



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.40 pm): On 17 April the Beattie government, with its massive majority, rammed through parliament legislation that forces local councils to amalgamate. It has appointed seven commissioners to draw the boundaries to nine shires in the electorate which I represent and throughout Queensland. This decision is one of the greatest attacks ever on a democratic tier of government, rural communities and the workforce in Queensland's history.

Local councils have been the engine driving Queensland communities, providing that infrastructure, jobs and administration, and local decisions are made through grassroots knowledge. In many towns, councillors are by far the largest employers, and merging local councils will rip the heart out of these rural communities. While the Beattie government has failed in delivering basic services resulting in health, energy and water crises, it is unbelievable that it has the gall to force amalgamations when councils have proven ability to capably deliver both efficiently and in a financially sound way.

There is no need to pursue this path of amalgamations. The state government is trying to create a distraction from its own incompetence. The state government should be working to fix the catastrophes that it has created in this state—the energy crisis, the health crisis and the water crisis. These should be the government's priorities instead of putting its grubby hands onto local government responsibilities which have increased dramatically as local councils endeavour to make up the shortfall—a direct result of this state government's incompetence.

Throughout this whole sordid tale this government, through the lies that it has told, has tried to discredit a perfectly capable and democratically elected tier of government. The Premier claims that 43 per cent of Queensland councils are unsustainable. This has been distorted as it is only 13 per cent, and half of these councils are large councils.

There are a lot of angry people out there. This is not just a beat-up by the Nationals, as the Premier claims. These are workers—workers in orange and yellow uniforms—who are concerned about their jobs. As we saw, those from the township of Richmond travelled 600 kilometres—300 kilometres across dirt roads—because they have seen and they know the devastation that occurred when the Goss government closed the railways. From 1990 through to 1996 we saw 14,000 employees lose their jobs. This is a government that is supposed to represent the workers.

Forced council amalgamations do not need to happen. It has been proven in Victoria and in South Australia that forced council amalgamations do not equal financial viability. We know that forced council amalgamations will cost jobs. There are other important jobs such as—

Time expired.