



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.22 pm): The Community Services Bill is designed to strengthen the processes and consequently the communities that receive funding through the Department of Communities. Many of our smaller communities are reliant on funding from various departments to offer a range of services not otherwise available in the area. These organisations provide services and support for people of all ages in areas such as emergency housing and referrals to and coordinating visits from other services. Many times non-government organisations have felt deserted by the interests of the big city. They believe that the Brisbane based bureaucrats are completely unaware of the drain on community services felt in smaller rural communities. Too often organisations from smaller communities are fighting the larger, more professionally run city organisations for funding from the same pool. Consequently, the needs of smaller communities are overlooked and prioritised as less urgent than the needs of larger communities and therefore the community misses out on the funding and cannot offer a particular service to the community.

The intent of the bill is to provide certainty to these organisations with regard to their funding. This should make the process clearer for those involved and alleviate some of the future financial pressures organisations face on a regular basis to continue the work they do. In rural areas the services offered by NGOs are varied and many. They generally offer information and referrals to other services and work with a range of different departments to assist those in the community who require assistance. They are often underfunded and are continually concerned at the future of their organisation to continue the work they do as their funding is based entirely on government grants. Added to this, the continuing pressure on volunteers to ensure that all reporting and accountability requirements are met can result in people not feeling confident or competent to take on the roles of executives on the committees of non-profit organisations. This results in volunteers becoming burnt out from their contribution and a large turnover of committee members each year. Consequently, there is little continuity from one committee to the next.

It is satisfying—and curiously out of character—that community consultation to ensure that legislation was appropriate and suited the needs of the organisation was undertaken. This ensured that all affected had the chance to deliberate and decide on the possible ramifications the legislation would have on their organisations. The bill is designed to provide greater transparency and certainty about how funding and other assistance can be given to community organisations. Any measures to improve certainty for organisations providing community services in our community is an advantage. The coalition supports the bill as it is vital that the government continues to improve the programs and processes designed to assist those organisations that assist Queenslanders most in need. I commend the bill to the House.