



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Thursday, 9 August 2007

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## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IMPLEMENTATION BILL**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (11.07 pm): I take no pleasure in rising to speak on the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill. One by one, the obedient government members have lined up to support the Premier and the local government minister's madness in this bill. They predicate their opinions on a Brisbane model, but that does not work in the regional areas. I was interested to hear the minister for public works, Rob Swarten, talk about a call to, in his words, a Tory councillor to fix water running under his house but that the guy has not turned up yet. I have to tell the House that under the new predicated councils, we will not have councillors who live around the corner; we will have councillors who live 100 kilometres away, and in some cases 200 kilometres away.

**Mr Swarten:** Like local members do now. Like Jim Pearce.

**Mr MALONE:** Local members do not go and fix water pipes. I am sure you, Mr Swarten, do not go and fix water pipes.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr English): Order! Please direct your comments through the chair, member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the reality is that local government is a different form of government to the state government. When those on the other side of the House try to compare the job that we do with that of a councillor, they are completely mistaken. If it is so simplistic that they can use that as an argument, we are in big strife, I have to tell you. We really are in big strife. We have a situation where the pioneer shire and the Mackay City Council were amalgamated when Goss came into government several years ago under the auspices of Kevin Rudd.

The situation was that the Pioneer Shire Council had quite a considerable amount of money and the Mackay City Council was almost broke. The people who live on the extremes of the Pioneer Shire Council, which was a rural council, today are lucky to see a councillor, they are lucky to see a grader, they are lucky to see their potholes fixed. Mackay City Council cannot even fix the potholes in the middle of the city. Guess how much they pay their CEO? We are talking about a reasonably small council compared to what we are talking about under the amalgamated situation. We are talking \$250,000 plus a year for their CEO.

The reality is that under the new Mackay City Council guidelines the Sarina shire and the Mirani shire will be combined with Mackay City. That area will cover north almost to Proserpine—those who know the geography will know how far away that is—south almost to Carmila down the Bruce Highway and west to the Eungella Ranges and even further out than that. It is a huge area. Even with divisions in the shire, some councillors will have to travel 100 kilometres at least to attend to a problem in their shire. The reality is that they will be called out to look at drainage problems and to talk to constituents about barking dogs and roosters crowing in the morning. That is what local government councillors do. If people think they will get the service they are getting currently they are in for a hell of a shock. There is an old saying and it is a very true saying: there is none so blind as those who cannot see. Unfortunately we have a group of nearly 60 members on the other side of this House who cannot see. Robert Mugabe would be right at home in Queensland right now.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr English): Order! That is unparliamentary. Please withdraw.

**Mr MALONE:** Why?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Relating a dictatorship to a democratic debate in a parliament I believe is an affront to the dignity of this chamber. Please withdraw.

**Mr MALONE:** Can I have a ruling on that?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I have just ruled. Please withdraw.

**Mr MALONE:** I withdraw. If this had happened 20 years ago Beattie would have been marching and demonstrating in the streets as he did under Sir Joh when the Springbok tour took place here in Queensland. This legislation is far worse than anything Sir Joh ever did, yet Labor members continue to be critical of his actions. What a joke. At least he had the best interests of Queenslanders at heart, which is more than can be said for those sitting on the other side of the House.

Currently I represent three full shires and three part shires within my electorate. Under the new boundaries I will represent three part shires. To give you some idea of that area, it covers from north of Mackay covering part of Mackay City to 30 kilometres north of Rockhampton and to the boundary of Moranbah. That represents three part shires. It is almost 400 kilometres long and over 300 kilometres wide. How ridiculous is that?

I will give members some examples and these, of course, are not exclusive or fulsome. I will talk about the little township of St Lawrence. St Lawrence is one of the most historic towns in Queensland. It was actually connected to the Adelaide to Darwin telephone line in 1865, and some of the posts that connected that line are still there. There are historic buildings in the town. The administrative centre for the Broadsound Shire Council is based at St Lawrence. I would assume that most members have driven the highway and travelled between Marlborough or Rockhampton and Mackay or Sarina and have seen the sign 'St Lawrence' off to the side of the road. Members would also be aware of the number of accidents that happen in that region. There is a dead region of 200 kilometres between Marlborough and Sarina. There is very little in the way of population and very little in the way of emergency services, except for those that are supplied by the St Lawrence people as volunteers. Most of those volunteers are actually employed by the shire council. The local honorary ambulance driver, who has an ambulance in a small shed in St Lawrence, is actually employed as one of the administrative staff in the council. I have seen that guy work almost all night and have to make a decision whether to fly a helicopter in and land it on the road to get people out of vehicles or out of trucks and be involved with the rural fire brigade as they put out the fires that are caused by some accidents and, of course, help out with extracting people from cars involved in accidents.

As I said, St Lawrence is only a very small town. The school struggles to hold a school population. They have done everything they possibly can to attract people to St Lawrence. It was once a major railway terminus. There is a small recreational area where caravans pull in on a regular basis and stay for a few days which helps create a bit more trade in the centre, particularly for the shop and the pub. If 10 or 15 people were taken out of St Lawrence, such as the administrative staff that will go to Moranbah when the new council comes into effect, it will be a ghost town. Who will supply the emergency services in St Lawrence? Who will look after the thousands of people who travel up and down that highway when there is an accident? Where are the emergency services going to come from? Is the government going to supply a helicopter to fly in the Ambulance Service or the firefighters? Not on your nellie. Those are issues right across my electorate in all the little centres up and down the highway and out through the Pioneer Valley. If members think there can be one councillor looking after 100 kilometres or more, they have rocks in their head.

The other issue, of course, is the services in those small towns. In St Lawrence we have recently had the sale of the Post Office. It is a go-ahead place. The Meteorological Bureau centre is there and gives four-hourly reports into the system. There is a major mail run of about 250 kilometres a day and, of course, the quantity and the critical mass of mail that actually goes through the shire centre makes it all work. The lady who has bought the Post Office is going to go broke. There is no doubt about that. As will the publican.

**A government member:** Why?

**Mr MALONE:** How dumb are you? The reality is that once the critical mass drops, the mail run will not be economical and basically she will lose her trade and the Post Office will close down. As I said, this scenario will be repeated time and time again.

In most of the rural areas—it is a little different in the city—the councillors get paid something like \$20,000. It is obvious that members on the other side of the House have done the calculations. Certainly we have a lot of councillors in Queensland. They do a lot of their work on a voluntary basis. They work with community groups, coastal communities, Landcare people.

**An opposition member:** Most of them pay someone else to run their business.

**Mr MALONE:** That is exactly right. Most of them lose money by actually attending council meetings. I have to admit that there are some councillors in the bigger regional areas who are probably paid a bit

better, but the reality is that those councillors make things happen. I can talk about the two major shires that I have in my area that will be amalgamated with Mackay City, and they are Sarina and Mirani. I have had a fair bit to do with those shires over a long period of time. In Sarina shire we are setting up a skilling centre which is part of the high school. The funds that have been supplied by the education department and the federal government have gone a long way towards setting that facility up with lathes and welders. We have built a beaut shed. We have agriculture. We have goats. We have chooks, and you name it.

The reality is that, had not the council supplied their equipment, their manpower and their plumbers, that would not have happened. There is probably \$3 million worth of assets on that site for which the governments—state and federal—paid about \$1.1 million. Most of that is simply because we had volunteers doing the work and we had the councils stepping in helping out. I am sure that once it goes to Mackay city we will never see a backhoe or grader used on a project such as that again. That is the sad part about it.

It is the same with Mirani shire. They help out. We had a shed built at the high school at Mirani for the Kick-start project. The council and the workers went in, levelled the site, put the sand down and helped lay the concrete. I can imagine the guys from Mackay coming out or authorising off-site work from the council! It is not going to happen. All this is a cost to government. The reality is that it is not getting anything in return for the stupid legislation.

Once we move to the bigger shires, just as the CEOs' pay rises we will see the same with the tribunal; we will see councillors' wages go through the roof. The minister indicated that local members can do the same sort of work and if councillors are expected to do the same sort of work as members of parliament they would expect to get paid the same amount. They will need a car, a fuel card, a laptop, a phone and they will probably need about \$150,000 a year to do it. The government should start adding that up and see how much it is going to save.

Talking about the strength of councils, a lot of responsibility has been passed down to councils without the resources that would normally come with it. We have seen huge issues in terms of waste disposal, environmental issues et cetera that have been passed on to council and the council has not been given any extra funding to enable it to deal with those issues.

The SSS program that was begun almost two years ago was never going to be implemented properly simply because the state government was looking for a change of boundaries. It would not accept that single councils could stand alone, that single councils could be strong enough to do what they had to do on their own. The government was looking for a change of boundaries to achieve a fewer number of councils. It was fairly obvious right from the start that the SSS process was biased towards never being able to reach a conclusion.

I wonder—and others have raised the same issue—how amalgamations can help hospitals in our small communities or emergency services that even now struggle to gain volunteers. How will they help the Auxiliary Fire Service or the Honorary Ambulance Service? I see Michael Kinnane sitting over there. Michael knows exactly what I am talking about.

At the end of August this year Sarina shire will celebrate 100 years. Then a few months after that we will have to pull down the sign that says 'Sarina Shire'. That will be a sad day. We are having a celebration at the end of August for 100 years of the Sarina shire and it is going to be a very sad day to see the shire losing its identity. There have been some great projects in Sarina such as the Sarina Sugar Shed. It would not exist if not for the mayor, who basically travelled all over the world at his own expense to find boilers, milling equipment et cetera to set up a crushing and distilling plant so that the Sugar Shack could get a licence to sell liquor to visitors to the centre.

I am in receipt of an interesting Electoral Commission letter that created a new enrolment. The resident who sent it on to me actually lives in the township of Miriam, which is in the shire of Mirani. His enrolment date was 12 July 2007, and I will table this letter.

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 16 July 2007, from P Ruddick, Divisional Returning Officer, Division of Capricornia (Australian Electoral Commission) to a certain person regarding their application for electoral enrolment.

It indicates that this person lives in Miriam. His federal division is Capricornia, which we would recollect has just changed boundaries. The state district is Mirani and the local government area is Mackay city, remembering that he lives in the Mirani shire. The letter is dated 12 July 2007. Honourable members will recollect that the commission's report was only handed down on the 27th. I will leave them to make their own conclusions. The reality is that, unless that is a typographical error—and I find that hard to believe—the Electoral Commission certainly was well aware of the new boundaries even before the report was handed down. The whole thing is just a farce. If my understanding is correct, the commission only met a very few number of times to actually read something like 35,000 submissions. Quite frankly, it does not add up. It is a total farce.

Councils in my electorate are the very lifeblood of the community. Without those strong councils that I have in my electorate, I am sure there is going to be a degrading of services and of the liveability of those areas. There is a real need to make sure that the residents in those shires have a real say on whether they

want to change boundaries or not. Whatever I can do by hook or by crook I will make sure that the people in my electorate get a chance to say whether they want to be in one shire or another or whether they want to expand it to a bigger shire. They need a say; they have to have a say. It is undemocratic for this government to force through changes to people's lives without giving them a say.