

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

LOCAL GOVERNMENT — AMALGAMATIONS

Motion

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house supports the retention of the Dadour local poll provision in the Local Government Act.

I have the privilege of moving and speaking to this motion today because the shadow Minister for Local Government, the member for Mandurah, is paired as he has some family issues to attend to. I will go through the historical reasoning why the Dadour poll provision is in the Local Government Act and also reflect on the government's broken promise on forced local government amalgamations.

There has been a little misunderstanding about the nature of, and the rights given by, the so-called Dadour poll provision. They are contained in schedule 2.1 of the Local Government Act 1995. They have changed to some extent since they were originally introduced by Dr Dadour, the Liberal initially and then Independent member for Subiaco. It was interesting to look at the second reading speech made on 27 March 1975 when the Dadour poll provision was introduced into the Local Government Act. I will give a couple of quotes about what Dr Dadour saw the Dadour poll provision to be, because I think members will find it useful. The first quote from Dr Dadour, in representing the electorate of Subiaco, states —

Two-thirds of my electorate is governed by the Subiaco City Council. Since the introduction of the Local Government Act of 1960 that council has been under threat of being taken over by the City of Perth or by the City of Nedlands. In spite of this it has been able to carry out an excellent job of local government. The Subiaco City Council always had a dark cloud hanging over it and as a result it could not function properly because it did not know what the next day may bring.

I will make some comments about that. Today, in what was a quite extraordinary Cirque du Soleil performance during question time, the Premier said one thing that I agree with: local government is a creature of the state. I accept that. No-one is arguing against the Premier's statement that local government does not have a constitutional position as such. It is there at the behest of the state government and the state Parliament at the time. But, as Dr Dadour said, often that can create poor governance, as it was in 1975 when Dr Dadour debated this issue, because the City of Subiaco that he represented was always under that dark cloud and worried about whether it would be taken over by the City of Perth. That obviously impacted on the decisions it made in providing for its ratepayers and, to a certain extent, or less so, we have seen that now since the Premier has said that it is his absolute intention to take part of the Burswood peninsula out of the Town of Victoria Park and place it in the City of Perth.

Dr K.D. Hames: He didn't say that. He said that that would be one of those things that would be negotiated.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I will read in a moment a letter from the Premier in which he said exactly that, so the Deputy Premier might just want to sit there and be quiet.

Dr Dadour went on to say —

The important thing, as far as I am concerned, is that democracy still lives with this Bill of ours because under it people will have the right, by referendum, to learn where they stand. In this way we will maintain the true democratic system of the three tiers of government as we know them. If the Federal Government interferes with the State Government boundaries, it is God help it. If the State Government starts interfering with local government boundaries, the local authorities should be given the same authority the State Government has in respect of its boundaries.

I will not quote Dr Dadour all day, but he went on to make the point —

This Bill represents true democracy and as long as we pass it, the people will be most grateful. What we are doing is correct because it is right that the people should be given the opportunity to determine whether they wish to join another local authority, and if so, which one, or whether they wish to retain the status quo.

He concluded with —

The Bill has been introduced as the result of one of our election promises and I am certain it led to the increase in my majority.

That is an important point to make, because Dr Dadour took this issue to an election. He was very clear in his intent to introduce the poll provision at the election at which it was introduced and, as Dr Dadour said, it led to

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the increase in his majority. That contrasts with the actions of the Premier, who went to the election with exactly the opposite position. I have already referred to the Premier's late discovery of the word "mandate". We have heard the Premier say that Tony Abbott clearly has a mandate to do a number of things. I had not heard the Premier use that word until Tony Abbott was elected a couple of weeks ago. The mandate that the Premier had was for exactly the opposite position. It was not as though this issue was not raised during the election campaign; it was raised specifically and the Premier took to the election the exact opposite position.

There have been a couple of changes to the Dadour provision since it came through Parliament. I know the member for South Perth and the member for Perth in particular will support this motion, and I think the member for Belmont will as well. The motion has been designed in a way so as not to critique or attack the government, but to express support for the intent of Dr Dadour in 1975. The Dadour amendment was changed slightly in the Local Government Act 1995. It determined that at least 250, or at least 10 per cent of, affected electors of one district could recommend that a merger proposal go to a referendum, and the merger proposal would not go ahead if at least 50 per cent of electors of the affected districts voted and a majority voted against that proposal. That was further tweaked again in 1998 by, of course, the Court government in the Local Government Amendment Act (No. 2), which limited the poll to the electors of the district that requested the poll. Interestingly, that is what the Premier critiqued today. He made that amendment. He was the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party when the amendment that he complained about today was made. That happened in 1998 courtesy of the member for Cottesloe, the now Premier, voting for that change. It is actually quite a high standard. It is not that easy to overrule the intent of the Local Government Advisory Board and the minister if they ultimately make the decision to merge two local governments. I want to put on the record, because I think some members may not be clear, that it is not that difficult to get the actual poll; a person does have to get that many signatures on a petition to get the poll. It is effectively the right to veto a proposal from the government. To succeed in that, at least 50 per cent of the electors of one of the districts have to vote in the poll. That will be very difficult. In an environment of non-compulsory voting, it would be quite a task to get more than half the members of, say, the district of Victoria Park to vote. It would have to be a particularly motivating issue to get more than 50 per cent of electors out. Of course, of those voters, the majority have to reject the proposal put by the minister or, in this case, Premier Barnett, as recommended to him by the Local Government Advisory Board.

Dr K.D. Hames: What about the Premier's contention that 250 people vote in Peppermint Grove?

Mr B.S. WYATT: That is right; that is why I made the point. The problem that the Premier has is that the Liberal Party made that change in 1998. That is how it was previously, as the Premier demanded today. The Premier said that if there were 100 000 people in the western suburbs, everybody got to vote. Then, in 1998, Richard Court, Colin Barnett and the now Deputy Premier changed that to limit it to one district. That is when that change happened. That change was made by members opposite.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Do you realise it is 15 years later?

Mr B.S. WYATT: I do, minister; however, I am curious why the government took the exact opposite position to the electorate. Why did the government lie to the electorate? I do not understand that. Members of the government sit here now and make a virtue of this strong reform, yet they deliberately misled the people of Western Australia during the election. That is what I am curious about. I will spend a couple of minutes going through the position taken by the government to the election, just six months ago—so much has happened in six months, members, and so much has changed. I will not reflect on the AAA credit rating that Western Australia lost today.

Several members interjected.

Mr B.S. WYATT: We have so much to reflect on, but I know that the Acting Speaker will slap me down if I try to wander off topic.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.M. Britza): I do not want the chat across the house; I just want to hear the member for Victoria Park.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for that protection. The first reference I want to make on the position the government took to the election relates to a document that has been referred to previously—the member for Cottesloe's residents' newsletter that came out just before election day. It reads —

There has been much said about local government over recent months. I have always believed that a combined council covering Claremont, Cottesloe, Mosman Park and Peppermint Grove makes sense,

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however claims that the State Government will use its powers to force such an amalgamation are simply not true.

That is what the member for Cottesloe took to his electorate and to the people of Western Australia. I recall the wonderful exchange the Minister for Local Government had during debate in his own electorate.

Mr A.J. Simpson: It was in the Armadale electorate.

Mr B.S. WYATT: It was in the member for Armadale's electorate, as reported by Andrea Downey in the *Armadale Examiner* on 20 February. The article reads —

The politicians disagree on local government amalgamations with Mr Buti saying the Labor party would support voluntary amalgamations and Mr Simpson saying the Liberal party supported forced amalgamations.

That was not left to lie. The minister, then the member for Darling Range, put out a statement on 21 February. The minister stated —

I recently made some remarks at a local forum that the Liberal Party supported forced council amalgamations. The Liberal Party does not support forced amalgamations, I got it wrong, it was my mistake.

I think there is some black humour in the Premier's office to have then given the member for Darling Range the local government portfolio. There was an element of humour when the decisions were being made as to who would get the local government portfolio. Either way, the member for Darling Range is the Minister for Local Government and he specifically said that the Labor Party does not support forced amalgamations.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Can you read the next couple of paragraphs?

Mr B.S. WYATT: I have a summary. Maybe the minister can do that when he gets up. The article is fairly clear. The minister also made the point after the elections when he referred to Colin Barnett. The article states —

But he ruled out legislating to force change, instead saying councils would have to fall into line with the changes, which would come with a clear vision for the future and "a bucket of money on the table".

The government took a position to the election, and six months later we have the exact opposite conditions surrounding forced amalgamations.

Mr A.J. Simpson: He hasn't forced anyone yet!

Mr B.S. WYATT: The minister will get his chance to debate the issue. The government has taken the exact opposite position post-election. That is why I referred to Dr Dadour, who said that he took this to the electorate and he was endorsed as a result. My friend Bill Hassell is a man with some integrity, which is something that is severely lacking on the government side of the chamber. Bill Hassell, a former leader of the Liberal Party, is a not insignificant figure in not only Liberal Party circles, but also more broadly in Western Australia. He made the point just this week on 16 September on ABC radio, when he referred to the Dadour amendment and said —

... you get a vote, if you don't like an amalgamation. The Premier is saying 'we're going to take that out, so if you don't like an amalgamation, you don't get a vote'. Now that is forced amalgamation.'

Bill Hassell is right. What the government is doing is forced amalgamation. The government will get up and say it is not forced amalgamation, but it is! By trying to water down the current Dadour poll provisions, the government is forcing amalgamations. Now, ridiculously, the government is demanding that local governments put in their submissions by 4 October, but because of the problems the Premier has in getting the legislation through the party room, those local governments do not even get the courtesy of seeing the legislation before they put their submissions into the Local Government Advisory Board.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The ACTING SPEAKER: I remind members of the galley they are allowed to listen, but not participate.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I am delighted to have some support in the public gallery from some very reasonable people who understand—no doubt people who are perhaps involved in local government—that if the government asks local government authorities to put in a submission on what the government wants to do, perhaps the government should tell them what the legislation will do. I know that the Minister for Local Government has the dog's breakfast that the Premier served up to him. The minister knows that a good public policy should require those local governments to have that opportunity but I know that the minister will not open up the time for submissions from those local governments post-4 October. Because the Premier has a problem with his own

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party room, we are now expecting local governments across metropolitan Perth to try to deal with bad policy implementation. When the Premier critiques local government, he should look in his own backyard. This is an awful way to change local government and to implement public policy. The Premier says what a wonderful thing this will be for Western Australia and metropolitan Perth, but we have not seen a business case. Local governments all over WA are spending millions of dollars and suffering the uncertainty that Dr Dadour talked about in 1975, because of these remarks that were initially made by the member for Bunbury the better part of five years ago. We are limping along and we still do not know what the government's legislation is. The Premier uses that as a reason to attack local governments. It is an unfair and unprofessional way to go about local government reform.

Last Sunday we had a public rally in Victoria Park. It was my first large public rally in Victoria Park since I became the local member. It was a big turnout and a vocal crowd.

Mr A.J. Simpson: How many?

Mr B.S. WYATT: I would guess about 1 000 or 1 100. It was a good crowd. The member for South Perth was there. The member for South Perth agrees with the position I am about to put to the chamber. This is a good example of the Premier getting those big feet of his in the way of doing the right thing. The Town of Victoria Park and the City of South Perth have been working on coming together for some time now, as the minister knows. Both the Town of Victoria Park and the City of South Perth have passed unanimous resolutions saying what they support and what they intend to do. That was done on the basis that the entirety of the Town of Victoria Park would amalgamate with the City of South Perth. That is because they knew that the Premier had his eyes on splitting the Burswood Peninsular; that is, to take the revenue-producing parts of the peninsular out of Victoria Park to give to the City of Perth, leaving the cost of managing those assets with the Town of Victoria Park. That is utterly unfair. The minister says it is okay because the government will give it compensation by extending its south-eastern boundary. That is not compensation. It would be compensation if the local government did not have to provide services. I would accept that. But it has to continue to provide services. It is not compensation.

That rally made a very important point. In my office, minister, I have not had much push back about the idea of the City of South Perth and the Town of Victoria Park coming together. But there are two issues that I have had a lot of push back about. The first is the proposal to take away that part of the Burswood peninsula that captures the Crown Perth casino and the new stadium and put it into the City of Perth. The second is the proposal to draw a boundary that will capture the residential areas. As far as the City of Perth is concerned, if this proposal goes ahead, it will not have to worry about the residents of the Burswood peninsula. All it will have to worry about is two large assets that provide a huge amount of income. It will not have to worry about the impact this proposal will have on the people in Lathlain, the people in the residential parts of the Burswood peninsula and the people in Victoria Park.

I know what will happen. The Perth parking levy will be extended to the new part of the City of Perth. That will mean that Crown casino and the stadium will be subject to a very large liability of about \$700 a year per parking bay. I dare say that Crown will not wear that multimillion-dollar liability. That decision will ultimately be made by Crown. But I dare say that Crown will pass on that liability in the form of paid parking. That will mean that traffic will be diverted and people will park in my residential areas, or in the residential areas of the Town of Victoria Park, which will leave the Town of Victoria Park with the cost of the traffic management and with the noise issues, with all the revenue going to the City of Perth.

The minister and the Premier should not try on me the argument that in order for Crown Perth and the stadium to succeed, they need to be within the local government boundary of the City of Perth. That is a ludicrous proposition. It does not matter which local government boundary those assets are within; Crown and the stadium will continue to succeed. So that is a nonsense argument that I simply do not accept.

The other issue that I want to raise is that I believe the Local Government Advisory Board has a problem. I am very interested to know whether the findings of the membership of the Local Government Advisory Board will remain consistent with previous findings that the board has made. In 2007, the City of Belmont tried to take Belmont Park Racecourse out of the Town of Victoria Park and have it put into the City of Belmont. In my view, the City of Belmont had a stronger argument than has the City of Perth in wanting to come across the Swan River and grab that asset. In 2007, the Local Government Advisory Board said, "No; our view is that the peninsula should come under one planning authority, the Town of Victoria Park." I therefore have severe doubts about the ability of the Local Government Advisory Board to give the minister independent advice.

The Premier has stated his preference. It is crystal clear. The minister has stated in correspondence to two of my constituents—one of whom is Ms Trethewey, who has provided me with a copy of the letter—that —

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The Crown complex and proposed new stadium are a major focus for recreation by the whole of the metropolitan area. The Liberal–National Government has decided the significance of these attractions means they require co-ordinated planning by the capital city authority.

The government has already made the decision. The government asked for feedback and submissions from the Town of Victoria Park and the City of South Perth and all the other local governments in metropolitan Perth. But the government has made its decision. I am not interesting in the government saying, “Put in your submissions, and the Local Government Advisory Board will make its decision.” Yes! I am sure it is going to contradict that! The government is already writing to my constituents saying, “Too bad, so sad; the decision has been made.” That is why many of my constituents who were not even aware of the Dadour local poll provisions are suddenly interested. Although those residents had been working in good faith to perhaps come together with the City of South Perth, they have been treated appallingly badly by the Premier. They want the right, in the event that this happens and the government takes away part of the Burswood peninsula, to say, “Let us put it to a poll and let us see whether we can meet that very high standard by getting half the electorate out to vote and then getting a majority of those voters to reject the government’s intent.” I can tell the minister now that many thousands of people will need to be involved in that poll for it to succeed. It will not be the case, as the Premier pointed out today when he attacked the Shire of Peppermint Grove, that it will need only a couple of hundred people to thwart the whole process. That was the intent of Dr Dadour when he introduced those poll provisions back in 1975.

I will conclude with these comments. The Premier should have taken to the election the clear position that if local governments are not willing to acquiesce to the demands of the Premier, he would bring legislation into this place to change the law to allow that to happen. If that is what the Premier had done, I would not have much to say about it. The Premier would then have that word that the Premier has found recently—“mandate”. But the mandate that the government has is the exact opposite. If the Premier now wants to beat his chest about being strong on reform, he should have had the courage to take those reform proposals to the people of Western Australia at the election. The Premier should not be so deceitful as to take, as soon the election was over, the complete opposite position. We have seen that happen time and again over the last six months since the Barnett government was returned to office. I know that people have had a gutful of that. That is why people want the right to have a say. They know they were duped at the election on 9 March.

I say to members on the other side: this is not a motion they need to fear. In this motion we are simply making the point that the house supports the retention of the Dadour local poll provision in the Local Government Act. The motion is not attacking the government. It is not offensive. It simply asks the government to tell us where it stands. Perhaps the minister will get up and tell us when local governments across Western Australia might get a look at the legislation that he has been hiding because he cannot get it through his party room.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [4.27 pm]: I rise to support the motion about the retention of the Dadour local poll provisions in the Local Government Act. In doing so, I want to acknowledge the people who have come into the gallery today to observe this debate. That includes mayors and councillors from around Perth who are concerned about this issue.

I have a lot of respect for people who put themselves up for election, both state and federal, and local. Although in this house, and nationally, where political parties are involved, we often have disagreements and so forth, we all go through the same thing. It is hard, and we have a lot of turmoil and trauma in our lives, just because we have put ourselves out there for election. People in local government have that turmoil and trauma as well. It costs them money. They have a lot of disruption in their lives. The financial rewards are very small. A lot of people demand their time and attention. We should show those people in local government a bit of respect for that. Every time the Premier stands and talks about these things, he is dismissive of these people. He says there are too many of them, they are not building enough swimming pools in the southern suburbs, or they are doing something wrong.

My view of this is coloured by the fact that I have been a local government councillor and a local government mayor, and I have that experience, as do other members on both sides of the house. I have that experience of going to work every morning and working all day, and then in the evening going to meetings and functions and events. The weekly delivery of the minutes for meetings and the chairing of meetings takes an endless amount of time. We get early morning phone calls because a dog in the street is barking. These things are very demanding on people who have taken up the cudgels and have been elected to local government. Let us give these people a bit of respect for what they do—just a bit. This motion is saying that we respect the laws that are there and we respect the mandate upon which the government was elected.

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I raised these issues two weeks out from the state election in light of the member for Darling Range's commentary that the government would move to forced amalgamations. He was properly slapped down by Liberal Party headquarters and the Premier, who, after I said the government had an agenda for forced amalgamations, publicly said that under no circumstances would they happen—so much so that when I repeated my claim, journalists told me that the Premier said they would not happen, so there was no story. The government succeeded in killing the story two weeks before the election based on an untruth. I was right and the Premier was not telling the truth. That is what happened. I get angry about these things because it was a matter of public moment; it was a matter upon which people would vote; and it was a matter upon which people would have made their decisions if they had known the truth of it before the election. They were not told the truth before the state election. I went through a hell of a time, like we all did—perhaps I went through a bit more than most!—before the election and what galls me is that the government was elected based on a set of promises that were clearly untrue. The state's press know this, because they all saw it. They interviewed the Premier and he said that what I said was not true. Today there is a test. It is a test that applies to members of the government. I understand that government members—under the rules of the Liberal Party in particular—are all free to cross the floor if they want to. This is their chance to stand up on this issue. This is a simple, straightforward amendment to ensure that the promises of the Liberal Party are adhered to and local say is retained. The Premier argues, and I have heard developers argue, that there are too many local councils in Perth, and indeed in Western Australia; however, I note that according to the Premier, the country is excluded from amalgamations. They need to be reduced because they are all so inefficient. I have read the academic papers by Dr Brian Dollery, who I think is from Adelaide or Melbourne.

Mr A.J. Simpson: New England.

Mr M. McGOWAN: He is from the University of New England in New South Wales. He said that these issues invariably cost ratepayers more money and do not result in greater efficiencies. I have read what he has to say about the topic. That is what Dr Dollery, the pre-eminent expert on local government amalgamations in Australia, says about these issues. The Premier persists with the argument that all local governments are inefficient. He says big is more efficient than small and big is more efficient than medium. I do not think there is a hard and fast rule about these things. Sometimes big councils are more inefficient than small councils; sometimes small councils are more inefficient than big councils. It all depends on the quality of the elected representatives, but more importantly, on the quality of the staff. If the government wants to do something about inefficiencies, the solution is not amalgamation; it is more efficient, speedier planning and building laws. That can be done easily and I think it is wise to create greater uniformity and ease by councils making decisions quickly and for people in the development or building industries to get decisions made more quickly and efficiently. That is what can be done and that is where the government should go. The government has picked the wrong issue if it wants to deal with these things. It should pick the issue of uniformity and sense in building and planning laws. A fight with local communities who just want someone elected who they can contact to represent them, who might have existed, as was said today, for 100 years, is the wrong fight to pick. That is particularly the case when the government changes the boundaries recommended in the report created for it. When Alan Robson came up with his report, his final recommendation was that if the report was to be implemented, every single recommendation should be implemented. What has the government done? It has picked and chosen from the recommendations and it has changed the recommended boundaries—so much so that the Town of Victoria Park, a local authority created by the Liberal Party when the now Premier was deputy Liberal leader back in the 1990s, which has to deal with all the issues surrounding Burswood Casino, is losing the revenue that allows it to deal with those issues. The Premier—I assume based on past performance—has created his own set of boundaries and ignored the Robson review. What sort of management is this? Is it any wonder that communities are up in arms about these things? Is it any wonder that they are not happy?

I was walking down King Street the other day. I had just bought my coffee after having caught the train to Perth and was walking to my office in West Perth. This guy got out of his car and wanted to shake my hand. He works in the development industry and builds certain sort of structures for local governments—I will not say what sort of structures because they are quite specialised and people might work out what firm it is. He works for a consulting firm in one of the big buildings on St Georges Terrace. He said to me that this local government reform had thrown his business into turmoil because local governments are not investing. He said local governments were not investing because they do not know where things are at; they do not know whether they will have to take on debt from their neighbours and whether they may not be able to afford what they are doing; and they do not know whether they will exist in future. He said that as a result his business had completely dried up. I add that the facilities he provides are very important, particularly in education. He said that things have been hopeless for months and that his business could not get contracts. Councils were on the verge of signing contracts to build these structures, but things have all dried up.

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The government has created five years of uncertainty. The poor old member for Bunbury was hung out to dry for four years by the Premier. He was told one day, yes, the government would proceed with amalgamations; the next day he was told the government would not be. He was out there saying there would be forced amalgamations and the next day he was saying there would not be. Can members imagine? He had to deal with a Premier who one day says to do this and the next day says to do that. The poor old Leader of the House cannot tell us what will happen in the house from day to day because he has to ask the Premier. There is a slight element of centralisation here, and all those people in this government we should trust to do their jobs are not trusted to do their job. Another very nice fellow I ran into walking down the street the other day, interestingly, walking down the main street of Bunbury, funnily enough, was the member for Bunbury.

Mr G.M. Castrilli: You were with the member for Collie–Preston.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I was there in Bunbury with the member for Collie–Preston; he loves Bunbury, as the member for Bunbury probably knows. The poor old member for Bunbury, the former Minister for Local Government, was hung out to dry by the Premier on these issues. The new Minister for Local Government is another nice fellow—I do not like to say it, but frankly he is; it is hard not to say that—who was hung out to dry. One day it is this and one day it is that. It must be awful waking up every morning not knowing what the situation will be. At the last election, I think government members could have been fairly confident of the government’s prospects of re-election, considering the position nationally in particular. However, the government did not tell the truth before the election. Had it told the truth and just released the policy that it would remove the Dadour provisions and Perth would have 14 councils, it would have been difficult for us to mount this argument, but it did exactly the opposite—hence, people are in the public gallery today. I am getting more emails than I can count from people upset about what is going on. Communities all over the state are disrupted. Millions of dollars have been spent. Businesses have been adversely impacted, and the government is losing support across the community and the party room—as the Premier might have learnt yesterday, the party room is leaking like a sieve. What an achievement. The Premier must be so proud! If communities wanted to come together, it would surely have been better for an active government to come to office and to entrust the minister to work with communities to come together, work out the arguments, adhere to the law, reach agreement between communities and progress things like that. Instead, the government has adopted this piecemeal approach, hung two ministers out to dry and now no-one knows what will happen. We heard the Premier say today, “I’m no clearer on whether a bill will come in on the Dadour provisions”; yesterday the Minister for Local Government stood and said, “We have no policy.” The minister is way too honest, I might add! The minister has a problem with honesty! The minister has a double dose of honesty, and the Premier has a deficiency. I have heard of iron deficiency; the Premier has an honesty deficiency! The minister has too much honesty running through his system! The minister stood and said, “We have no policy! We don’t have a policy!” So, apparently the government has no policy.

Mr A.J. Simpson: We have a plan.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Maybe I spoke too soon!

In closing, we are now saying we support the retention of the Dadour provisions. Apart from old Dr Dadour from Subiaco, the only other members of Parliament I remember from the 1970s are Sir Charles Court and John Tonkin. I remember Dr Dadour because he actually came up with something that has lasted the distance and was reinstated back into the laws when Paul Omodei passed the Local Government Act in 1995. When I was shadow local government minister in 1998, a slight change was made, and I remember it because the government—in which the current Premier was deputy Liberal leader—reinstated those provisions into the laws. On a whim, the Premier has decided we have to get rid of it all. I do not think there will be much difference in efficiency whether there are small, large or medium local governments. I think efficiencies can be created by overarching laws that create greater uniformity across the state. But that is not what the government has done; it has gone for the option that will cause massive disruption. We are saying let local communities have a say.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [4.41 pm]: It is an interesting day for Western Australian politics. I will start by acknowledging the two mayors in the public gallery—the Mayor of Nedlands, Mr Max Hipkins, and the Mayor of Subiaco, Heather Henderson.

I want to go through some of the reasoning given for this tortuous and mishandled process of local government reform. We are now in the fifth year of the government telling us that local councils have to merge, but I do not think we are any closer to an outcome suitable to the community of Western Australia. It is quite interesting that the government has been lecturing councils on efficiencies and financial management. A government that today lost its AAA credit rating has been lecturing councils around the state about the efficient use of government,

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Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

taxpayer and ratepayer resources. This is no model government for the proper management of finances. The loss of the AAA credit rating today by this government shows it cannot manage its finances and it should not lecture everybody else on how to manage theirs. I have seen councils manage finances much better than this government has over the past five years. I have seen my three-and-a-half-year-old daughter manage her finances better than this government has over the past five years. I think this whole process has been flawed.

The experience of other states is that forced amalgamations do not lead to lower rates. It does not happen. The whole basis of the reform is flawed, but what has been more tortuous has been the five years of the mishandling of the process. Those five years have created chaos and criticism of this government, and have seen significant expenditure and wastage from councils around the state that were forced to develop plans.

The motion we have moved today relates specifically to this house supporting the retention of the Dadour local poll provision in the Local Government Act. That is our position. Nothing has been put forward by the government to change our view. As I said, it has been mishandled from the start, and it is all about making a decision. The Premier keeps standing and saying, “We’re making decisions, we’re making tough decisions.” Firstly, we are not quite sure what decision he is making; and secondly, what will the outcome be? Ultimately, should the decision-making process not be determined on the outcome? What is the government going to deliver to the community of Western Australia? The Premier has been standing and beating his chest, saying, “We’re prepared to make tough decisions,” and mocking us, but what will the actual outcome be? What is the government actually seeking to achieve? He has not guaranteed lower rates for everybody in the community—far from it. Experience from other states shows that lower rates do not eventuate. After five years of chaos, we still have no clear answer from this government on what it will do in relation to the Dadour poll provision. We still do not understand where the Liberal Party stands on this issue. It has been stuffing around for five years, but where does it stand; when will it bring in the legislation; and when will people see that legislation? Absolute chaos!

I turn to a key election promise made around the time of the 9 March election. As we have demonstrated in this house on a number of occasions, this government has no mandate for forced amalgamations. At election time it actually denied it would force councils to merge. One of my greatest fears about bigger councils is, frankly, politicisation at every level. If someone runs for mayor of a city of more than 100 000 people, they need a lot of financial backing. I know the Liberal Party likes being very involved in local politics, but what I see happening here is the removal of any prospect of there being independent mayors around the state. I think there is a real danger that local government could be politicised to such an extent that there may not be independent councillors or mayors. I actually like the fact that many mayors and councillors do not belong to any political parties. I think that is a good thing, and I think by forcing there to be bigger electoral areas, there will also be forced politicisation.

I will talk about some of the key issues in relation to the plans that have been outlined. Frankly, this government could not have drawn stupider plans in relation to some of these boundaries. It sought to create a City of Perth that, frankly, would always be leaning a particular way—it would always be right wing—and tried to grab all the big monuments around the place, but did not really take into consideration communities of interest. I find the boundaries of Perth quite interesting, because it is picking that stadium here or that university there, but what the government does not understand is that those monuments or structures are nothing without the community around them. Look at what the government is doing to the City of Vincent; it ignored communities of interest and split it into three, and focused on where the swimming pool or stadium is. The government has not actually looked at what makes suburbs work—the people. The draft plans that have been released are, quite literally, ridiculous. The government has created battles across the metropolitan area. I hate to say it, but it was again another badly managed process by a government that has completely lost its way. It has created fights where it did not need to. It has created fights everywhere. I do not know about everyone else on my side, but I am getting many emails and letters from people across the metropolitan area who are not normally active in this sort of political debate, but this government has managed to activate people across the metropolitan area against itself because it did not sit and look at what would work in relation to communities of interest. The government wanted to be viewed as having made tough decisions, but that has presented some key problems. Firstly, it actually made no real decisions, and, secondly, just the process of making a decision is not the key; it is about the outcome. I am still unclear about the outcome the government is trying to achieve. As we have demonstrated again and again, it does not lead to either better services or reduced council rates. I find it ironic that this government has spent five years creating 10 additional departments across the public sector. This government has told everybody that it is more efficient to merge, yet it has taken the opposite approach to managing departments across government.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

I could go through some of the silly decisions involving the western suburbs, including the Cities of Kwinana, Stirling and Vincent, or what has happened with the Town of Victoria Park, the City of South Perth and the Burswood peninsula. This government has created battles when it did not need to. If it actually worked with people and not against them, it would have had a better outcome. The point the Leader of the Opposition made—I strongly support it—was that this government is basically putting everything on hold. Councils will be unable to make key decisions about service improvements, service changes or infrastructure because they will have no certainty about their rate base over the next five to 10 years. This government has basically suspended key decisions that affect communities, families and pensioners across the metropolitan area. As I said, this matter has been mismanaged from the start and we are still no clearer on what the plan will be. The minister said that the government has a plan. Well, I hope we get an idea of what that plan is from his response because, so far, we have not seen anything of that plan. The member for Collie-Preston has just highlighted to me the number of letters received from the residents of the City of Kwinana who are against the change. If we couple that with all the emails we are receiving, we can see an enormous amount of resistance and anger throughout the community.

A colleague of mine gave me a letter to the editor from this weekend's *The Post*. I will not mention the author's name, but it is written by a young person and is titled "Kids have lesson for Barnett." It reads —

I attend Kapinara Primary School and am a regular POST reader.

I have recently noticed the storm of controversy following the announcement that the councils of many of my local suburbs will have to merge.

I downright disagree about this. Premier Colin Barnett promised not to force local councils to merge.

This seems to me like lying, or going back on a promise.

At my school, like any other school, if you go back on a promise, you're almost instantly a social outcast.

I really think politicians should take a leaf out of our book and at least rethink the penalties of doing such a thing.

Australia is supposed to be a democracy.

This means that the citizens get to choose.

And suddenly announcing that the council's are to merge isn't exactly democratic, is it?

Mr Barnett has claimed that the merge will not be forced because councils will have until 2015 to decide.

But he has also said there won't be much negotiation except for some slight border changes.

This confused me for a bit, but then I realised that this was yet another example of our Premier contradicting himself.

This is what a quite astute 12-year-old believes and understands about the Premier's actions.

It is up to everyone on the backbench and in the ministry to stand up on this issue. Members can talk to their local papers and attend local rallies and say whatever they want to say. However, the ultimate test is how members will vote on this motion and how they vote in the party room. Every member will be held to account. If they support the Premier down another one of these very dangerous and silly paths, they will all pay the penalty. It is up to all members to think about what promises they went to the election with and what the community is saying, and to stand up for the local community they represent.

MR G.M. CASTRILLI (Bunbury) [4.55 pm]: I will make a short contribution to this debate. The Leader of the Opposition said how proud we must be about our party room and how it leaks like a sieve. I am not very proud that our party room leaks like a sieve. I suspect that if somebody leaked information from the opposition, those members would feel exactly the same.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I think the Leader of the Opposition was being ironic when he made that comment, which often does not read well later on.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I thank the member for Midland, but I just want to put my thoughts on the record. When I was a minister, several groups of councils were very interested in going through this reform process that involves an amendment to the Dadour poll provisions. A group consisting of the Shires of Perenjori, Morawa, Three Springs and Mingenew did a lot of positive work. When the time came, the former shire president of Perenjori started an action against the reform process, which was his absolute right. Of course, Perenjori then

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voted against the reform, which meant that the hopes and aspirations of the other three shires and the people involved in that process did not proceed. The Shires of Carnamah and Coorow also looked at amalgamation but did not go to the polls because I think Carnamah pulled out, which again was its right, and its decision was based upon the consequences for the community. At a later stage, in their quest to hold back expenditure, those shires talked about closing swimming pools and not watering ovals, but that was Carnamah's decision and it had the right to make that decision. The Town of Narrogin and the Shire of Cuballing went right through the process. That was a very proper and in-depth process involving consultants. Those councils saw the benefits they could achieve and wanted to go through the process. I visited the Town of Narrogin and met with the group on several occasions, and they were very positive meetings. However, a group in Popanyinning, which is in the Shire of Cuballing, started an action and had the numbers—according to the poll provisions—to vote against the process, so again the hopes and aspirations of the Shire of Cuballing and the Town of Narrogin did not come to fruition because —

Mr P. Papalia: How much money was wasted on consultants?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I do not know the figure off the top of my head, member for Warnbro. All I can say is that the town and the shire went through a proper process. We are probably talking about 4 000 or 5 000 people, but the reform did not eventuate because a group of people in Popanyinning, using the Local Government Act, did not allow it to happen. The Shires of Yilgarn and Westonia were both in discussions, but, of course, the poll provisions stopped that process.

The Labor Party has said that it supports the retention of the current position of the Dadour poll provisions. I read some copies of minutes from the Western Australian Local Government Association that reported that there was an opportunity for a compromise position to be considered, which could be in line with the Minister for Local Government's original proposal. The State Council of WALGA should strategically consider options to retain the current position to oppose any removal, suspension or amendment to the poll provisions, or to adopt a position to support the amendment to the poll provisions for which any poll petitioned will be of the entire districts involved in the amalgamation proposal. The amendment then became a motion. Resolution 243A.4/2013, which was carried, states at paragraph 2 —

Adopt a position to support an amendment to the Metropolitan poll provisions, where any poll petitioned will be of the entire districts involved in the amalgamation proposal with the following conditions

- a. For a poll to be held a petition will be required from 25% of electors of one local government
- b. For an amalgamation to be rejected by the Minister, 50% of electors of all local governments proposed to be merged are required to vote, for it to be a valid poll.
- c. a majority of votes at the poll against will defeat the amalgamation proposal

I presume that is the amended position of the Western Australian Local Government Association. I will therefore be interested to see whether that is in fact WALGA's position.

I say to the members of the house that all of us in this house understand that reform is never easy. If it was, we would have done it long ago because it has been talked about since 1957. Without reform in Western Australia, I believe that some local governments will face a future of unsustainability. The objective of this government is, and always has been, to increase the capacity of local government through a raft of measures.

Mr P. Papalia: It was just to reduce the number of councils. That was your only objective.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: This is where the member for Warnbro continually fails to understand that the reform process is not just about amalgamations. The reform process is about that part plus a heap of other stuff.

Mr P. Papalia: Rubbish!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: For four and a half years the member for Warnbro has failed to understand that.

Mr P. Papalia: Your only argument is to reduce the number of councils.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would rather speak through the Chair, if that is okay. As I said, the objective of this government is and always has been for greater efficiencies, greater governance capacity and better delivery of services.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: But, member, you've never done the research.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr P. Papalia: You've never won the argument. You've never presented a case.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am sorry, what was that? What did the member for Warnbro say?

Mr P. Papalia: You have never presented a case for forced amalgamations. The only argument that has ever been run by the Premier is to reduce the number, with no justification!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am sure the member for Warnbro remembers me standing in this place several times—more than several times—talking about the reform process being in several parts: first, the reduction in number; and, secondly, the reform of local governments in a raft of measures to make them more efficient. That is what we have attempted to do. The reform process is about better delivery of services; more service delivery for their communities; greater efficiencies; better coordination in the delivery of infrastructure; a reduction in duplication; the elimination of inconsistencies in decision making; making local governments more sustainable through enhanced financial and asset management capabilities; and further developing skills and competencies of elected members and staff.

I have had meetings with several staff of local governments who understood what I was attempting to do, because some staff in local governments saw themselves as having no career path in a small local government and some could not get back to areas on the coast.

Another aspect of the reform process is developing strategies to reduce town planning and building approval times. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned before that we could do that. When Labor was in government, it identified all those aspects of the reform process as well, but it took the politically expedient way out. Members opposite know that reform of local government is right. They know that reform of local government is needed.

Mr P. Papalia: You lied about it in 2008.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro! Member for Bunbury, resume your seat, please.

Withdrawal of Remark

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, will you withdraw that comment, please?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I withdraw, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. You are on two calls, so just please contain yourself.

Debate Resumed

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I really did not hear what the member for Warnbro said, Madam Deputy Speaker. But, as I am quite used to the member for Warnbro, it does not really matter.

I can also say that the former Labor minister also said that amalgamations would create the capacity for local government to serve the community, would avoid any duplication of services and would direct future cost savings into community services. That is what she said and I am just repeating it. Those on the other side of the house know all of this.

Mr P. Papalia: Yes, voluntary.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The Local Government Advisory Board appointed by Labor, as I have said many times, provided a report in 2006 that identified a number of those very important financial, operational and sustainability issues that affected the sector. Labor's own report said that in 2006, but nothing was done. WALGA's Systemic Sustainability Study Panel report also identified a heap of things that needed to be done. Urgent reform of the sector was required. When we see something, we really cannot "unsee" it. This is therefore the first time in history that local government has embarked on a significant reform process. As I said, it has been talked about since 1957 and nobody has done anything about it. Labor's previous leader, Hon Eric Ripper, also recognised the benefits of amalgamation. He was reported on 30 May 2008 in the *Rockingham Weekend Courier*, when the member for Warnbro was there, as saying —

Mr P. Papalia: I was not in Parliament.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I know that. But Hon Eric Ripper, obviously supporting the member for Warnbro, was there. He said that if local governments amalgamated, they would be more efficient and cost effective.

Mr P. Papalia: Did he say they would be forced?

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Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: No. I will get to that. Hon Eric Ripper also urged local governments that where it was suitable to merge, they should do it voluntarily. That is what he said.

Mr P. Papalia: That is what our policy is. It's unchanged. It was our policy in government, and it is our policy in opposition.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Warnbro!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am getting to it. Do not panic, member for Warnbro. Hon Eric Ripper also said that there were 140-plus councils in this state and that it was in the interests of local governments to amalgamate voluntarily.

Initially, I received a very good response from local governments on local government reform. About 65 of them wanted it, and about 22 of them wanted it but could not proceed because their neighbours did not want to proceed with them. This side of the house passed several amendments to the local government legislation. The Leader of the Opposition said that there were a heap of things we could do to help local government. We did a heap of things to help local government. We strengthened local governments' ability to deal with their service delivery issues. We introduced disqualification provisions for council members to cease office when they were elected as members of Parliament or were convicted of a major crime. We made provision for the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal to make determinations for CEOs and to examine the allowances and fees for elected members. We made provision for an examination of the types of investments councils could invest in, enabling the minister to suspend a council for up to six months if required. We reduced local government compliance reporting by almost 80 per cent—that has to be something. We mandated a 10-year strategic plan that forced local governments to talk to their communities. Since 1910 this state has reduced the number of local governments by three per cent. The closest state to us in that regard is Tasmania at 47 per cent. It is a sad situation when 30 local governments in this state have had declining populations for the last two census periods. I reckon that will continue. However, to me, as a former local government person, it is terrible that that has occurred in those communities. I do not know what the member for Warnbro thinks, but that is what occurs. Public apathy in local government is increasing. Local government elections get a 30 per cent turnout. I am a bit sad that some people just do not care about local government. There are unfilled positions.

Mr P. Papalia: You still haven't made the case.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The shadow Minister for Local Government—I am sorry he is not here today, because I get on very well with the member for Mandurah; I would consider him a friend—recognises the need for reform. He stated in earlier speeches that he made in this place that if I wanted to reform local government when I was the minister, then I should frankly do a Jeff Kennett! That is what he said to me in this house; it is in *Hansard*. He said that, in reality, very few local governments will go down the voluntary path. The member for Mandurah said that, whichever colour of government is in power, if it wants to achieve meaningful reform in local government, the government needs to force amalgamations because they will not be achieved —

Mr P. Papalia: What did he actually say?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Sorry?

Mr P. Papalia: Are you quoting him?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am paraphrasing what he said. The member can look in *Hansard*; I will give him a copy of what he said.

Mr P. Papalia: So you're verballing him!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: He said that they do not want to force amalgamations; they will not achieve reform. That is what he said. The shadow minister, the member for Mandurah, also contended —

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Opposition members really do not like listening to this. He also contended that local governments will not come to the table voluntarily, and that the only way to achieve it would be to do a Jeff Kennett or a Peter Beattie! That is what he said. If Labor believes there is a need for reform and that it will not happen voluntarily, what will it do about the question of forced amalgamations? Quite simply and frankly, the Labor Party will not put up much of a fight against reform in local government because the reality is that it wants to see the government do it, because then it will save the opposition from doing it! The member for Mandurah also said—I really respect him and appreciate his —

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

Mr P. Papalia: You shouldn't be putting words in his mouth!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: No, I am not.

Mr P. Papalia: You should be very careful!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I appreciate the comments he made to the effect that what I am doing in the Peel area is too small; that I should consider a bigger area to amalgamate because of communities of interest, impact on growth, population, lifestyle and the economy. The member for Mandurah saw the potential benefits of creating a council of a similar size to that of the Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: However, the member also said that some of the members on his side of the house and from the Shire of Murray might not agree with his position. He said that, and I appreciate and respect him for saying those things. The member for North West —

Mr P. Papalia: It is pretty dishonest to be making up quotes in the absence of the member!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I didn't say I was quoting anything. The member for Warnbro should look at *Hansard* and he will see what the member for Mandurah said.

Mr P. Papalia: What is the date?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It was late last year before Parliament broke.

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: All members can have a look at *Hansard*! Grab the *Hansard* and have a look at it!

Mr P. Papalia: So what is the date?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: If I have said anything wrong that does not imply what he said, then I will apologise in the house.

An opposition member: That is why we have *Hansard*!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The member for North West gave a very interesting and useful insight into his thoughts on Labor when he was a member of the Labor party. I remember what he said. He stated that there were a lot of Labor members —

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Members must listen to this! He stated that there were a lot of Labor members who wanted to force amalgamations; that many Labor members were very supportive of forced amalgamations and wanted to support the Liberal Party in its quest to look at ways to reform local government. The member contends that more than half, if not more, of Labor members support forced amalgamations. The member is here —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you for the third time.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: If he wants to, he can get up and refute what I have said, if it was incorrect.

Mr V.A. Catania: It is correct.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Where does it leave Labor? Does it support forced amalgamations?

Mr P. Papalia: No!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Do its members then support the removal —

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: If more than half of its members want to force amalgamations, and the member for Mandurah said that reform can only be achieved if one does a Jeff Kennett or a Peter Beattie, then do its members support the removal of the Dadour provision or not? I ask: who is really in conflict here? Is it the government side of the house or the opposition side of the house? It appears that more than half of the opposition wants forced amalgamations and the rest still do not know. Members opposite want the government to do all the hard work; to sit back and say, "It's not me." It is like Pontius Pilate! "It's not me! It was them! It wasn't us!"

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

Mr P. Papalia: Just tell the truth!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I want to know when opposition members will come clean on the truth of their intentions in respect of forced amalgamations. Members opposite will not criticise the government for wanting reform; they only criticise the government for taking a long time and spending too much money on it. The only solution, according to the shadow Minister for Local Government and member for Mandurah, is to force amalgamations, which will necessitate the removal of the Dadour amendment. His contention is that the only way to achieve reform is to actually force amalgamations. I suspect that this may be the Labor Party's real secret position.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.16 pm]: I rise to speak on this important motion, and I will not try to verbal members on the other side of the house, as the member for Bunbury has just done in the most extraordinary fashion to the member for Mandurah, who is not here to defend himself.

Earlier today the Premier tried to characterise this debate as being one around the issue of local government reform. It is not. The Premier is trying to say that because we oppose the suspension of the Dadour provisions, we therefore oppose local government reform. We do not. We agree with the Premier that the local government system is a function of state government, as he said in the chamber earlier today. We are happy to support a process of reform in relation to local government. We do have a plethora of local governments—that is, many local governments. However, it is interesting that the Premier can point only to his own area as being the one extreme example in the metropolitan area, but he is extraordinarily silent—incredibly silent—on the issue of local government reform in the country areas, but let me set that aside.

As I said at the beginning, this is not a debate about local government reform. This is a debate about honesty. This is a debate about issues to do with how a party presents itself to the electorate prior to the election and then how it adopts a completely different position after the election. This is a very simple exercise. We discussed this yesterday with the Minister for Planning, who said that we cannot have it both ways; that we cannot do this and cannot do that. It is true. I say to the Minister for Planning: the government cannot on the one hand say, "We want to do Royal Perth Hospital, Fiona Stanley Hospital, the new children's hospital, Midland hospital"—all those hospitals—and then on the other hand say, "But we're not going to do them now because we can't afford them." It is the government that made the promises; it is the government's members who collectively took to the last election a very clear policy on local government reform: namely, that it would not force local government amalgamations.

This might, in another place and time, be a question of reform, but it is not. This is a question about the integrity of the Liberal Party and the Barnett government, and the honesty and respect with which they treat the Western Australian people. People went to the polls in March this year believing the government's policy was no forced local government amalgamations. The issue was directly raised by the Leader of the Opposition in the context of that election campaign and the issue was dealt with by the Premier in the context of that election campaign: there would be no forced amalgamations in local government.

This stands in stark contrast to the government's position today. No wonder people have such little respect for members of Parliament, when they see these bald-faced exercises in dishonesty. These are extraordinary stark examples of dishonesty towards the electorate. The government had an opportunity to have a mandate on local government reform, if the Premier had had the guts to stare the WA electorate in the face at the election and say, "Yes, we are going to force local government amalgamations." If it had then won the election, the government would have what is called a mandate. But the government does not. The government does not have a mandate; it has a confused set of slogans. The only thing the government had a clear position on during the election campaign was that it would not force local governments to amalgamate. That is the only mandate the government has. The government can force local government authorities to undertake studies on amalgamations and submit proposals and it can enter into a long-term debate on the merits of particular amalgamation proposals—that is the right of the government—but it has no right and no mandate to force local government amalgamations. The government cannot suspend the Dadour provisions because it has no mandate to do that. In fact, the government made an explicit promise to the people of Western Australia that it would not do this. The fact that the government is now contemplating this so publicly is a disgrace. And the fact that the government is now looking to follow through with the suspension of the Dadour provisions is a complete betrayal of what it stood for during the election campaign.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members of the gallery, you have been previously advised that you can watch the debate but it must be in silence. If there is any more applause from the gallery, I will ask the staff to remove you. Please observe the rules of the house.

Mr R.H. COOK: This issue raises a great deal of passion, not necessarily because people want to keep their local government authority, but because they are very angry. People get angry when they are treated with such disrespect and when the Liberal Party lies to them. People get angry when they think they are operating under one set of rules prior to the election because of an explicitly stated policy position that the Liberal Party has turned on its head and said the exact opposite of now that it is in government. This is an issue for the Minister for Planning, for him to reflect upon his speech in this place yesterday. It is the minister's side's continual effort to say one thing prior to the election to win votes, and its complete lack of capacity to follow through with that because the government either cannot afford those promises—they were not fully costed and fully funded—or is now simply repudiating that election promise.

Mr J.H.D. Day: We are keeping our commitments. What I was referring to yesterday was the suggestion that we should be more spending in the education area, but, on the other hand, criticising us for the rate of growth in spending and debt levels.

Mr R.H. COOK: No, minister—that is actually the point. When the government went to election, it did not say that it was about to introduce cuts to education or repeal tax changes. The government never said those things. All it said was, “Yes, we can do all the Labor Party's policies and our policies, and they're fully costed and fully funded.” It was a lie! This is a similar example. It is another example of the complete lack of integrity that the minister's side had in the lead-up to the election. The government is now demonstrating, full tilt, the complete contempt it has for the WA public. The government is prepared to say one thing to members of the public when their votes are up for grabs, and then completely repudiate those policies once it has their votes in its pocket. The government now has its bums on what the Treasurer calls the “expensive seats”—he has one slogan in this place, “the cheap seats and the expensive seats”—and is treating the people who voted for it with complete contempt. That is the opposition's complaint. The reason the government is in such a complete shambles of economic mismanagement is its lack of self-discipline; it has been prepared to promise everything without having any economic discipline. The government went to the people and said, “This is fully costed, fully funded; we can afford everything, we will do it”, and now it says, “Oops, hang on! No, we can't. And, by the way, the schools of Western Australia are going to pay for it.” That was the Premier's trick today, when he said, “All right, we stuffed up. We stuffed up the economy and now you're all going to pay for our mistakes.”

We on this side have said that we are not against local government reform. That is a complete furphy; that is the red herring that the government is trying to put out there because it is desperate for something to hang its hat on in this debate. The opposition is about keeping the government honest. We are about keeping the Barnett government honest and making sure it sticks to its election commitments.

A good chunk of my electorate is made up of the City of Kwinana. The City of Kwinana has been a city for one year and two days. It achieved city status in September last year. The community is growing strongly and has a very strong sense of identity and what it wants to achieve as a community. Some might say that I should be all for local government reform. I must admit I reflected upon that a couple of times during the last election campaign and thought, “Wouldn't it be good if the local mayor didn't have a local government authority to challenge me from in the election.” But I respect the right of the City of Kwinana to determine its future. The City of Kwinana spent over \$200 000 on the amalgamation process, on consultants and studies to ready itself and be prepared for the discussion. It has undertaken significant discussions and negotiations with the City of Cockburn, which is the local government authority it has been told it has to amalgamate with.

Mr A.J. Simpson: They didn't want to go to Rockingham.

Mr R.H. COOK: There is a whole lot of politics around that, as I am sure the minister is aware.

The City of Kwinana is serious about identifying efficiencies of the amalgamation process and it is doing the right thing by the government in treating the opportunities for reform with respect. The Dadour provisions provide the community with an explicit right to have its say in the reform process.

Many people in Kwinana do not want the City of Kwinana to amalgamate with the City of Cockburn. These people want to maintain their local government authority and it is a natural part of any community that it wants to maintain its sense of identity and retain control of its destiny. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a huge groundswell of support for non-amalgamation in the City of Kwinana. In a community survey undertaken by the City of Kwinana, a significant proportion, I think 80 per cent, of people did not want to amalgamate with another

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local government authority, and a slight majority of people would rather amalgamate with Cockburn than with Rockingham. For the record, I do not sit in that camp; I think there is a natural sense of common community with Rockingham. But I accept that I am one voice in that particular debate. The people of Kwinana have the right to be heard in this debate. They have the right to respond to this process and to be able to put up their voices, utilising the full provisions of the Local Government Act 1995. They want a democratic resolution of this issue. It might be that they do not achieve the 50 per cent majority vote, and then the majority of that. They would need in excess of 15 000 people to vote and a majority of those 15 000 people would be required to turn it around. I am happy to back Kwinana because its sense of community and identity would give it a pretty good chance of getting that together; but maybe not. They are the rules by which we play, and the community would have the opportunity to utilise those rules. It is extraordinary that the government is not prepared to play by those rules as well. It may be that the amalgamation process goes ahead. It may be that, despite the Dadour provision, the amalgamation goes ahead. That would be a very sad outcome for the people of Kwinana, but those are the rules and I am happy to accept them. I am not happy to accept that the government will suspend those democratic provisions of the process that will allow the people of Kwinana to have their say. The democratic provisions of the Local Government Act and the laws of this state allow those people to respond and participate in the debate. I do not think it is too much to ask that the Barnett government respect the rules that are in place.

The government wants to achieve some outcomes. Members opposite call it reform. The opposition calls it amalgamation. I take on board that the member for Bunbury said he had a reform agenda. I have not seen that. I have heard a long discussion about amalgamations, which has sat like a dead hand across the whole local government sector for the past five years and has brought us to this unhappy situation. This situation can only be made worse by taking away those democratic provisions of the act that people should be able to utilise.

As I said, the Labor Party is not against reform, but this is not reform. We support a democratic process, and we repudiate the practice of saying one thing to the electorate prior to the election and doing the opposite thing once the government has people's votes in its back pocket. We repudiate the notion that the government takes away the rights of people to participate in the democratic process by suspending the provisions of the act that gives them that capacity. Let us have reform by all means. Local governments have behaved extraordinarily well in entering these negotiations in good faith. The government should not treat them disrespectfully by treading on people's democratic rights and withdrawing those aspects of the legislation that they feel provides them with some voice in the process. The government should respect those democratic institutions and the commitments it made prior to the election and, for God's sake, be honest with the people of Western Australia for a change.

MRS G.J. GODFREY (Belmont) [5.33 pm]: I rise to speak on the motion before the chamber. I wish to cover a few issues. The first issue is community feedback; the second, some of the history involved; the third, some consultation, leadership and issues in Belmont; and, finally, the reform time line. I received a number of emails on the issue of community feedback, three of which came from people within Belmont. Most of the contacts I have received came from outside Belmont. The first email reads —

I am concerned the way the WA Government is handling the proposed council mergers. I am in principle not against council mergers, however it appears no consideration is given to the wishes of the residents in the council.

It has to be noted that the council merger in Toronto, Canada ... and mergers in the Netherlands ... did not produce any of the efficiencies proposed by the proponents. Has the Robson Report looked into council mergers elsewhere in the world?

In response to this email, I refer now to a report submitted to the Speaker by Mr John Castrilli, the former Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Citizen and Multicultural Interests, who spoke this evening. This report refers to a study tour of the Wiltshire, Swindon Borough and Birmingham councils in England; and local governments in Edinburgh, Scotland; Vancouver, Canada; and Auckland, New Zealand. It provides a response to this person's legitimate query about whether any information had been collected from mergers elsewhere.

I now move on to another report titled "Local Government Reform Research Paper" on the implementation of structural reform in Queensland, which was commissioned in November 2012. This report was prepared by the Western Australian Local Government Association. Listed under the heading, "Summary of Key Issues and Findings" are the following points—

- Simultaneous state-wide reform is difficult; metropolitan is manageable.
- Mutual political positioning of both major parties is critical

I move on to another email that I received from David Harrison, chief adviser, corporate and government affairs, the Office of the Vice Chancellor, the University of Western Australia, which reads —

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I am writing to you about local government reform and to express the University of Western Australia's strong support for the boundaries of the City of Perth to be expanded to include UWA. I have recently met a number of you to discuss the importance of this reform to the University and how the adoption of a more rational system of local government across the whole campus is vital for UWA's ongoing development as a world-class centre of excellence in advanced learning and research.

The current local government system is an impediment to achieving our strategic goal of becoming one of the world's top 50 universities by 2050. The Crawley campus straddles three local government municipalities (Cities of Perth, Nedlands, and Subiaco) and the boundary between the Cities of Perth and Subiaco runs down the centre of Winthrop Hall.

I would like to point out to members how difficult it would be to do work on a building in that situation, because it would need building approval for the left and the right of the building, which would be quite hard.

I now turn to some of the unusual boundaries in the City of Belmont. Members would probably think that Belmont Racecourse belongs within the City of Belmont, but it does not; it belongs within the Town of Victoria Park. The boundary between Belmont and Canning city councils is an old spur railway line through the Kewdale freight marshalling yards. Within the airport, the boundary between Belmont and Swan city councils is near the control tower. These boundaries have been around for over a hundred years, which shows they are outdated.

I now refer to a report that was commissioned by the City of Melville that reviews local government in Perth. Attachment 1 cites a Committee for Perth report, which states —

According to the Perth @ 3.5 Million & Beyond Project Perth's local government structure has been virtually static since the early 1900s when the population was around 73,000 ...

The report continues —

Despite reviews over the years of local government in Perth, there has been little change in local government arrangements. The reviews include :

...

- **1968** Local Government Assessment Committee ... recommended reduction from 27 to 17.
- **1972** Local Government Boundaries Commission ... recommended reduction from 26 to 18.
- **1974** Royal Commission ... recommended reduction from 26 to 22.
- **1995** Structural Reform Advisory Committee
- **2006** Local Government Advisory Board (Chairman: Gregorini) recommended reduction from 30 to 23, and possible further reduction to 20.

...

In the light of the above, and considering the pace of global development, it is important that structures and frameworks are put in place ... that will ensure that Perth is enhanced by development rather than struggling to keep pace. This had led to the current review of metropolitan local government in Perth.

I now refer to a letter from Hon Ljiljana Ravlich, MLC, the Minister for Local Government, dated 8 May 2007, on her consideration of the Local Government Advisory Board report into structural and electoral reform in Western Australia. The letter states in part —

The report was requested in 2005 by the then Minister for Local Government and Regional Development. Since its release, considerable feedback on the report has been received from local governments and communities.

The letter goes on to say that the board made a range of recommendations, which include proposals to amalgamate a number of local governments. Another of the recommendations was that the power of electors to call for a poll when their local government is part of an amalgamation proposal be removed.

One of the findings of the board in its report was that some local governments are facing staff recruitment and employment pressures that are threatening their organisational sustainability. Last night, I went onto the website of the Shire of Kalamunda, and I noticed that the shire has four senior positions vacant at the moment. Those positions are principal project manager, at a salary of \$140 000 per annum; director corporate services, at \$200 000 per annum; director infrastructure services, at \$200 000 per annum; and director development services, at \$200 000 per annum. That is in excess of \$740 000, or three-quarters of a million dollars, for four positions that are vacant in that council at the moment.

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I now turn to the “Annual Report 2005” of the Local Government Advisory Board. The chairman of the board at the time was the late Charlie Gregorini, OAM, JP. Charlie was a mentor of mine as a new mayor and I respect his input into local government. The annual report states that the vision of the board is —

That Western Australia should have a system of local government that is robust and effective in meeting the needs of Western Australian communities.

This is based on a structure of community focussed local government units that have local boundaries integrating land use, the environment and transport systems. A sufficient resource base is required to efficiently, effectively, flexibly and responsively, exercise functions and powers and be capable of embracing micro-economic reform.

I now quote one paragraph from the chairman’s report —

Overall it has been pleasing to see local governments devoting significant time and resources to developing appropriate representation structures ... Furthermore, it is estimated that the reduction in the number of Councillors across the State as a whole in the last two years will lead to total savings of approximately \$2 million.

I now refer an email that I think we all received from Mr Bill Hassell, dated Tuesday, 17 September. I think Mr Hassell jumped the barrier with some assumptions in that email. Mr Hassell is asking for the repeal of the Dadour amendment. He states in his email —

I well understand that Government has to make tough and unpopular decisions from time to time, that financial integrity, which I strongly applaud, sometimes requires the deferral or cancellation of some projects, or some decisions from which there is a backlash. The art of government is to sell the reasons and have them respected if not liked.

He states also —

I know of no demand for more or better services in the western suburbs. It is in such areas as Stirling and Wanneroo, which are already very large and not to be expanded that such demands may be found.

I now refer to *Hansard* of 28 June 2001 and the debate on the Tamala Park Land Transfer Bill 2001. That debate refers to the Dadour amendment; that is why it is relevant to this debate. I quote as follows —

Mr OMODEI: How many pages are there in this legislation? There are only three pages, whereas the other legislation is comprehensive. The alternative to the restructuring of the City of Perth would be to use the Local Government Act and have a referendum. The minister knows as well as I that had that course of action been taken, the restructuring of the City of Perth would never have happened. If the minister wants a significant restructuring of local government, she will have to use legislation to do it because people do not like change.

The shire and the Town of Albany were combined after a referendum was held; however, it went through by only three per cent on a motion by the Shire of Albany.

There is then the following interjection —

Mr Hyde: Would you support our amendment to take referendums out of the legislation?

It continues —

Mr OMODEI: Yes, I would. I will provide members with some history of referendums. The Dadour amendment was introduced by Tom Dadour. He was a Liberal member who later became an Independent. He gave his preferences to Carmen Lawrence and got her into Parliament. Tom Dadour’s amendment provided for a 30 per cent referendum component, whereas we want to make it easier for people to change their boundaries. Under the Local Government Act, which the Labor Party agreed to, we introduced a 50 per cent criteria and that has made it very difficult. The shires of Narrogin, Northam, Greenough and Geraldton have stopped amalgamation of those areas using the referendum process. It is incumbent upon the Government to consider those issues.

Further in this debate on Tamala Park, Mrs Roberts, then then Minister for Local Government, states —

The member also commented on the provisions of the Bill, which clearly give no right of compensation to the City of Perth and removes its ability to use the courts to frustrate the objectives of the Bill. These provisions were included to ensure that the City of Perth did not waste ratepayers’ funds in mounting legal challenges. It will also ensure that this matter will be resolved quickly, as it should have been many years ago.

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That seems to be in opposition to what members are saying at the moment.

I also refer to what Mrs Roberts said about Mr Ron Back. She said —

Ron Back is a person of utmost integrity and competence. At the time, the city treasurer produced a comprehensive paper for the councillors. That conflicted substantially with the figures and facts that appeared in the Carr-Fardon report. However, there is not much point arguing about that report now.

One of the arguments put by a previous speaker in the debate was that Tamala Park could not be split because that was not provided for in the Carr-Fardon report, the suggestion being that the Carr-Fardon report is somehow gospel and there can be no divergence from it. There ended up being at least half a dozen divergences between the Carr-Fardon report and the ultimate legislation. I note that the most significant of those divergences was canvassed in the earlier stages of debate on this Bill. The Carr-Fardon report suggested, for example, that the Burswood Resort Casino should go into the City of Perth. When Carr and Fardon drew up the boundaries of the City of Perth, they included the casino. After a great deal of argument by the ratepayers of Victoria Park, they managed to retrieve the casino.

There is then an interjection —

Mr Pental: That is the first wonder of the previous Government, and it took the party room to overturn that decision.

It continues —

Mrs ROBERTS: That is right. As the member for South Perth pointed out, the real interest at that time was the creation of the new City of Perth. There was no real interest in, or emphasis on, the creation of the new towns. Indeed, I understand that on the basis of some earlier drafts, different things would have happened with those towns. There was a suggestion that parts of Victoria Park could be incorporated into either South Perth or Belmont. Suggestions were also made that more of the Town of Vincent could ultimately go into the City of Perth, and that some of it could be divested to the City of Stirling, and the like. Ultimately, though, the Bill was brought before the Parliament.

The former Minister for Local Government, the member for Warren-Blackwood, said that a Bill had to be brought before the Parliament because the old City of Perth would never have agreed to the split.

That is a bit of background on Tamala Park and the events at that time.

I now move to the subject of consultation and Perth Airport. Perth Airport was commenting on the Western Australian government's Directions 2031 plan. The document states —

The State Government's *Directions 2031 document* recommends:

- Interconnectivity between Perth Airport and the Kewdale-Welshpool industrial centre should be encouraged;
- Strategic freight movements corridors to both the Perth Airport and Kewdale-Welshpool should be protected from potentially conflicted development; and that
- An investment strategy be prepared for road and rail transport access to and around Perth airport for the next 15–20 years.

Another comment from the airport was as follows —

Outcomes in relation to the Shire of Kalamunda, which incorporates part of the airport to the East and an important Airport access road ... have been poor.

That is from communications between the airport and the Shire of Kalamunda.

[Member's time extended.]

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I now move to an article published in *Farm Weekly* which reads —

Local Government and Regional Development Minister John Bowler announced a review of structural and electoral reform in October ...

That was in 2005. The article continues —

As part of the review, the LGAB has to consult the Western Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Managers Australia.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

Submissions are also required from individual local governments and the wider community, hence the need for the forums and hearings across W A.

These forums give the community a chance to participate in the report which will be presented to Mr Bowler.

Potentially far-reaching recommendations will be made to the minister.

These could result in huge changes in local government authorities and the wider community.

The ministerial report needs to present a structured plan identifying issues such as objectives of and need for structural reform, benefits, possible approaches, impediments and potential councils suitable for amalgamation.

The report will also address voting eligibility, voluntary voting considerations, types of elections and whether preferential or proportional representation should be introduced.

The LGAB will report on how council mayors or presidents should be elected and the frequency of ordinary elections.

I will now quote from a short Western Australian Local Government Association president's advisory group communications plan.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Forrestfield, it is up to the Chair to decide whether the debate is being carried on as it should be. I thank you for your assistance, but when it is required I will make a judgement.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I quote the principal message from the plan. It reads —

The metropolitan review of Local Government is an OPPORTUNITY to consider ALL options available to create an economically, socially and ... sustainable model of Local Government.

I think that is an important issue.

I will now talk about the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council, of which I was a member for eight years. The regional council is made up of six councils in the eastern region and it is about resource sharing. It is a very successful regional government that has continued for the past 33 years.

I go to workshops and consultations. I have further documents on the G20 mayors and chief executive officers workshop that came up with six local government boundary options and I also have the Robson report, which we have spoken about.

In *The West Australian* Alan Robson is quoted. The article states —

Releasing the findings of a 12-month review, Professor Alan Robson said sweeping local government reform was urgently required to get rid of duplication, wasted resources, major inconsistencies across councils and illogical government boundaries.

I now move to a quote the shadow local government minister, Mr Paul Papalia.

Mr P. Papalia: If you sit down, I'll give you another one!

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I will read it to the member. Mr Papalia said —

... that another report was "a shameless diversion to avoid the minister having to admit failure".

"It just confirms that he's incapable of any leadership —

Ms M.M. Quirk: Where are you quoting from?

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: From *The West Australian* of 24 June 2011. The article continues —

The Government allocated \$3 million in last month's Budget for metropolitan council reform on top of the \$7.2 million spent on the policy since 2009.

Therefore, a lot of money has been spent and a lot of consultation has been done on this issue.

Mr P. Papalia: That's pretty selective quoting.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: No; I will quote myself now. In October 2011 —

Mr P. Papalia: Once you've done that, sit down.

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Mrs G.J. GODFREY: No, I will not; I have got more. I have more time. I quote an article from a local community newspaper in which I am mentioned —

City of Belmont Mayor Glenys Godfrey and chief executive Stuart Cole attended —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: Yes. I will start again —

About 120 of WA's councils sent representatives to the Whole of Local Government Forum, Planning for Change 2011.

...

Cr Godfrey said many councils had broader issues about working with the State Government.

Mr P. Papalia: Do you have a position on this motion?

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I am getting to it, member for Warnbro—the member is on three warnings. I will start again —

“There were many issues raised by local governments throughout the day with some of the key issues being the State Government’s lack of strategy, leadership or plans on waste management, biodiversity, infrastructure and public transport,” ...

Cr Godfrey said a lack of consultation with local government on these issues had also been raised.

“The city of Belmont strongly supports the view ... relating to a lack of state leadership on these key issues at a time when the state is legislating local government to adopt integrated community and strategic planning,” ...

In a joint media statement, our Premier said —

“Perth is the fastest growing city in Australia but our local government structure dates back to the late 1800s ...

“We need local governments with the scale and capacity to deal with these challenges. Council reform will deliver a more strategic, co-ordinated approach across the metropolitan area for issues like planning, road networks, waste management, the Swan River, recreation, housing and health.

I will now refer to some statistics, but not very many. I quote *The West Australian* dated 26 October 2012. It is an article about the seven separate municipalities in the western suburbs. The member from Kwinana talked about the Premier only talking about the west, but I will compare the west with Belmont and Kalamunda, which is the proposed merger. In the western suburbs there are 97 000 ratepayers and 68 councillors. In the eastern suburbs there are 21 councillors. In the western suburbs there are 64.8 square kilometres, but in Belmont–Kalamunda, there will be 389 square kilometres, so there is much more area to cover so more resources would be needed in the area. I am almost finished. My final comment is a quote about Belmont–Kalamunda.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members; it is difficult for Hansard when everyone is speaking.

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I quote an email regarding the merger proposal with the Shire of Kalamunda. It reads —

The City of Belmont has undertaken a well planned and proactive approach to ensure its community can be managed in a strongly sustainable manner over many years. This has resulted in Belmont being ranked as the 6th (of 30) most sustainable council in the Metropolitan Local Government Financial Review Report undertaken on behalf of the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel in May 2012. Kalamunda was ranked as 28th and declining in the same report.

...

By contrast The Shire of Kalamunda has been through a period of Operating Deficit, which has required the disposal of assets and significant rate increases to turn around. In fact the Kalamunda Long Term Financial Plan predicts rate increases consistently at 7% per annum over the next 10 years. Given that the Kalamunda rate in the dollar for the General and Industrial differentials are already higher than Belmont’s equivalents, this is not seen as a sustainable outcome.

...

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Given these circumstances, it is clear that the Belmont community's best interests must be managed to ensure that there is not a substantial drain on the assets created and contributed to by ratepayers over more than 100 years.

I am coming to a close. Regarding the reform time line, 5 September, which was the deadline for nominations for local government, has passed. There was a record number of 800.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Point of Order

Mr N.W. MORTON: The member for Warnbro continues to interject, even though the member for Belmont has not asked for interjections. He has already been called to order three times.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Forrestfield. Given the time I leave the chair until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [7.00 pm]: It is my pleasure to rise to address the motion that this house condemns the Barnett government for breaking another promise and totally misleading the people of Western Australia with regard to forced council amalgamations in the metropolitan area. It is an interesting motion. It is a very similar motion, I might add, to one that I moved all the way back in 2009. On 12 March 2009, I moved a similar motion in this place in regard to the Barnett government breaking a pre-election promise in 2008 not to force amalgamations.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member, for your information we are debating the Dadour local poll provision.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, I was reading the wrong one!

The ACTING SPEAKER: I will read it out so that we are all on the same page. The motion before the house is —

That this house supports the retention of the Dadour local poll provision in the Local Government Act.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is very similar, too!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Carry on, member for Warnbro.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I would appreciate Hansard correcting my error. A very similar motion was moved in 2009. At that time, the Barnett government had been elected. Before the 2008 election, the Liberal Party made a very clear promise to the people of Western Australia that it would not force local government amalgamations across the state. But it was not just the Liberal Party that made that promise prior to the election—the National Party also made that promise. Prior to the 2008 state election, the National Party also made a promise that it would not force local government amalgamations across the state, as did the Labor Party. Members would believe that because the Labor Party had just had seven and a half years in office and throughout that time had not tried to force amalgamations. We had a consistent policy —

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: There is an echo in the chamber!

The Labor Party's policy has remained unchanged for the past 12 years; that is, if councils wished to amalgamate voluntarily, they would be supported by the state government if Labor were in office. That was the policy. That is what the former Labor government did in office. We supported and paid for voluntary amalgamations when in office as opposed to our opponents who are now in government. The Liberal Party came into office in 2008, having promised not to force amalgamations. I am disappointed that Hon John Castrilli is not in the chamber. He was appointed Minister for Local Government post the 2008 election. He went to the election promising the people of Western Australia, including his electorate of Bunbury, that he would not force council amalgamations. He said he would keep his "promise". That was the word used on his behalf by the now Premier and by the leader of the National Party prior to the 2008 election. They both promised that they would not force amalgamations.

In February 2009, the Minister for Local Government, Hon John Castrilli, travelled to Exmouth in the member for North West Central's electorate.

Mr V.A. Catania: It was 9 February 2009.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Castrilli; Deputy Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook; Mrs Glenys Godfrey; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John Day

Mr P. PAPALIA: It was February 2009. The Liberal–National government was elected in September 2008. Both parties promised right up until that election not to force amalgamations. Then minister Hon John Castrilli travelled to Exmouth and met a bunch of local government representatives, including the then president of the Western Australian Local Government Association —

Mrs G.J. Godfrey interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It was not the member for Belmont.

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: I was there; I remember. I was in Exmouth.

Mr P. PAPALIA: She was there—okay. The member for Belmont was there in her previous role as mayor. There was a bunch of local government representatives from around the state. They were addressed by the new minister. He shocked them. Bill Mitchell, then the president of WALGA, reported word for word what the local government minister said. Mr Mitchell, a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party, was shocked that his own party was breaking its pre-election promise. He reported what was said at that meeting; that is, “If you do not come up with your own plan to amalgamate, then we will force you to do that.” The Minister for Local Government stated at that meeting, “If you don’t want to do it, I’ll do it, as simple as that.” Representatives from WALGA were shocked because it had just spent a lot of time, money, effort and energy on the systemic sustainability study process in an effort to develop its own pathway towards sustainability. The objective was to ensure that all local governments were sustainable and were able to provide good services to their communities. When they heard that in Exmouth, it was an absolute shock.

It was widely reported. Just in case it had possibly been an error on behalf of the Minister for Local Government, he followed up, on 12 February, with an interview with Paige Taylor from *The Australian*. The minister said —

“At the end of the day, I want reductions in numbers and if they come back and say ‘We’re not interested in this’, then I will legislate,” ...

That was way back in 2009. The Liberal and National Parties promised before the state election that they would not do that. Subsequent to that, there was some consternation from local governments throughout the state. Naturally enough, I raised the matter in this house as shadow local government minister at the time. I did so with the support of the member for North West Central. It is valuable to know that he supported our stance at the time, being thoroughly and emphatically opposed to forced amalgamations throughout the state. He was opposed to it then, and I know that in order to preserve his honour, the member for North West Central will stand with the Labor Party on this motion to oppose forced local government amalgamations anywhere in the state. That is his honourable position. To do anything else would be dishonourable because he would be refuting what he said at the time when he confronted his now leader over the matter.

We drew to the attention of the house and the public the fact that the National Party also went to the election promising not to force amalgamations, yet it sat idly by as part of the cabinet that had just announced through the Minister for Local Government that the government was about to force amalgamations. As part of our efforts on behalf of local governments in this state to ensure that the government was held to account and kept its promise, we raised the matter in Parliament. The member for North West Central was then a member of the Labor Party. I moved to add the following words to the motion that was being debated —

and that the house condemns the Minister for Local Government for his threats to force local government amalgamations in Western Australia.

Immediately after that, the member for North West Central rose and said —

I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Warnbro. I am glad to see the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Regional Development in the chamber to listen to this debate. This is another broken commitment by the government. The Liberal Party and National Party made promises when they were in opposition but we have seen the stock squad disappear and now the police station in my electorate has gone, which the then opposition promised it would reopen. A police station is desperately needed in Gascoyne Junction.

The current member for North West Central then went on to say —

This is a consistent flip-flop government. I am glad that the Minister for Regional Development —

The honourable Leader of the National Party —

is here. Will he promise to not support any amalgamations in the Murchison area involving the towns that I have just mentioned? I know that he is busy with some parliamentary business but I look forward to his reply to that question. Yet again we are seeing the National Party giving \$1 to regional Western

Extract from Hansard

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Australia and taking away \$20. That is a consistent pattern. Local governments have been given money through the royalties for regions scheme but must now spend it to justify their existence.

That justification of their existence was a very flawed process. The member for North West Central was right to criticise that process, because it compelled local governments to spend a lot more time, money and energy on trying to justify their existence and sustainability, and presenting that information to the government. They paid a lot of consultants right across Western Australia a lot of money, and the extraction of exactly how much it had cost us from the then minister took up a lot of time in the previous Parliament. In the end, ultimately, I think one amalgamation was achieved. For the cost, it was just extraordinary. Perhaps the former minister, the member for Bunbury, could refresh my memory; was it \$20 million or \$10 million? I cannot remember exactly.

Mr G.M. Castrilli: Which one?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The whole process during the time of the last Parliament cost tens of millions of dollars, I suspect—I think it was more than \$10 million.

What did the state get out of it? It got four and a half years of uncertainty—because the first Barnett government went for that long—for the 13 000 employees of the local government sector across Western Australia. It got four and a half years of uncertainty for all local governments and their representatives across Western Australia. There was also uncertainty all the way up until the last state election about whether those councils would exist and whether their business cases and plans, and their management practices and future plans, were viable—all of that was uncertain. That was a direct result of the Barnett government's poor management and obstinacy in being determined to push on with a process that had been rejected by the vast majority of local governments—the people being impacted—and its incapacity, despite that, to at any time argue the case for the benefits of amalgamation. No member of the Liberal Party or National Party in Western Australia has ever come into this place and argued the case for the cost benefits of forced or voluntary amalgamation. They have never argued their case. It is impossible to argue that case.

I listened intently to the member for Belmont's contribution earlier when she quoted all manner of reference material in regard to forced amalgamations around the country. What she did not quote was the report of Hon Max Trenorden, former MLC and member of the National Party, and Hon Nigel Hallett. They went to Queensland on behalf of their parties and the people of their electorates, by the way—it would be nice to see a bit more of that from the other side of Parliament—to determine the actual circumstances post-forced amalgamations because all manner of references had been made to the benefits. When they got over there, they were informed that the actual cost of forced amalgamations in Queensland was \$220 million. The other point they brought back for the edification of the Liberal party room and the Nationals party room was that the state government did not pay any of that. There were no funds in the state government budgets to meet those costs. So who does Madam Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker) think ended up footing the bill? Who paid that \$220 million in additional costs to the —

Mr G.M. Castrilli: That was a Labor government.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not care who it was. It was a bad decision. It was the Beattie government and I think it was a bad decision, so it is not one to emulate. Regardless of which political party was responsible, it was a stupid decision and it should not have been made. Who do members think ended up paying the \$220 million? It was the ratepayers across the state. Do members think they had a drop in their rates? Do you think, Madam Acting Speaker, that forced amalgamations in Queensland resulted in a drop in rates? They had to pay \$220 million worth of bills they had not been confronted with prior to that act, so I do not think they got a drop in their rates.

Mr P.T. Miles: Well, they did!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not think they did. No matter how much some members from somewhere in the northern suburbs north of the river purport to suggest that there was savings out of it, there was not. The reality is that it cost a lot of money and disrupted a lot of people. There is another factor that is very difficult to measure but I think is particularly relevant to those people across the state who oppose this bullying behaviour and forced amalgamation process that the minister does not believe in. I know he does not believe in it.

Mr A.J. Simpson: I have not forced anyone! I have not forced anyone!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know he has been handed it by the Premier, and I have every level of empathy and sympathy for the minister. That is what the Premier does to good people whom he sees as an easy mark; we have seen that on quite a few occasions. I have every sympathy for the minister. I know he does not believe in it, but,

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sadly, he is going to have to wear the consequences. The minister knows that before the last state election he was championing the cause against forced amalgamations, as was the Premier.

Mr P.T. Miles: What's your case for not doing it?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not trying to force amalgamations; I do not have to defend the case!

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I thank the member for Girrawheen.

The member for Girrawheen has very kindly offered me a newsletter. I know this has been read into *Hansard* before, but it is worth repeating for the edification of members opposite in case they think their Premier is not given to bending the truth or saying one thing prior to the election and doing a completely different thing immediately post-election. I just remind members; not that they should need much reminding because we have experienced it and seen so many examples of it this week that our heads are spinning from the number of times the Premier has broken his word to the people of Western Australia. The number of deceptions he has enacted on those people who voted for the Liberal Party and National Party at the last state election is just extraordinary. But the people in Cottesloe know probably better than most the true nature of the Premier of Western Australia—the man responsible for losing the AAA credit rating for the first time in two decades! That same man who, over the course of five years, has destroyed the best set of economic books this state has ever seen. That same man is also somebody who told his own electorate, as well as the rest of the state, one thing before the election, and has now broken his word. And this is not the first occasion of him breaking it; it is the second time in five years he has gone to an election saying he will not force amalgamations, and then immediately post-election returned to the argument and said he will force amalgamations. He said it in his newsletter of summer 2013 —

Mr P.T. Miles: You're making it up!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not.

I will quote from "Hon Colin Barnett MLA: Member for Cottesloe: Residents' Newsletter" of summer 2013 —

There has been much said about local government over recent months. I have always believed that a combined council covering Claremont, Cottesloe, Mosman Park and Peppermint Grove makes sense, however claims that the State Government will use its powers to force such an amalgamation are simply not true.

It is just a lie. It is just not true.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Premier of this state—the man who has destroyed the economic credibility of Western Australia in a period of five years and has lost the AAA credit rating for the first time in 20 years—lied to his own electorate and the rest of the state when he promised he would not force amalgamations. On many, many occasions he has gone into the public domain and claimed —

Withdrawal of Remark

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member, I do not think it is appropriate for you to say that the Premier was lying to anybody. I think that is what I heard you say.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, Madam Acting Speaker. I retract that.

Debate Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Premier of the state of Western Australia, who has destroyed the AAA credit rating for the first time in 20 years, said one thing to his electorate and the people of Western Australia about not forcing amalgamations; he promised not to force amalgamations before the election. Once he was elected, he returned to his objective of forcing amalgamations. It was dishonest. He is dishonest. He demonstrated that he was being dishonest. No matter how many times the very few supporters of the Premier in the party room speak up on his behalf—the few numbers that are left—they will not change the truth or the facts. They will not change the view of the people of Cottesloe in Western Australia. They know he said it. They know he has changed his position, and so do some government members. Some members have spoken out on behalf of their local governments and the people they represent, and they have said it is wrong. They are right. I look forward to the member for North West Central joining us and condemning the Premier for saying one thing before the election and saying another thing after it and trying to force amalgamations. I cannot expect the Minister for Health to speak out, because he is bound by cabinet solidarity, but I know he does not believe in what the Premier is doing. It was difficult to

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ascertain but I know that the member for Belmont does not think there is a common interest between Kalamunda and Belmont. I know she did not think that the forcing of that amalgamation was a good move. I suspect that she might support us as well.

Dr K.D. Hames: She kicks for the good guys.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The guys who lost the AAA credit rating for the first time in 20 years!

I also point out that when my colleague the member for Kwinana was speaking, he talked about how the people of Kwinana have rejected this forced amalgamation process. I also point out—the minister knows this to be true—that the Robson review did not recommend amalgamating Cockburn and Kwinana. It was not option A or option B. On how many other occasions has that been the case? I suspect that the City of Vincent was one of them. I cannot recall because I do not have that portfolio anymore, but I do not think it was Belmont either. How many different ones were not recommended? The boundaries the minister came up with and that the Premier seeks to impose on the people of Western Australia without consultation do not resemble what the Robson review recommended.

There are a number of things wrong with this process. The Liberal and National Parties lied prior to the 2008 election about not wanting to force amalgamations. The National Party finally came on board after a bit of coaxing, and defended the regions, but it has rolled over on the metropolitan area; it does not care about it. It has said, “You can do what you want with it as long as you leave our constituencies that we hold alone.” The Nationals have done that. The rest of the government members went to the last election promising that they would not force amalgamations. If the amalgamations are not forced, why does the Premier continue his mantra of the necessity for a reduction in the number of councils? If they are not forced, the government cannot force them. It means that the government has to allow the councils to amalgamate by voluntary means if they want to; and if they do not, they should just be left alone. The government knows that in many cases councils were already achieving a lot of the sustainability outcomes, improvements in services, and collaboration and cooperation to which the member for Belmont referred. The Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council was doing a lot of things. That is just as true with the Southern Metropolitan Council. The government knows that these councils are doing a lot of things of their own volition. They saw the writing on the wall, they have worked together, and they have managed to achieve sustainable outcomes through that. Their objective was to improve services. That used to be the government’s objective. Throughout the five years of the Barnett government, the objective has been abandoned. The objective of providing better and more efficient services to ratepayers has gone. It is now solely about the number of councils because that is the only thing the Premier ever speaks about. It is the only thing the minister refers to when he is talking about this process. He does not talk about better outcomes for the ratepayers or better delivery of services; all he talks about is how outrageous it is that we have 139 councils in WA.

A government member: It is 138.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, it is 138; the government achieved one amalgamation. It is outrageous that we have 138 councils. That is the only thing the minister refers to in his justification for amalgamating. Then the Premier has the temerity to suggest that having 125 councils is much better. If we achieve his objective and amalgamate the councils in the metropolitan area, the final number will be 125. How much better is that? How much more efficient and how much more successful is that? What a wonderful outcome! What a brilliant legacy for Hon Colin Barnett’s premiership to have reduced the number of councils in Western Australia from 138 to 125! Bravo! Congratulations, Premier. Perhaps that can be chiselled on his tombstone. It is worthy of acknowledgement. People will talk about it in decades to come. The Premier blew the AAA credit rating, he cut education funding, he insisted on digging a hole in front of the city and spending \$400 million for no return by the state and he insisted on shifting the stadium from a location we had to one that would cost about \$2 billion, about \$1.5 billion more than was needed, just to satisfy his ego. He insists on bringing forward projects such as museums when we cannot afford them. He insisted upon all of these things. He insisted upon a light rail system and an airport rail line that was not fully costed and fully funded.

Point of Order

Mr P.T. MILES: Madam Acting Speaker, you looked as puzzled as I was. The member is way off track. We are talking about item 11 of private members’ business—that this house supports the retention of the Dadour local poll provision in the Local Government Act. He has wandered way off it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member, just keep to the Dadour local poll provision.

Debate Resumed

Extract from *Hansard*

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Mr P. PAPALIA: I was just about to wrap up. I was going to say that the government has done all those things. It has trashed the best books in the history of Western Australia, and to what end—to reduce the number of councils from 138 to 125! It is disgraceful.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [7.28 pm]: I want to put on the record the fact that the National Party of Western Australia does not support forced amalgamations in regional Western Australia. This was reaffirmed at our state conference in York in August this year, where we celebrated 100 years of the National Party. Our position was reaffirmed—that we do not support forced amalgamations in regional WA. That has been the policy of the National Party for as long as I have known the National Party. It is interesting that the member for Warnbro referred to some of the *Hansards* from the past and stated my position, yet again, that I do not believe in forced amalgamations. When I was sitting on the other side—sometimes I cringe when I talk about sitting on the other side!—I defended the member for Warnbro in his position as shadow Minister for Local Government. My position has not changed: I do not support forced amalgamations and I do not support forced amalgamations for regional WA for various regions. It is interesting that the Labor Party keeps going on about the fact that it does not support forced amalgamations. Perhaps the member for Warnbro and the former member for Belmont would recall letters being sent out to local governments that did not clearly state the Labor Party's position. I think we had plenty of personal conversations about how the Labor Party should stand up and not force amalgamations, but there was a view among many sitting to the right of me who were in favour of forced amalgamations. The debate in 2009 was about forced amalgamations. I remember the former leader of the Labor Party Hon Eric Ripper clearly wanting forced amalgamations. I remember hearing how many of the Labor Party members of shadow cabinet wanted to force amalgamations. The member for Midland was one.

Mr P. Papalia: Where is it in *Hansard*?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member is in the shadow cabinet; he knows exactly what went on. If he reads *Hansard*, it will back up what I am saying about the Labor Party when the member for Belmont was the leader. A report in the *Rockingham Weekend Courier* of Friday, 30 May 2008, is quoted in *Hansard* as follows —

If local governments amalgamated they could be far more efficient and cost-effective, State Treasurer Eric Ripper has said.

Mr P. Papalia: Does it say “forced” amalgamations?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There we go! It continues —

Mr Ripper was speaking at the South Coast Regional Chambers of Commerce Budget breakfast at the Port Kennedy RSL Sub Branch headquarters on Thursday ...

Mr Ripper said he urged local governments where suitable to merge, and to do it voluntarily, and gave examples of those that already had. “There are 140 plus councils in this State and it is in the interests of local government to amalgamate ...

That shows his view of amalgamations.

Mr P. Papalia: Yes, voluntary amalgamations.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I can remember the discussion that the member for Warnbro was part of about whether the Labor Party should support forced amalgamations. He can keep going on about what the Labor Party thinks, but that was a quote from *Hansard* by the member for Bunbury. I will read some comments recorded in *Hansard* by the member for Mandurah —

If the minister is genuine about wanting to radically reform local government numbers, then he should, quite frankly, have simply done a Jeff Kennett or even a Peter Beattie. I have to tell the minister that although any government of either persuasion may decide there will not be forced amalgamations, only voluntary ones, the reality is that very, very few local governments will do it. That is the reality.

He was hinting that the only way to reduce local governments was to force amalgamations. We can see the underlying sympathetic view in the Labor Party on forced amalgamations.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the member saying that *Hansard* is dishonest?

Several members interjected.

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The ACTING SPEAKER: A number of members are on two or three calls. I know it will be a late night, but I think they should be quiet and not yell across the chamber, please. Member for North West Central, please continue your debate. If you want to accept interjections, you are most welcome to do so, but I will call to order anyone who is interjecting inappropriately.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

As I said, who knows what the Labor Party's position is? We all know that when we walk around the corridors of Parliament House, the view of Labor Party members is, "Let's do a Peter Beattie and a Jeff Kennett." The National Party does not accept any of that. We will stand up for our constituents—the people who have elected us—with the policies we took to the election. That is why the people of regional WA voted for the National Party. We stand up for our electorates and for regional WA. We do not support forced amalgamations in the regions. The reasons for that have been canvassed many times in this house. In my electorate, three very clear regions—the Gascoyne, the Murchison and the Pilbara—cover great distances. To say to the people there that forced amalgamations will benefit those towns would be utterly ridiculous.

The National Party's policies are in place with the aim of looking after those small towns in regional WA. Royalties for regions is in place to build up our communities. The National Party is about growing and empowering its communities to make sure it can attract and retain more people in regional WA. Our position is quite clear and comes off the back of what we have been able to deliver through royalties for regions. We will look after our small councils and our mid-sized councils. We will look after our councils in general in regional WA to make sure they are protected. We have a track record of protecting our constituency. That is why I am on this side of the chamber. We all saw what happened during the election campaign. Everyone claims to support royalties for regions but when it comes down to it, members opposite are far from supportive of it and of building up our regional communities. That is quite clear.

Mr R.H. Cook: Can you hear yourself?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Absolutely. I love hearing it. Would the member like me to keep repeating it?

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The problem with members opposite is that they do not like the truth. They try to portray themselves as wanting to look after their constituents. They should be open and honest about their view on forced amalgamations. They are claiming that the other side is trying to trick the punters in the electorates but I think members opposite are doing exactly the same because they are not portraying their view tonight; that is, they want to see forced amalgamations and they want a reduction in the number of councils. My concern is that if they get into government one day, they will not stop at forcing council amalgamations in the metropolitan area; they will come down hard on local governments in regional WA. It is important that the National Party is in this chamber and retains the balance of power in the future to ensure that we protect our communities and protect against any forced amalgamations, because that, coupled with members to my right getting rid of royalties for regions, will have a detrimental effect on our communities.

The only way to protect regional WA in the future is to make sure it has a National Party representative. Members opposite will say something publicly but I know what they talk about in the corridors of Parliament House, in their factions in the party room and in caucus. They talk about how they can support forced amalgamations and how they can get rid of royalties for regions because they need help. The punters are not fooled by Labor Party trickery. We should be careful about what members opposite say because they speak with forked tongues. They clearly do not support regional WA, as they showed in 2008 and 2013. I am goddamned glad I am here on the National Party side!

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [7.38 pm]: I rise to speak briefly on the motion supporting the Dadour local poll provision. I know the member for Fremantle is very keen to also contribute. The Leader of the Opposition summed up well that the piecemeal approach to this issue has left people suspicious of local government reform. This government's duplicitous action of telling the electorate that there would be no forced local government amalgamations is now a question of principle, which the Western Australian people endorsed. They understood, because the government told them, that changes to their local governments would not be forced. The Labor Party does not disagree with local government reform. Indeed, local government reform by this government has been a lost opportunity for debate on how we want to be governed at a local and state level; for example, the government's planning review for housing starts demonstrates just how complex bureaucracy has become for people and how removed they are from all levels of bureaucracy and all levels of government.

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It appears that the government wants change for the sake of change and it will not let the people decide, and that is why we support the Dadour provisions. We support them also because they would enable the community to determine what is best for their community. The outcome is paramount in what we deliver to the people and for the community. Emeritus Professor Alan Robson's report made recommendations with a view to strengthening the standing of local government. The handling of that report and the government's response has undermined this objective, creating disputes and mistrust when not needed between communities of interest. The intention of the Robson recommendations was to build the strength, capacity and effectiveness of the authority of local government. This must come through the people's endorsements of any change, and that is why the Labor Party is endorsing the Dadour local poll provisions.

As outlined in the Robson report, the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel was appointed in 2011 to examine the current and anticipated regional, social, environmental and economic issues affecting or likely to affect the growth of metropolitan Perth in the next 50 years. The panel's task was to recommend the most appropriate local government structures and governance models for metropolitan Perth. As the member for Warnbro said, it seems passing strange that the proposals that then came before local government did not meet either option A or preferred option B of the Robson report. The panel found that the current metropolitan local government arrangement does not deliver to the people of Perth due to weaknesses, which include wasted resources, inefficiencies, inconsistencies and fragmentation; illogical boundaries; and variations in the densities and services. If the intent is to drive more balanced local governance for our communities, the government should have been out there selling it so that people could make more informed decisions using the Dadour poll. Now people are simply opposing change for opposing sake because they are angry because of the disrespect of this government in saying there would be no forced amalgamations, with a view to gain electoral support, and then changing its position once in power.

The problem we now face is that the community simply accepts a council stance for no change to their boundaries without a critical eye to what is in the best overall interest of their neighbours and communities. In the seat of Mirrabooka, the City of Wanneroo remains unchanged, but the changes to the boundaries of the City of Stirling, which were in option B but not in option A, are very controversial to the major "Stay in Stirling" campaign. This makes it difficult to have a debate that is not concentrated in those areas that are in the options. It is difficult to have a whole-of-local-government and residents' debate.

The excise of areas in the City of Stirling, in particular, the Mt Lawley area, have no direct effect on the residents of the City of Stirling who I represent. However, it is in their interests to know the consequences on their facilities if that happened. Would it mean greater cost or indeed would it be a benefit? Currently, the residents in Mirrabooka, Balga and Westminster have a council that has opposing strong interest groups on the coast and the heritage inner-city area. The question for residents in Mirrabooka, Balga and Westminster is: if one of these areas goes into another municipality, would these areas be the beneficiary of such a change, as the focus of the council could shift to the middle area that often misses out because of the divided focus? For me, this is a hypothetical discussion that has not been able to be drawn out and debated because of the decision of the government to go into forced amalgamations. Therefore, we are in an emotional debate that means that we cannot have a reasoned discussion about what are the benefits to the residents.

Had this debate been dealt with rationally with a view to the residents deciding on a proper cost-benefit analysis presented to the community, the best outcome could be reached. One of the residents in the area under dispute is keen to move to the other council because there is a two-bin policy. That is something that could be considered. Another resident has raised with me that Robson's option B was to deliver councils of even-population densities and a smaller-sized City of Stirling. That would mean more services to the remaining suburbs. The loss of income due to rates will be more than compensated for by the increasing residential density—this resident told me—due to the re-zoning to R30 and R40 to satisfy the inner-city infill as is now the practice.

There are varying views and the residents' voices are not being heard because the only voices being heard belong to people who are in councils defending their intrinsic and entrenched positions. The point is that the debate we should be having is not one of fending off the state government's push for forced amalgamations and changes to the boundaries, but one of: what is in the best interests of the residents? Such a lost opportunity to have a debate within the community provided for by the Dadour provisions is the reason why the Labor Party believes—I would like to wrap up, obviously—that there should be no changes to the capacity of residents to decide for themselves. I thank you for the opportunity to address the house.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle) [7.44 pm]: Obviously, council amalgamation is an issue. On behalf of a number of people who I represent in Fremantle, I have spoken about this issue before in the house. It is particularly relevant that we are supporting the retention of the Dadour local poll provisions in the Local Government Act. I understand that Dr Tom Dadour, the former member for Subiaco, was active in opposing the

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shutting down of the Fremantle rail line by a former Liberal–National government. We will give credit to the government side when its members do something decent. In that case, I certainly applaud his standing up for the Fremantle rail line because closing it was very unpopular. It proved to be a mistake and reinstating it has been very successful.

I give credit to Dr Dadour, the former member for Subiaco, not only in that regard, but also for his recognition of the importance of local input into local government as provided for in the poll provisions. As has been outlined by a number of speakers on this motion, people, not only on this side of the house but across the community, are frustrated by the government's actions with forced council amalgamations. First and foremost, it is clearly a broken promise, but it is one amongst so many broken promises by this government that it is just a daily occurrence. It just seems to be like water off a duck's back to the Premier. But people are frustrated out there in the community. They understand that this issue was put explicitly to the Premier and to the government in the lead-up to the state election, and explicit promises were made. I now see that the Premier is here in the house this evening. Explicit promises were made by the Premier, and I have addressed this issue before. People felt some despair after they saw not only the map of council amalgamations planned by this government, but the manner in which they were to take place—that is, we are given every reason to believe, through the mechanism of forced amalgamations in the metropolitan area.

The frustrations of people in Fremantle and East Fremantle are not only in relation to the broken promise, but, as I said, also in relation to the map that is proposed showing where we would amalgamate with the City of Melville. That is currently a council about three times the size of the Fremantle and East Fremantle councils combined. As I understand it, Melville has its own priorities, and none of those is consistent with those priorities planned for Fremantle or East Fremantle. When Fiona Stanley Hospital finally comes online, the whole Murdoch precinct will be a major employment area. Tens of thousands of people will be employed by the two hospitals based at the university, the justice centre and surrounding businesses. I understand that it might become the second biggest employment centre in the metropolitan area. Major issues are associated with that centre for the Melville council, not the least of which is effective transport. The council has responsibility for that major centre. It also has Garden City shopping centre, which is a major shopping and service centre. The council is situated alongside Garden City. Melville council has a large residential ratepayer base, which means that it must provide a lot of services across a large number of people—about 100 000, as I understand it. In fact, I think its income is about the same as the City of Fremantle, but it should be noted that Fremantle council has less than one-third the number of ratepayers that the City of Melville has.

Melville has its own plans and priorities and they do not include the considerations of Fremantle and East Fremantle in the west. I have spoken before in this house about the issues Fremantle is trying to grapple with. Fremantle council is working very hard to revitalise the Fremantle town centre and to work on much-needed economic stimulation, particularly in the CBD. It is trying to attract the right sort of development that is not only sympathetic to Fremantle's heritage considerations, but also consistent with what the state government asked all local governments to commit to, which is an increase in density in city centres. Fremantle has taken that on board. After a lot of debate with the community, the council has got through amendment 49 to the planning provisions to increase density in the town centre. However, actual development plans and building have not eventuated yet. The planning structure is there, but there has not been an opportunity for the building to take place.

Fremantle council is doing all the right things consistent with the state government's Directions 2031 document in which Fremantle was identified as a strategic metropolitan centre. Again, the council took the state government at its word and enacted a range of strategies and policies consistent with what the state government required of it through Directions 2031 to increase density and the like, but the council and the community is being held back by this state government. In trying to realise its potential, Fremantle is frustrated by the amalgamation decision, which is contrary to other state government policy decisions. The Fremantle Port Authority and the Public Transport Authority could do more to work with the council and the Fremantle community to integrate the port authority's, and the Public Transport Authority's work with the local community. I have spoken before about housing assets in the heritage-listed warders' cottages, which are owned by the state government but are sitting in decay in the middle of Fremantle. As I said, the council has been proactive, but it is being held back only by the state government.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, Hansard is having difficulty picking up the dialogue taking place. There are a lot of conversations going on that we are trying to sort through. Could you please let the speaker on her feet be heard. Take your conversations outside.

Ms S.F. McGURK: From the Fremantle community's point of view, the other concern about the amalgamation process is that it threatens to stall any progress on development plans in Fremantle. As I said, with Fremantle and

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East Fremantle representing about one-third and Melville about two-thirds of ratepayers, we would think that the needs of Fremantle and East Fremantle could be diluted in a wider super council.

The heritage–tourism considerations for Fremantle are important. I hope that I do not need to explain to the house the significance of Fremantle as a heritage site and a tourist centre. It is not like any other metropolitan centre. We need to make sure that we retain what is special about Fremantle and its surrounds so that we can continue to attract tourists and support the businesses that rely on the tourism industry.

A number of people on this side of the house and I have spoken before about our frustration when the government says that we are afraid of reform or we are not prepared to take on these issues. That was exactly the case for the government; when it had an opportunity to canvass these issues with the community before the election, it squibbed and failed to take on these issues with the electorate. We need to retain the Dadour amendment so that the community has a say on these important issues. The Fremantle council was proactive; earlier this year, in March, it conducted its own community survey on council amalgamations and over 1 200 ratepayers responded. The survey found, among other things, that the community’s least favoured option was the Melville–Fremantle–East Fremantle amalgamation. The possibility of amalgamation with Melville is deeply unpopular among people in the Fremantle electorate. I urge the government to ensure that the community has the opportunity to say what sort of council reform it would find acceptable. I think it would find some reform acceptable. However, I urge the government to not force an amalgamation on Melville council, a council which is working quite well. Fremantle and East Fremantle councils have their own character and their own priorities.

I have also spoken before about North Fremantle. To excise North Fremantle from that picture is really frustrating for the community. People in North Fremantle feel as though they are part of the Fremantle community. The port authority will be kept within the Fremantle–Melville council, but the land around the port north of the river will go to the western suburbs super council, whatever that will be. That does not make sense. The council needs to keep the suburbs around the port with it. We would think there would be considerations to keep them together. Again, I have heard people in North Fremantle despair at being cut off from Fremantle.

The Premier may have been at one of the polling booths on the day of the federal election. I went to North Fremantle Primary School and some petitions against council amalgamations were being circulated. I have one last point.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I am largely indifferent, but I lived in North Fremantle for about eight years and it is sort of half and half in the area. I do not care. Whatever North Fremantle wants, they should get, but there are divided views about which way they should go. Having lived —

Mr D.J. Kelly: If it is okay for North Fremantle to get whatever they want, why not Bassendean?

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is just one of those issues. I know the people in North Fremantle really well and it is a great place to live. I will probably end up living there again in the future.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In that sense, would there be an opportunity for the community to say what would suit it in the amalgamation? If the Fremantle Port Authority is to go with Fremantle, it would make sense for the land immediately around the northern part, such as North Mole, which is the lion’s share of the port authority’s work, to be kept in the same local authority.

I want to mention another frustration with the government’s strategy and that is the belligerent nature of the proposal. If councils abide by the plan that the government has spelled out, they will be treated one way; if they voice their opposition and complain too loudly, they will be threatened with having commissioners installed in their place.

Mr C.J. Barnett: As the member knows, North Fremantle is in my electorate.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not talking specifically now about North Fremantle. Broadly, as a mechanism, I think it is something that the government should be ashamed of. It stifles debate in the community. It has been a consideration amongst councils and it weakens the government’s arguments for reform. If there was an economic rationale or a compelling business case for that sort of reform, those arguments would stand on their own without the need to bypass community consultation by removing the Dadour provision and without the threat of imposing commissioners on councils that do not toe the line. The council amalgamation process is contrary to other major policy statements by this government, such as Directions 2031 and the need to increase density within major metropolitan areas. For those reasons the Fremantle and East Fremantle communities have been very active in their efforts to voice their opposition to a forced amalgamation with Melville. They call their campaign “Fremantle Forever” and have set up a very active Facebook page. Local papers will be covering some

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of their activities. We also hope that when the Dockers win this Saturday, we will be only one game away from winning the grand final and we will have the opportunity to celebrate all things Fremantle.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.H.D. Day (Leader of the House)**.