Council meant that our area would be unfairly represented in the new regional council.

Secondly, given the comments in local media from some Gold Coast City councillors, residents held real concerns that Gold Coast Council would attempt to abandon their promised budget allocations and services.

In following up on their concerns with the Premier and the Minister for Local Government, and later with further meetings with Mayors Ron Clark and Graham Able, I have been pleased to report back to my constituents that the Logan City Council election in March 2008 will be on divisional boundaries, which is a real win for Beenleigh residents.

I would also like to thank the Minister for responding so quickly to the concerns I raised with him about the continuation of services to northern Gold Coast residents during the transition period.

My neighbour the Member for Waterford and I are significantly reassured by Minister Fraser's statement to this Parliament where he said that Gold Coast City Council has an obligation to ensure that it sticks to its budget, sticks to the program of works that it has, and ensure that the money it has gained from my constituents in rates is invested appropriately as it has decided.

In acknowledging the disappointment and concerns of many of my constituents, I also recognise their resilience and positive attitude when it comes to adapting to change.

We have done it before and we will do it again.

Over the past six years the electorate of Albert, after decades of neglect by the National Party, has at long last been receiving the quality and quantity of services it deserves.

Whether it be road upgrades, extra bus services, new police beats at Jacobs Well, Logan Village and Ormeau, or the latest new state primary school at Coomera North, the Beattie Government will continue to deliver for the people of Albert who call one of the fastest growing areas of all of Australia home.

As Tourism Minister, I've noted particularly the claims from some from Noosa and Port Douglas about the effect the council mergers is likely to have on their tourism industries.

In extensive consultation with leaders from our tourism industry, I am confident that the Noosa and Port Douglas communities have nothing to fear from being part of larger regional councils.

Both domestic and international tourists are important to sustainable jobs in these regions.

There is no research which indicates that visitors make decisions on holiday destinations based on which council they are in.

The tourism product and supportive infrastructure, easy air access, marketing campaigns, and attractive and exciting experiences are all issues of vital importance in attracting more tourists to Queensland.

With the Government's intention to introduce iconic legislation to protect the natural assets of the destinations, we will ensure the very things that make Noosa and Port Douglas so unique and so attractive to tourists to be protected.

The Government recognises the unique natural attraction of Queensland's tourist destinations, and is committed to working with local government and the tourism industry to make sure they are not damaged by overdevelopment.

The formation of larger councils will allow them to pool resources and market themselves as a destination, a region, rather than separate entities fighting for the same tourist dollar.

I encourage all councils and regional tourist organisations to focus on the significant benefits there will be for the tourism industry from regional councils.

The formation of larger councils will help the industry streamline campaigns designed to attract tourists, giving them more bang for their marketing buck.

It will also support the development and promotion of regional and themed tourist experiences to attract visitors.

More coordinated destination marketing is a key initiative of our \$48 million, 10-year Queensland Tourism Strategy.

Under the QTS a Local Government Tourism Strategy will be developed.

We work closely with councils on the provision of tourism infrastructure, to increase awareness of the industry within local government and aligning tourism opportunities with local government planning.

Queensland's tourism industry provides about 140,000 jobs throughout our regions, and a lot of them are on the Sunshine Coast and in Far North Queensland.

Mr Speaker, a strong and sustainable tourism industry relies on strong and efficient local government—that's exactly what amalgamated regional councils will deliver.

I commend the bill to the House.