



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 15 April 2008

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (12.21 pm): The local government elections on 15 March represented an important milestone for the Queensland government's reforms which were announced in the middle of last year. It is now important to take a look back at some of the achievements over that time, particularly those achievements associated with ensuring that the industrial relations measures put in place were successful in protecting the entitlements of staff involved in the local government reforms.

On 27 July 2007 the independent Local Government Reform Commission provided recommendations to the Queensland government on the name, class, boundary and electoral arrangements for the new local government areas in Queensland. All local governments were reviewed by the reform commission except the Brisbane City Council. The Queensland government accepted the independent commission's boundary recommendations which reduced the number of councils in Queensland from 157 to 73 on the 15th of March elections. However, it was always mindful of the challenges that this represented not only to the councils and to the residents in the area but also to the staff that would be affected by amalgamating many varying agreements into the newly formed local councils.

In recognition of this, a number of supporting mechanisms were put in place by the state government to ensure that staff member entitlements were protected and that workers were not disadvantaged due to council amalgamations. This was not an easy job and required much expertise to ensure that the industrial framework in place throughout the transition period protected staff benefits and entitlements.

I am pleased to advise that through the mechanisms put in place by the state government a smooth transition of all staff into the new amalgamated councils has occurred without any loss in terms and conditions. This was achieved by a number of committees and legislative mechanisms put in place to facilitate these reforms in consultation with various stakeholders in local government. The lead forum for the statewide issues is the State Transition Committee, which included members from various government departments and also included representatives from unions, the LGAQ, the LGMA and the Aboriginal Local Government Association of Queensland.

This committee approved the Workforce Transition Code of Practice, which provided some certainty and protections for employees. The underlying principles of the code included no forced redundancies for three years; maximise employment security for local government staff; maximise the retention of local government staff; contracts of employment will be honoured; maximise support to staff throughout this transition process; no overall loss of employment across the local government sector; no overall reduction in working conditions; no overall disadvantage to workers; and no forced relocations for 12 months. All apply in conjunction with existing industrial agreements including the rights of workers to access their union in the workplace.

Further protection for employees was provided through the Local Government and Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2008. This legislation will insulate Queensland local government workers from the Liberal Party's WorkChoices legislation until it is fully torn up over the coming months. Whilst the framework for the reforms was provided by the state, local councils were given the task of preparing for the

specifics of the amalgamation based on local issues and considerations. Each new council was required to set up a local transition committee to oversee the period until 15 March. These committees consisted of elected representatives from each amalgamating council and the relevant unions representing the combined workforces.

Unlike those on the other side of the House, who cannot accept a union's legitimate role to represent its members, this government acknowledged that IR for the amalgamating councils was a complex issue that required industrial relations expertise and a consistent approach throughout the process in order to deliver the required outcome for employers and employees. All those involved on the LTCs provided good guidance and knowledge, especially workers' unions on these committees that also provided IR expertise and the necessary consistency over several councils which produced a smooth transition for workers.

The LTCs were required to prepare a transition action plan based on key deliverables and recommendations. All LTCs submitted their TAP to the state and all were approved prior to the changeover day. This crucial achievement will provide clear direction for the new councils. The other important outcome of the LTCs was the fostering of relationships between each of the amalgamating councils and the union representing the workforce. While not all were happy with the initial reform announcements, most got on with the job to ensure success for the new council and protection of staff entitlements. As I said, this was not an easy job and I congratulate those involved on achieving a good outcome for workers and, therefore, for the new amalgamating councils.