



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.11 pm): The decision to force councils to amalgamate is one of the greatest attacks on a democratic tier of government ever in Queensland's history. For the past year the majority of local councils have been working to review how best to deliver services to local communities in a process known as Size, Shape and Sustainability. Council had initiated the review and the state government had endorsed it until yesterday when the Premier chose to force amalgamation without any consultation with the primary stakeholders.

The government abolished the SSS process yesterday and decided instead to establish a Queensland Local Government Reform Commission, which will be given a strict three-month deadline to make recommendations on amalgamations and boundary changes. This decision by the state government is centralisation at its worst. Local residents are being denied the opportunity to determine the future of their community. Premier Beattie had laid the foundations where local representation would be removed and rural residents would lose their voice. Our councillors are democratically elected and are the first people most residents approach when they have an issue regarding any level of government. They are well-known, well-respected community members and take their position seriously.

This is dictatorial and does not have the support of the majority of councils in this state. I would like to express concern at the number of council employees whose positions would become redundant as a result of the planned amalgamations. I ask the government whether it will guarantee job security after all of these councils are amalgamated. I am sure that they will be standing up for these workers when these amalgamations do take place.

In my electorate there are nine shire councils—Etheridge, Richmond, Flinders, Dalrymple, Bowen, Peak Downs, Belyando, Jericho and Aramac—and one city council, Charters Towers City Council, which provide wonderful support and representation to their communities. But at present their future is bleak and there is much fear about the future of smaller rural towns that will lose their local representation by being forced to amalgamate with larger councils.

The Premier has already stated that 88 local councils with fewer than 5,000 residents are not sustainable. How could he state that—that 88 local councils with fewer than 5,000 residents are not sustainable. What an antirural government we have. How is the amalgamation of shires going to contribute to the future of our smaller towns? With some towns and some shires more than 100 kilometres apart, there is a risk that the smaller towns will be neglected and deserted. It is with great passion that I vehemently oppose this legislation.