



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.43 pm): Very often in this place we have many robust debates and very occasionally something comes up that is historic and will be remembered by many people for years to come. Tonight will go down as a night of shame. We saw an arrogant tirade tonight from the Premier and the arrogance that he displayed when he laughed out loud and said, 'I'll be here for 100 years; you'll never shift me.' That is the sort of arrogance that the people of Queensland hate, and that is the sort of arrogance that we have seen bubble to the surface over the last 10 months.

This is the fourth evil trampling of the rights of people by this government in recent months. We saw it just last year when the poor victims of Dr Patel were told at a public meeting that the government was trying to bring him back when they knew that they had stopped him coming back four weeks before. We saw the trampling of the people of Gympie and the Mary Valley when the Premier knew he was seen as the person who did not build dams. So he purposely proposed that dam knowing he would have protest meetings and he wanted to convey to the public of south-east Queensland—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Toowoomba South—

**Mr HORAN:** My speech tonight, Mr Speaker, is about what the people in my electorate feel about the trampling of their democratic rights and the fact that they and the people of the Darling Downs have not had a chance.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Can you take your seat for a moment. I am going to let you expound those values in a moment. Can I indicate to those members who may be wondering about the member for Toowoomba South mentioning the extradition of Dr Patel that the legal advice given to me as the Speaker is that that is fine in terms of sub judice as long as it does not go to the heart of the matter that is involved in the case. Therefore, I have allowed the member for Toowoomba South to speak in that way.

**Mr HORAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. So we see these constant examples culminating in what is happening tonight on this night of shame. Members on this side of the House have been reasonable in talking about shires where there was need for adjustment and where there were some logical, sensible, practical opportunities. Perhaps the government could look at the issues of some of the doughnut shires where there is a town surrounded by another shire. Some of those have been talked about and debated for some years. But when we look at the Size, Shape and Sustainability report we see that this government has failed to work with local government in a cooperative way to get to some timetables. What has this local government minister and the one before him been doing? They said that the process just lingered on and did not get anywhere. It is because this government just meandered along through its local government ministers until this year it got to the point where it wanted to trample everybody's rights and give nobody a say.

One of the most precious things for the people of Queensland is being able to have some representation and to be able to have a say. How many times did we hear those terms used in this parliament? If we look at the Darling Downs where eight shires have been brought into one, we had a harmonious community where we liked and appreciated each other. Whether it is business, sport or social, Toowoomba and the downs have always been like that. But it has been the towns of the downs and the

shires and those magnificent people over generations who have been councillors, leaders and mayors. We have 64 councillors and mayors.

I have heard people speak in this debate in a derogatory way about people as though they go in there to put their snouts in a trough. Try taking on a job as a mayor or a councillor in some of those Darling Downs shires and working long hours, doing it for your community, doing it because your family or yourself have lived there for generations, doing it because you believe in the area, doing it because you want to promote Clifton, Pittsworth, Cambooya, Millmerran, Oakey, the Rosalie shire and Crows Nest, whose residents are proud of Highfields. These councillors promote their areas.

Oakey has been promoted. They have streetscaped the street. They talk about it, they promote it, they build it up and they try to get industry. Those councillors are part of Oakey as a part of the Jondaryan shire. They are part of Glenvale, closer in towards Toowoomba. The shire of Crows Nest, which had been moving in a practical way to amalgamate with the shire of Rosalie, is proud not only of Crows Nest but also of the blooming and blossoming suburb of Highfields. They are always there talking it up. Go to the cultural centre and you will always run into the mayor or the councillors, whatever functions are on. They support it, and the people of Highfields love it. They love it because of the way the shire looks after them and the way that they have representation. They have some eight councillors in that area which they can go to.

Now we are going to have this huge area with eight councillors who may well be mostly from the Toowoomba area because of the sheer weight of numbers. That is going to mean that the representation of all those people on the downs is going to be seriously and massively diminished. Are councillors from Toowoomba going to go out to functions at Millmerran or Yarraman? The shire will go 40 kilometres south-west of Millmerran, close to Inglewood. The shire will go up to Yarraman in the Burnett. The new shire goes within three kilometres of Dalby because the Jondaryan shire goes that close to Dalby. Will they go 80 kilometres out to do the roadworks? It is just ridiculous.

I hear people talk about their patch that they know of and understand. If you know and understand the Darling Downs and you understand the towns of the downs and you understand their integration with Toowoomba, then you will understand the huge hurt and damage that has happened in this process.

A large part of the hurt has been due to the way in which it has happened. I had a fellow from our area ring me; he is a fellow whom I really admire. His family is represented on one of the war memorials in the south-west of the city for World War I, World War II and the Korean War. He is very upset, and he rang to talk to me about the way this process has happened. He said that his family fought for democracy so at least we could have a say. I think that is what is upsetting people. As much as there are mistakes, as much as it has been rushed in and as much as there are those who are against it or for it, everybody feels the government has been undemocratic, heavy-handed and arrogant because of the way this has been handled.

When the government wanted to build Lang Park, Labor members took some time and talked to people. They canvassed various ideas and floated the ideas for probably a year or more until they felt it was right to move with the whole process. But this has been bang, right between the eyes. That is how it has happened, and people do not like it. I can tell the government that there will be a lingering hatred over what has happened in this circumstance.

How do we define the heart and soul of townships or communities? It is a difficult thing, isn't it, but we all know the heart and soul of the areas that we come from. We can say in a disparaging way that the boundaries were drawn 110 or 150 years ago, but they still work, they are still appropriate and they are still vibrant shires being promoted by people who live there and care for them. Councillors are there to talk to the people about the verges of the road being slashed, a new little sports field, help for the show society, the annual Anzac Day ceremony and all the different things that go to making these communities. That is the heart and soul of these places.

I love Toowoomba, but other people like to move out to Highfields or they like to live at Pittsworth, Cambooya and all those sorts of places because that has the village atmosphere they want. They like the shire. We do not hear complaints about those shires. There are shires on the downs that have no debt. Millmerran in particular has no debt, Clifton and Cambooya have very little if any debt, and then at the top of the tree there is Toowoomba City Council with the bulk of the debt. We will end up with a shire where the city of Toowoomba has about 63 to 65 per cent of the population and about 83 or 84 per cent of the debt, so that debt will have to be absorbed by other parts of this new proposed regional shire.

One of the arguments for this has been improved costs and efficiency. I can tell this parliament that if any single council on the Darling Downs or in Queensland wasted hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, like this Queensland government has wasted money on the recycled water pipeline, they would be sacked. The government is paying double the price for gravel and aggregate at certain times. Stuff is being put in the wrong place and they are being told, 'Don't shift it, just bring some more trucks.' People are being offered hundreds of thousands of dollars for jobs to entice them away from elsewhere. Trenches are being put in the wrong place. I can tell a litany of stories about the cost.

To get the five millimetre gravel that is required will take every quarry between Grafton and Bundaberg working at 120 per cent capacity for 12 months, and they will still not supply the amount of gravel that is required. It is an El Dorado for people and it is known everywhere. If we talk to people around south-east Queensland, we hear that they all want to get on it.

The government is wasting money and is being forced to pay these prices because of this obscene haste. It panicked because there was no planning and no proper water infrastructure in place going back to when the Goss government got in and the Wolffdene Dam was closed down. Because of all that, we are now paying probably twice as much. When the project was only five to 10 per cent complete, the government announced another \$680 million increase, from \$1.8 billion to about \$2.4 billion. So let us not talk about financial efficiencies in councils, when this state government is wasting hundreds of millions of dollars in this way on these projects. As I said, any council that did that would be sacked.

I want to talk about another measure of efficiency—development approvals. Development approvals have to be done well and accurately in the modern world of approvals, and they also should be done in a timely fashion. If we look at this new regional council with Toowoomba as the centrepiece, approvals for relatively straightforward developments by developers like my predecessor—and everybody knows that the former member for Toowoomba South is a major developer who has been doing high-standard developments for nearly 50 years in the city—can take six months or more. I know of one that has taken 10 months and it will probably go another 12 months at least. In the adjoining shire of Crows Nest, those same developments are properly assessed in a matter of weeks. That is the difference between a small shire and a large shire. So it is not true that big is necessarily better.

I want to raise a couple of issues that relate to my shadow portfolio of primary industries, and I am pleased that the minister for primary industries is here tonight. I have mentioned this in previous debates. The mayor is the first point of call for the DPI leadership when there is a biosecurity problem, a major exercise or an outbreak of something. They pick up the phone and go straight to the mayors; that is where the local leadership and the local knowledge is. Stock inspectors are not around like they used to be. The mayor is the first point of call. On the Darling Downs, which is the centre of Queensland for feedlots, intensive industries and agriculture, that is gone under this legislation. There will be none of those mayors out there. There will be some council bureaucrats in the city somewhere but all of that which is so important will be lost.

The other issue I want to mention is the National Livestock Identification System. This was recently introduced into Australia at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Those electronic ear tags cost about \$4.50 each, and how many million head of cattle have we got in Queensland? The primary industries minister might help me here. We have the bulk of the Australian herd, which is about 27 million, so we probably have some 15 million to 20 million. The code in those electronic ear tags—at \$4.50 each—is the name of the shire.

**Mr Mulherin:** We'll sort it out.

**Mr HORAN:** You'll sort it out! How many million will it cost? If there are 20 million animals at \$4.50 a tag, does the minister have a spare \$90 million? Everyone will have to cut the tags out of every bull, cow, steer and heifer. How are we going to sort that out? With all of the changes to the shires—with some going this way and some going that way—the biosecurity in the Queensland cattle industry will be under an immediate threat because it will not be accurately coded through the ear tag system. In every other state in Australia in every single shire, those electronic tags are coded with the shire. That is just one little example of the problems that will occur. The rush and haste that has been associated with this whole process is disgraceful.

As I said earlier when talking about the boundaries of the proposed Toowoomba Regional Council, there was obviously no thought whatsoever given to amalgamating these eight shires and whether it made any sense to have Yarraman sticking out on a cow's horn into the Burnett or whether it made sense to have those areas way out past Millmerran. There was no thought given to any of that.

I doubt that the 35,000 submissions got read by too many people. People in Queensland genuinely tried to put in a submission thinking it would be of some use. Minds were made up well before this process started. The riding instructions were there, the guidelines, the fences. There was an instruction from the government. It knew what it wanted. I have always regarded Terry Mackenroth as a very able and capable local government minister. I know what Terry's philosophy about amalgamations has always been. He is a pretty strong character. There would be no doubt in my mind that Terry's opinion would carry the day, and that is what we have seen—the whacking together of all these shires with no thought and as a result we have all these other situations occurring.

Now we have the issue of divisions. There has not been agreement on divisions. We could end up with a very sad and tragic situation where there is no representation. Where previously the seven rural shires had 56 representatives who were interested in the area, representation may now all come from Toowoomba. There may be one or two from the country. Who knows how it is going to go. I think it will be a real problem.

Again we had an issue with the new name, as other areas did. People almost threw their hands up in the air and said it was a fait accompli. What is in a name? The name is probably the last vestige that those people had of some form of recognition. The Toowoomba Regional Council is a big mouthful. If it was called Toowoomba and the downs council at least there would be recognition of the two components of this amalgamation—the Darling Downs shires and Toowoomba City itself. It is the term that those who live in the area use—Toowoomba and the downs. It would have given these people some feeling of fairness.

Another issue I want to raise is the disgraceful and dictatorial threat to sack and dismiss these councils. Do members know why they will be sacked? All they are trying to do is get some democracy. The minister wants to sack these good, wonderful, generous Australian citizens—these Queenslanders. Those opposite stood up and gave one minute's silence for a convicted drug runner from Singapore but will not stand up for their own Queensland mayors! That is one of the most disgraceful things I have ever seen in my life. When I think of the good people on the downs—the mayors, the councillors—who want to have a referendum—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr HORAN:** They want to have a referendum so at least they can have their say. What is wrong with that? It will cost Queensland nothing. Can the government not let them have their say? Those opposite would sack them and yet give a minute's silence for a drug runner. Shame on them! It is a shameful night tonight.