



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Thursday, 4 June 2009

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (5.38 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government Bill 2009. This bill is about improving financial efficiency and accountability. There is conflict as a result of forced council amalgamations and I hope that the situation can be improved. Problems have been caused by these new councils being forced together.

There is a cost factor involved. I know that the councils have indicated that it is costing them over \$200 million to implement the process of forced council amalgamations. At the same time, the state government has contributed only \$30 million. That is a big difference.

There are a lot of serious issues that relate to local government such as the large increases in rates. Some rural councils were charging \$800 to \$900 a year. A lot of those smaller communities on the outskirts of towns do not receive the necessities that people in the city receive. Basically, they do not receive the services. Yet under the equalisation process they were forced to pay exactly the same amount in rates as those who live in the city. So they incurred a massive increase in their rates. We should also consider the size of some of these councils. For example, the Tablelands Regional Council covers 60,000 square kilometres, which is the size of Tasmania. Likewise, the Isaac Regional Council covers 60,000 square kilometres. It takes four hours to get from one end to the other of those council areas.

This bill seeks to improve efficiency and financial accountability for effective local government. Part 3 of chapter 3 contains provisions relating to the delivery of road infrastructure. The Herberton to Irvinebank road is a shocking road. On 25 May a minibus rolled on that road and many children were injured. The road is a deathtrap. Virtually every time people use that road they risk life and limb. The road is part of a tourist route. Herberton is one of the oldest towns on the Tablelands. Herberton and Irvinebank were rich tin-mining towns. Every time the council grades that road, after two or three weeks and a little bit of rain rocks appear. Basically, the money that is spent grading that road is a waste. It is a state government road. The state government contracts the council to maintain the road. We should forget about paying hundreds of thousands of dollars each year grading that road. After it rains, the gravel just washes off. It is catastrophic. The state government would be better off spending money sealing the road from Herberton to Irvinebank, once and for all. That way, no money is wasted year in, year out on grading it. Then the council could concentrate on maintaining that road from Irvinebank to Petford. All the council is asking is for that road to be sealed.

The member for Mirani referred to flying foxes. This issue may not relate to the bill, but I believe it does, because it is about improving efficiency in government. So far this year it has cost the Charters Towers Regional Council \$230,000 to chase bats from one tree to another. If councils and the state government could work together properly, rather than chase bats from one place to the other they could find a solution to this problem. It would bring efficiency to councils. The council would have more money to spend on other things. All the council needs is a helicopter to push the bats out. If the state government would allow us to do that, the council would have more money to spend elsewhere. I bring those issues to the attention of the House.