



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

Hansard Thursday, 15 November 2007

---

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION (INDIGENOUS REGIONAL COUNCILS) AMENDMENT BILL; LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.27 pm): The decision to force councils to amalgamate is one of the greatest attacks on a democratic tier of government that has ever occurred in the history of Queensland. The agenda of council amalgamation, which was pushed so avidly by this government, has the potential to—and will—destroy the unique character of small communities. The Torres Strait island communities are not only unique; they are culturally distinct. This legislation does not recognise their individuality and will result in a loss of diversity in the region.

The role of councils is varied and differs from shire to shire. No longer do councils have the sole responsibility of looking after roads, water, buildings, garbage and rates. They have been proactive to ensure the future of their communities and to protect the qualities that differentiate them from surrounding shires. The management and the day-to-day delivery of services requires the input of local people. Councils in the Torres Strait are responsible for far more services in their communities than any other local government in Queensland.

It is fundamentally wrong to assume that the decision made by the external administrators will be accepted, tolerated or respected by local people. Forced amalgamation in these areas will, as in many areas across the state, result in the loss of community leadership, ultimately resulting in the degradation of smaller local communities and services. Smaller local councils contribute to the social, cultural and sporting lives of each and every citizen within the council boundaries. Amalgamations will directly affect the liveability of these communities.

Torres Strait councils were working with the local government department for more than 16 months to investigate and discuss options for the future of their councils and the issues that relate specifically to their communities. This was the Size, Shape and Sustainability process. The model proposed in this legislation has been imposed rather than collaboratively agreed upon and does nothing to recognise the inherent differences between councils. Position appears to be the only determining factor throughout the entire amalgamation process.

Local councils have been the engine driving Queensland communities. They have been providing the infrastructure, the jobs, the administration. Local decisions have been made through local grassroots knowledge. In many communities councils are by far the largest employer and the forced merging of local councils will rip the heart out of not only the communities across Queensland but also the Torres Strait communities. The decision by the state government is centralisation at its worst. Local residents are being denied the opportunity to determine the future of their community.

There are more important issues around Queensland than forcing council amalgamations. As an example, a 75-year-old lady collapsed in Charters Towers and a fire brigade turned up to pick her up. Can you imagine the family of that 75-year-old lady seeing a fire truck come to pick her up! Another example is

that a man severely damaged his leg in a machinery accident. One ambulance turned up, so they had to call the fire department—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** But these are very important issues, Mr Deputy Speaker, that need to be addressed.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! They are not relevant to the bill. I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** When the Premier handed down this decision in April not only could we not believe it but also the backbenches could not believe it. The backbenches could not believe—

**Mr Finn:** Your backbenches?

**Mr KNUTH:** The government backbenches could not believe that such a bad decision and a great attack on the people of Queensland could possibly occur. They could not believe the decision, we could not believe the decision and the people of Queensland could not believe the decision. There are more important issues out there than forcing councils to amalgamate in Queensland.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Charters Towers, I would ask you to direct your speech through the chair and bring your speech back to the bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** I believe that this decision is the wrong decision. This government needs to apologise to Queensland for gutting these communities. I believe that it needs to go back—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Charters Towers, I have warned you twice. Bring your discussion back to the bill or I will sit you down.

**Mr KNUTH:** The government needs to go back to the Torres Strait Islanders and go back to the original process which was Size, Shape and Sustainability and give back the community its say.