

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS AMENDMENT BILL 2001**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 31 July.

**MR SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [1.55 pm]: At the outset, I wish to place on the record my support for this amendment. If regional ministers are to be responsible for the various development commissions, it makes sense for the Act to be amended to accommodate that. Not to do so would probably add further complexity to the operations of the development commissions.

It is no secret, particularly in my part of the world, that I have concerns about the functions of the development commissions. The commissions themselves also have some problems about the way in which they operate. The commissions have not developed or evolved naturally from the good old days, as I would call them. The Labor Party set up the regional development advisory committees. It was a great idea for them to work as advisory committees because they had to work in cooperation with the people in the regions, either through the country shire councils ward system or directly with the local governments who were affected. It made for a harmonious relationship, and it allowed issues to develop at their own pace and ultimately come to fruition. With the benefit of hindsight, they probably came to fruition in a quicker time span than many development initiatives have come to fruition under the current development commissions.

I have found no reason to disagree with the position that Les McCarrey held on development commissions. He advocated an arrangement similar to that which existed approximately 15 and 18 years ago, when there were regional advisory committees. That is not a criticism, veiled or otherwise, of any of the personnel within the development commissions, and nor is it a criticism of the chairmen and the boards who work with them. They do the best they can in a task for which the job description and duty statements are extremely vague.

I am concerned at the potential for the commissions to be politicised. I have commented on that in the past, but I will limit my comments today to saying that perhaps it is just a coincidence that many National Party candidates seem to have come from the boards or personnel of the development commissions. Perhaps for that reason - perhaps it is also coincidental - in my first four years as a member of Parliament I was never invited to board meetings to make submissions to, or to be asked my opinion on particular issues by, the development commissions. Having lived in the Gascoyne region all my life, I thought I had a few clues about the way the Gascoyne operates and that I could make a valuable contribution. Nevertheless, for one reason or another I was never invited to board meetings to make any submission on any issue. I compare that to the current circumstances, with a different minister and a different Government, when I am regularly invited to attend board meetings. I am approached to comment on a variety of issues, which I think is wonderful. I am not naive enough to think that they want my contribution because of some giant intellectual capacity that I may or may not possess. It seems to be a policy of keeping your friends close and keeping your enemies even closer.

Mr Carpenter: You can't win with that attitude.

Mr SWEETMAN: I know I cannot. I do not normally have a defeatist or negative attitude on these issues, but the development commission is doing very well by its minister. It is trying to act as a conduit between the minister and issues on which the local member is working. It is in the minister's best interest to know what the local member is working on as quickly as possible. The commission is in a position to serve the Government and the minister well. Again, that is not a slight on the personnel. Who knows what good may come from that?

[Leave granted for speech to be continued.]

Debate thus adjourned.

[Continued on page 1870.]