



**Amalgamation Adjournment Debate Speech
GLEN ELMES**

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard, 9 August 2007

Mr ELMES (Noosa--Lib) (5.53 pm): I rise to speak against the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007. This bill represents tyranny in its operation and the destruction of Noosa in its performance. What is worse is that the handling of this bill and the entire process of amalgamations represents a pattern of deceit by the Premier and this government. I say tyranny because despite overwhelming opposition from within Noosa from citizens and businesses, opposition from both sides of politics, opposition from all manner of high places, Mr Beattie and his minister refuse to see reason. They refuse to listen to the people of Noosa. They are hell-bent on imposing their amalgamations through any means necessary.

I say a pattern of deceit because we have had a number of events where the minister for local government specifically set out to gag the people of Noosa and all Queenslanders over this issue, starting with the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 which took away the requirement of a vote before amending any council boundaries to the Local Government Reform Implementation Bill 2007 which takes away any assistance people may receive from the Australian Electoral Commission to the leaked email from the deputy executive director of the Department of Emergency Services dictating that SES volunteers were banned from protesting outside this place on Friday of last week.

As if this pattern of deceit is not enough, the minister today threatened that any council that calls a poll on the amalgamations would be immediately dismissed without notice and would have administrators appointed. This pattern of deceit flows right through this government and taints all of its actions and brings this parliament into dishonour.

The removal of the Noosa Shire Council will result in the destruction of all we hold dear. The Noosa council has stood in the way of developers' bulldozers and it has kept our home a shining example for the rest of the state and for the rest of the country. By taking away our council and replacing it with one charged to handle Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa this government puts in jeopardy the beauty and environmental jewel of Noosa.

Belatedly the Premier has recognised that Noosa is special and has suggested special legislation to protect Noosa and Port Douglas as iconic locations. But what standing does this legislation have to protect us when only a few short weeks ago another piece of his legislation took away our right to vote. So why is Noosa worth special consideration here? Compared to the legacy of the Noosa area and the efforts that have been expended to preserve the environment and keep Noosa special, the legacy of this Beattie government stands in stark contrast. The legacy of this government is sickening. Three former Beattie government ministers are now in jail or under investigation.

But now the Beattie government has reached a new low. Not only is it prepared to sully its own representation but it has directly attacked Queenslanders by refusing them access to democracy. We see here that the Beattie government is ruling Queensland without regard for the impact on Queenslanders. The Beattie government was not even listening when thousands upon thousands of Queenslanders from across the state made their way to this place to protest against this bill. Yet they are not given the respect of a decent response from the Premier or his minister. We all heard him today label giving a vote to people affected by this bill pointless. Then his minister followed up by introducing amendments which take away the only form of assistance which has been given to ordinary Queenslanders by the federal government.

The doctrine of democracy is a lofty concept and one which is often claimed by members in this place when speaking against government actions. But here we see that I am not just talking about hot air and rhetoric. The actions of this government are deliberately designed to restrict the voice of the people. This government is openly violating the main concept of democracy which gives people a voice.

For the purposes of the record I would like to discuss who will be supporting this bill today and the violation of the democratic process. We in this place heard earlier this week that the Deputy Premier does not care about this bill and its affect on rural Queenslanders because her house is in Brisbane and will not be affected. So following on from her remarks I would like to record who in the government will not be affected and who, similar to the Deputy Premier, simply does not care. Let me read the roll of dishonour to members. It is: Mount Ommaney, Mrs Attwood; Aspley, Ms Barry; Brisbane Central, the Premier; Chatsworth, Mr Bombolas; Capalaba, Mr Choi; Broadwater, Ms Croft; Sandgate, Ms Darling; Redlands, Mr English; Greenslopes, Mr Fenlon; Yeerongpilly, Mr Finn; Mount Coot-tha, Mr Fraser, the minister; Gaven, Mr Gray; Kallangur, Mr Hayward; Stafford, Mr Hinchliffe; Albert, Ms Keech; Southport, Mr Lawlor; Indooroopilly, Mr Lee; Lytton, Mr Lucas; Logan, Mr Mickel; Bundamba, Mrs Miller; Waterford, Mr Moorhead; Inala, Ms Palaszczuk; Bulimba, Mr Purcell; Mansfield, Mr Reeves; Mudgeeraba, Mrs Reilly; Nudgee, Mr Roberts; Stretton, Mr Robertson; Woodridge, Mrs Scott; Burleigh, Mrs Smith; Mount Gravatt, Ms Spence; Springwood, Ms Stone; Algester, Ms Struthers; Pumicestone, Mrs Sullivan; Redcliffe, Ms van Litsenburg; Cleveland, Mr Weightman; Murrumba, Mr Wells; and Ferny Grove, Mr Wilson.

That is the list of members who will make sure that the people of Queensland get this dishonest piece of legislation before this parliament rises tonight. All of these people simply do not and will not care about rural Queensland. Their homes and their way of life are not going to be affected by these amalgamations, so they simply do not care. I put the challenge to all members who I have just mentioned: prove me wrong if you will and cross the floor--

Ms BARRY: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. Even though I am the member for Aspley, I live in the Pine Rivers shire within my electorate and it will be affected by these amalgamations. He is misleading the House.

Mr ELMES: Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to the member voting with the coalition when the time comes.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): There is no point of order.

Mr ELMES: Of course not.

Mr Springborg: Good try though.

Mr ELMES: It was a good try. To prove me wrong, I invite the member to cross the floor when the vote takes place later on. If these people do not cross the floor they are showing their disrespect to the mums and dads, the kids and the grandparents of regional Queensland and it is following on from the deceit of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the minister for local government. My message to all of the members I mentioned is that history will judge them. History will record that a vote was taken today and that the elected representatives of Queensland chose not to care about who would suffer from their decision. History will record a pattern of deceit shown by the Beattie government today. When history looks back, I want people to remember that Labor was callous, not caring. It was happy to continue its contempt of rural Queensland. Let history record those words because they aptly describe this government's treatment of all Queenslanders displayed most flagrantly in this situation.

But Mr Beattie is not just disregarding the people of Noosa and all Queenslanders; he is disregarding support from all sides of politics. Some 31,000 submissions to the Local Government Reform Commission rejected amalgamation of the Noosa shire. Thousands upon thousands protested here in Brisbane just one week ago tomorrow. He is also disregarding the advice of federal leaders of both political parties. In fact, it has taken the Prime Minister to intervene in order to bring about some semblance of democracy to this government. But Mr Rudd is also on the record condemning this bill and condemning Mr Beattie's actions to prevent the people's voice from being heard. Premier Beattie's petulance in this situation is completely hysterical and he is refusing to listen to Noosa or to give the

people of Noosa a chance to voice their opposition. This is a government bent on tyranny and a government drunk on power.

Why does the Premier not listen to his party's federal leader and consult the community properly? I table reports of some of the other objections to this amalgamation of the Noosa shire council--namely, from the local ALP branch in Noosa, an email from Kevin Rudd and support from Sir Richard Branson and Bob Ansett against amalgamation.

Tabled paper: Copies of various media articles and other documents regarding the Noosa Shire Council and proposed amalgamations of local authorities.

Clearly support for Noosa against this amalgamation comes from both sides of politics and the Premier and his cabinet are alone on this issue. Yet he continues in his petulance. His childlike displays in this place show that he is not acting rationally in pursuing this issue against Noosa.

I draw the House's attention to comments made by the minister for local government recently. On 7 August Minister Fraser said with respect to amalgamation of the Noosa shire that the Local Government Reform Commission made a recommendation that it believes is the best result for the people of the Sunshine Coast as a whole as a region. Clearly, Minister Fraser is not considering what impact amalgamation will have on the people of Noosa; he is thinking about how the developing of Noosa will benefit the rest of the Sunshine Coast. Minister Fraser also said on that day that the people of Noosa should accept their fate. He said specifically, 'We should all accept the umpire's decision,' as if the Local Government Reform Commission was an independent umpire when one of the commissioners is a paid director of a developer. While the commission was set up to look independent, it was clearly stacked in a particular direction. On 5 June 2007 Minister Fraser said in this place that he could not trust local government councils to agree on amalgamation. He said that the only way to achieve what he wanted was to impose it upon Queensland because he could not trust Queenslanders to decide for themselves. Such is the paternalism of this minister, and aren't we lucky to be in his care!

The Beattie government has few friends on this issue, with no support not even from its party mates in Noosa or federally. So why is it proceeding with this? The reasons behind this process are unclear. We know what the official line is from the government, but Noosa does not fit into that definition. So why would the government proceed to force amalgamation on Noosa? The official line given by the minister is that the local councils are financially weak and will be unable to continue to operate without assistance. However, this reasoning from the minister stands in stark contrast to reality. Noosa, according to the minister's own web site, is listed as follows--

Noosa Shire Council

Your council is financially STRONG.

A local government with high capacity to meet its financial commitments in the short, medium and long term. It is likely to be able to manage major unforeseen financial shocks and any adverse changes in its business and in general economic conditions with only minor revenue or expense adjustments. Its capacity to manage core business risks is strong.

This assessment is part of the financial sustainability review conducted by the Queensland Treasury Corporation.

As at 18 May 2007, the QTC had completed an assessment of 105 Queensland councils against a 10-year financial sustainability forecast.

These are the words from the minister's own web site about Noosa. It beggars belief that if this government's own rationale behind amalgamations does not apply to Noosa, why then would it proceed? Perhaps it is because the Premier and his minister want to see Noosa developed. We know that he appointed his mate Terry Mackenroth to the Local Government Reform Commission to vote on whether Noosa should be developed and we know that Mr Mackenroth is a paid director of Devine Ltd, one of Queensland's biggest property developers. We should also remember that it was Terry Mackenroth who started the whole Sunshine Coast amalgamation debate when he spoke in favour of it at a Property Council lunch in Mooloolaba just a couple of years ago. Such a person on the commission hardly makes it an independent umpire despite what the minister may like us to believe.

The Deputy Premier said amalgamations were necessary to give councils clout to deal with mining companies and other multinational corporations. But again this does not apply to Noosa because the council and the community itself have stood up to developers and other environmental vandals for more than a generation. It is the people of Noosa who are the insurance policy of our way of life and not this minister and his phoney legislation. They are removing the opportunity for the people of Noosa and the people of regional towns and shires across our state to vote on whether they want this amalgamation. This government is exhibiting all the hallmarks of history's tyrannical rulers. The stink of deceit can be smelt in every corner of Queensland today. I urge the Labor members opposite to see what their leaders are up to. Give the people of Queensland the opportunity to voluntarily accept amalgamation. Do not force it down their throat! Do not kill off some of our smaller regional towns and shires!

I cannot understand why this government refuses to see reason in this situation. I hope that government members in this place will see reason today. If they do not, let the record show that today in this place democracy was put to death. Let the record show that the Beattie government maintains its pattern of deceit to hoodwink the people of Noosa and the people of Queensland. Let the record show that Labor stands for oppression. Let it show that Labor stands for deceit. Let the record show that I and the Queensland coalition opposed amalgamation without the right of a vote. When we come back into power, we will reinstate the Noosa shire and we will give the communities across the state an option through the ballot box to re-establish their community in the way that they would wish.

I also say that it was with great relish this afternoon that I wrote to the Australian Electoral Commission formally requesting a plebiscite. The minister would be pleased to know that I did not speak to anyone at the Noosa Council. I did it off my own bat so I hope that Noosa can again be one of those places that continues the fight. Today is not the end of it. This is not the end of it; this is the start. There is another announcement that will be made tomorrow from the Friends of Noosa. There are more meetings happening tomorrow. This is going to go on and on and on all the way through to the next state election. We will make sure that the Labor Party is renowned throughout this state--from one end of it to the other--for this and remind people every day what it has done to the smaller regional towns and cities across Queensland.
