



Speech by

## Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

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### LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (5.48 pm): Mr Speaker, before I make my contribution, I indicate that you are absolutely correct: the document is not exactly the same. There is a title page headed 'Financial sustainability reviews—summary of outcomes to date' with a date on it. It is not the same document and that date is very relevant.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** That date is very relevant—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** That date is very relevant because do you know what it does, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Horan:** What absolute nitpicking! Get up and have a decent debate and stop all that childish behaviour!

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

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Member for Gregory! I have indicated that it is not the same document. It is not exactly the same document.

**Mr Hobbs:** Just that one page, Mr Speaker.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Can I say to you it is not the same document. I am not entering into debate about this. I have ruled that it is not the same document and I ask the member for Warrego to consider that, if it is not exactly the same document, he should indicate the difference. I call the Premier.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Of course, let me highlight the date on it, which is 17 January 2007. That is very relevant, because it highlights exactly who provided it to the opposition. It is very relevant. I move the following amendment—

That all words after "Parliament" are deleted and the following words inserted:

"supports the Government's timetable for reform of Local Government across Queensland and notes its confidence in the independent Local Government Reform Commission."

Currently, Queensland has 1,258 councillors, 1,170 mainstream councillors, 79 Aboriginal councillors and 62 Islander councillors. We have 157 councils and at least 41 of them are in a financially vulnerable position. Economically responsible government demands that we move to secure the future of local government. To do otherwise would leave the 37,000 people who are currently employed by councils across Queensland exposed to years of uncertainty.

The opposition is advocating a do-nothing approach, and that is not an option. If there was nothing wrong, why did the councils initiate this process themselves two years ago? They know that there are problems. Their difficulty is that the Local Government Association did not have the intestinal fortitude to face up to the answers that were necessary to solve the problem. We have.

We have set up an independent, transparent process. The Queensland Local Government Reform Commission is chaired by former Electoral Commissioner, Bob Longland—a very distinguished Queenslander. He is supported by six additional commissioners: former local government ministers, Terry Mackenroth and Di McCauley, who are both well regarded by local government; former president of the Queensland Local Government Association, Tom Pyne, who is also well regarded by local government and indeed became the chair of one of the amalgamated councils in northern Queensland, Cairns and Mulgrave; and also the former Queensland Liberal leader and former member of the EARC committee on local government reform, Bob Quinn. The chair of the Queensland Treasury Corporation, Sir Leo Hielscher, will also be a commissioner. As well, former Electoral Commissioner and Director-General of Local Government and Planning, Kevin Yearbury will be an administrative commissioner.

The commission is receiving advice from the Indigenous reference group, which was established recently in Cairns to coordinate the review of Indigenous communities. The reference group will help the commissioner in its consideration of the future structure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils.

The reform commission has been given a strict three-month time frame to make recommendations on amalgamations and boundary changes to the government. But they will use the two years of work that was done under the Triple S program. That work will not be wasted. It will be considered by the commission. It will take into account the special needs and circumstances of each and every community, particularly those in the bush.

The legislative terms of reference provide for the Local Government Reform Commission to have regard to the grouping of like communities of interest to maintain the social fabric and character of communities, options for community representation that reflect the diversity of the state's regions and promote representation of discrete communities. I want to repeat my message to people living in rural and remote communities: do not be led astray by the opposition's scare campaign. We are aware of the important services that local governments offer. We will not forget their needs.

We know that this is a tough process for people who are employed by councils. There will be uncertainty until 1 August when the commission makes its recommendations. That is why we have announced that there will be \$12 million in the next budget to include a staff support package that will ensure that council staff have their jobs protected for two years from March next year. There will be no forced redundancies of council staff. The only people who will be affected in the immediate term are those mayors, councillors, chief executive officers and senior executives of councils who are identified by the Local Government Reform Commission for amalgamation.

Let us remember that Queensland is not unique in this situation. Reform has already occurred interstate. Reforms are underway in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I remind members that submissions to the Local Government Reform Commission close this Friday, 25 May at five o'clock. It is not too late for people to make a submission. The commission reports that, as of yesterday, it has already received 4,211 submissions.

This reform is the most significant change to local government in Queensland since Federation. Those recommendations will be provided to the state government by 1 August.