

SHIRE OF AUGUSTA-MARGARET RIVER, SPLIT RATING SYSTEM

**834. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development:**

I refer to the minister's flying visit yesterday to the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River and reports in today's media that councils will be banned from implementing split rating systems.

- (1) Why does the minister apparently prefer heavy-handed regulation and legislation to address this issue, when it has arisen only as a result of the actions of one misguided, recalcitrant council that is almost certain to have the majority of its elected members voted out of office at the first opportunity?

Several members interjected.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: There are 15 speakers in the place, by the sounds of it.

Hon Ken Travers: And one President who will give a ruling, I am sure.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, rather than the 15 interjectors who will come to order.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: My question continues -

- (2) Why did the minister not advise the council, as it had clearly lost the confidence of the community and had been requested to resign, that a better course of action would be to immediately follow this request and allow democracy to reign?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:**

- (1)-(2) The honourable member is quite right: I did have two meetings yesterday morning. The first was with the council and the second was with representative stakeholders. I understand that councils can differentially rate, but in doing so they must follow due process as outlined in the Local Government Act. Councils have the right to use the concession power, but it should be used for only that, not to impose a differential rating system.

When I met with the council I advised that I was concerned at what appeared to be a lack of due process and consultation with the community, which had permeated the community and probably exacerbated the level of anger, and that the council's policy decision was a fairly blunt instrument that had captured people that it was unintended to capture. I am concerned at the use of the concession power both in the application of the concession for this purpose and the process by which the concession was adopted. Section 6.47 of the Local Government Act was provided to enable local governments to give concessions to people to whom rates represent a real hardship, such as self-funded retirees and others on fixed or low incomes. I have asked my department to advise whether the section of the Act that enables concessions to be provided can be better defined and whether we can spell out a process through regulation that can be gone through when a concession is applied to a category of people outside of those normally defined as concession holders. Before doing that, it is my intent to consult with the Western Australian Local Government Association, Local Government Managers Australia and the Western Australian Council of Social Service as part of that process. I will not introduce a regulation without consultation with key stakeholders.

Hon Norman Moore: I am pleased to hear that.

Hon Murray Criddle: The president said you had already given a knee-jerk reaction.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The president of that association says that I have been in the job for only five minutes and that this is a knee-jerk reaction. I was appointed to the position of minister on 21 September. From that time I accepted not only a ministerial salary but also ministerial responsibilities. Quite frankly, I have a job to do. It does not matter whether I have been in the job for five minutes. The simple fact is that I have a responsibility to do the job. I was concerned that there had been no public consultation process before the shire's concession for owner-occupiers was introduced. If there had been some consultation, some of the obvious anomalies may well have been considered. Hon Barry House, in the House yesterday, outlined the history of the problems of that particular local government authority. It was in fact suspended by Hon Paul Omodei in 2001. I have some concerns about the lack of due process. The intent of the regulation, which I am seeking advice on, relates to due process.