

SHIRE OF AUGUSTA-MARGARET RIVER, RATING SYSTEM

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

The minister will be aware of recent widespread dissatisfaction with the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River on matters relating to its rating system and other issues. That dissatisfaction culminated in an electors' meeting on Sunday, when approximately 500 residents passed by an overwhelming majority a resolution expressing no confidence in the councillors and calling on them to resign.

- (1) Why did the minister, her representative or at least someone from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development not attend this meeting?
- (2) Does the minister support the steep, divisive rate increases imposed by the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River?
- (3) I understand from media reports that the minister is meeting with the shire tomorrow, and I ask -
  - (a) where will the meeting take place;
  - (b) is the minister meeting the whole council or just the president; and
  - (c) how does the minister propose to ascertain the nature and extent of the complaints raised by the community?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:**

I thank the honourable member for his question.

- (1)-(3) This is a very complex issue. It is certainly not simple to resolve, given the number of people involved and the categories of ratepayers impacted on. I am aware that there was a meeting which, on my advice, was attended by between 350 and 450 people. I was interested to hear Hon Barry House say that 500 people were definitely there.

Hon Barry House: I said approximately.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Okay; the numbers certainly vary. I understand that a motion of no confidence in the council was passed. The Department of Local Government and Regional Development did have a representative at that meeting. I can find out the name of the officer, who was asked to keep a watchful brief on the meeting and report back.

Hon Barry House: That wasn't made clear to the meeting.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I reaffirm that the officer was there. Do I support the increase? It is not a simple matter of whether I support one group or another. Obviously, each group has its own reason for feeling aggrieved.

I have made it quite clear that I will be meeting with representatives of that local government authority tomorrow with a view to having an open and frank discussion about the position in which the council now finds itself. What I am not prepared to do at this stage - and will be an option of absolute last resort - is suspend the council.

Hon Barry House: I haven't asked you that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Hang on! I am telling Hon Barry House what may not happen. The Government will not spend \$1 million on an inquiry, given that local government elections are due in May next year. Ultimately elected representatives of local governments are dependent on a democratic process. There are quite clearly ratepayers in this local government authority who are not happy with the decision that has been made by the council. If we cannot get a positive outcome to this matter tomorrow, it will be up to the electors in May next year to determine what happens to that local government authority.