



Speech by

Ted Sorensen

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

Hansard Thursday, 4 June 2009

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (5.33 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government Bill 2009. This bill of 291 pages will replace the previous bill of 1,054 pages. I believe that is a good start. When the Local Government Act 1993 was introduced it was not much bigger, but it grew over the years to the size it is today. Local government is a strange beast, especially the way it interacts with other acts associated with it, especially the Water Act, the Integrated Planning Act and the Environmental Protection Act. One of the biggest problems with the amalgamation of the Fraser Coast City Council was amalgamating the different rates across-the-board. The government has very much underestimated the cost of amalgamation for these local government areas. One only has to see the number of rate rises that have been introduced to make sure that they continue to be financial.

Another area that I believe needs to be looked at is cost shifting from state government down to local government. The other day the transport minister suggested councils should introduce a transport levy. I do not believe that this cost shifting should occur. The Minister for Community Services and Housing suggested in the paper recently that councils should be more responsible for the funding of housing in their area. Local government in the past has been roads, rates and rubbish but it still takes on many responsibilities such as community infrastructure, parks and gardens and foreshore management for those councils that have parks and gardens along the foreshore. One of the difficulties is that the different acts that interact with local government do not recognise the trees on the foreshore as infrastructure. I believe that we should be able to protect those trees on the foreshore as much as any other infrastructure along the foreshore. We see trees falling at Hervey Bay and there is very little that the council can do about it as permits have to be passed through different departments. It would be great if the Local Government Act could look at that.

Recently I had a complaint from a gentleman who brought to my attention that the Ombudsman does not look into some of the corporations under the Local Government Act. I ask that the minister take notice of that complaint. I have not yet ascertained the details surrounding it.

I find clause 155, which states that councillors have to vacate the office upon nominating for another council or the Legislative Assembly, very unnecessary simply because local government is like an apprenticeship into politics. It certainly gave me experience of what residents really want. Some of the ideas from the opposite side of the House are interesting. I believe it is a disadvantage to local and state government that creates a costly by-election if the councillor does not win. That councillor still has the right then to turn around and run for council even if he does not win a seat in a state election. I find that totally unacceptable. If one is a state or local government employee it is recognised that they resign on the day before the election. I hope that we can solve some of those issues in the act. Thank you very much.